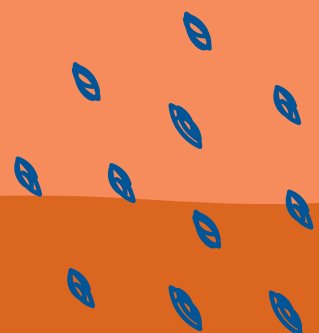


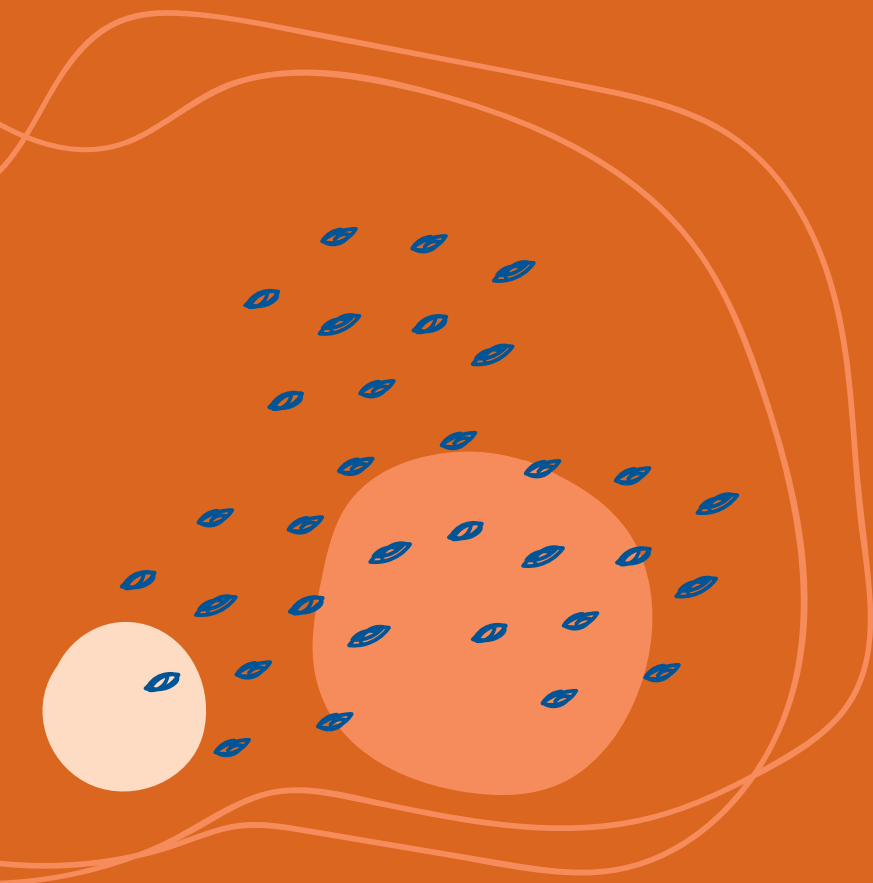


Disability Inclusion and Intersectionality Series: Paper #1

# “THEY CALL ME BY MY NAME”:

A Synthesis Review of the United Nations  
Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women’s  
Special Window on Ending Violence Against  
Women and Girls with Disabilities





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Produced by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund)

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Cover title description and credit: Quotation from a woman with disabilities participating in the UN Trust Fund-funded Special Window project of Action on Disability and Development International in Cambodia.



## About the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women

The United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) is the only global grant-making mechanism dedicated to eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls. Managed by UN Women on behalf of the United Nations system since its establishment in 1996 by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 50/166, the UN Trust Fund has awarded \$215 million to 646 initiatives in 140 countries and territories. In 2022, the UN Trust Fund managed a grants portfolio of 186 projects aimed at preventing and addressing violence against women and girls in 70 countries and territories across five regions, with grants totalling \$87 million. Grant recipients are primarily civil society organizations (CSOs). Since 2018 (cycle 20), the UN Trust Fund has been funding only CSO projects. In 2022, the majority (62 per cent) of these CSOs were women's rights organizations.

## About the Special Window to End Violence against Women and Girls with Disabilities

The UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women aims to reach women and girls from particularly underserved communities. To further this commitment and in recognition of chronic under-funding on this issue, in 2018, the Fund established a thematic funding window specifically aimed at addressing violence against women with disabilities with funding for 3-year projects. In 2019, \$3.5 million was awarded to ten projects were awarded a total, followed by an additional \$6 million in 2020 funded to twelve other projects.

The Special Window responded to the needs of women and girls with disabilities and was intended to catalyze a shared journey between the UN Trust Fund and CSOs to facilitate a better understanding of programmatic and operational challenges in this area to inform evidence-based programming and advocacy efforts. As a result of this journey, it was intended that these lessons would be widely disseminated towards the aim that future programming would be more inclusive of the needs of women and girls with disabilities, and funders could be more responsive in supporting the environment necessary for this to be realized.



*Nursery training organized for girls.*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- *Christoffel-Blindenmission Christian Blind Mission e.V.* in Pakistan
- *the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women* in Bangladesh
- *Coordinadora por los Derechos de la Infancia y la Adolescencia* in Paraguay
- *Women Challenged to Challenge* in Kenya
- *Fusa para la salud integral con perspectiva de genero y derechos asociación civil* in Argentina
- *Desarrollo Legislativo y la Democracia* in Guatemala
- *Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales* in Argentina
- *Organisasi Harapan Nusantara* in Indonesia
- *Action on Disability and Development International* in Cambodia
- *Beyond Borders/Depase Fwontyè yo* in Haiti
- *National Center against Violence* in Mongolia
- *Stars of Hope Society* in Palestine
- *Nepal Disabled Women's Association* in Nepal
- *Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe* in Zimbabwe
- *Mujeres Transformando el Mundo* in Guatemala
- *Umuryango Nyarwanda w'Abagore Bafite Ubumuga* in Rwanda
- *National Union of Women with Disabilities of Uganda* in Uganda
- *Swaziland Action Group against Abuse* in Eswatini
- *Paz y Esperanza* in Peru
- *Initiative pour un Développement Equitable en Haiti* in Haiti
- *Society for Life Changers and Good Parental Care* in Nigeria
- *Mental Disability Rights Initiative of Serbia* in Serbia.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

Women and girls with disabilities face increased risks of several forms of violence compared with those without disabilities. With one in every five women estimated to have a disability, engaging with the specific realities of violence against women and girls with disabilities (VAWGWD) should be a priority. Yet it is often denied, deprioritized or tackled as a separate issue, in part owing to the invisibility, ignorance and stigma connected to disabilities. Recent literature has highlighted a gap in qualitative research through the conceptual frameworks of intersectionality and feminist disability theory in relation to low- and middle-income country contexts, and the importance of research grounded in interventions around VAWGWD (Meyer et al., 2022; SVRI and EQI, 2021). International instruments recognize the importance of a cross-cutting gender and disability perspective and the need for a deeper understanding of this.

This synthesis review contributes to this research gap by taking a qualitative, intervention-focused approach to understanding the relationship between disability and violence against women and girls. It summarizes key insights and lessons emerging from the United Nations Trust Fund Special Window on ending violence against women and girls with disabilities (hereafter “the Special Window”) portfolio of 22 civil society organization grantees that were funded between 2018 and 2023. These grantees were situated in a wide range of contexts and were also working with women and girls with diverse types of disabilities and facing various forms of violence. In this way, the review also contributes knowledge to the wider sector of ending violence against women and girls, which can help improve programming so that it is both disability specific and disability inclusive, and build an evidence base that is driven by current practitioner and Global South realities.

## Methodology

The synthesis review followed the approaches and methods associated with qualitative meta-synthesis. It engaged with selected project-specific monitoring reports, and the limited available endline external evaluations and knowledge products from the 22 projects. A two-stage analysis and synthesis process involving these documents was followed, and two focus groups were also conducted with representatives of the 22 grantees in the portfolio.



*Focus group discussion for women living with disabilities organized by Women Challenged to Challenge*



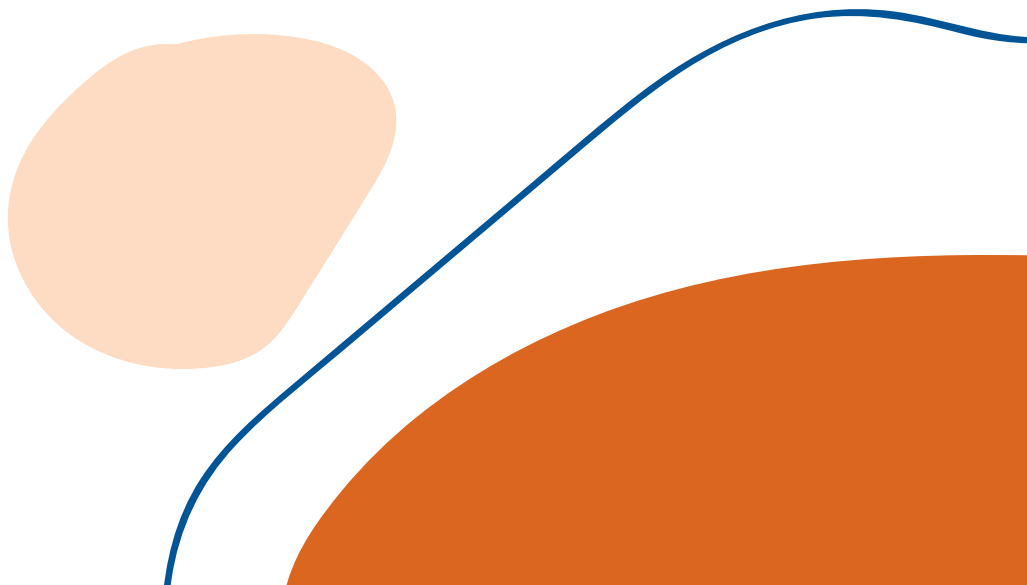
## Key emerging themes from practitioner insights

Five interlinked themes emerged from the analysis and synthesis process, and were used to structure this synthesis review.

- 1. Prioritizing collaborations to address VAWGWD:** Collaboration emerged as a crucial element of both the success of VAWGWD programming, and working at the challenging intersections of gender, disabilities and violence. Collaborations included both formal partnerships as part of applying for the grant, and new and informal collaborations emerging in the process of project implementation.
- 2. Enabling mindset shifts around VAWGWD:** Grantees' experiences and learnings highlighted the key role of grantees in raising awareness of VAWGWD, working more intensively to transform existing mindsets in different domains, supporting paradigm shifts in understanding disabilities, and producing and disseminating knowledge for the prevention of VAWGWD.
- 3. Centring the agency and meaningful participation of women and girls with disabilities:** The participation of women and girls with disabilities was identified consistently as especially important for the specific intersection between gender, disabilities and violence. Grantees showcased the many different levels at which this took place.
- 4. Engaging with legal and policy systems to address VAWGWD:** Engaging with these wider systems and the institutions within them emerged consistently across the portfolio as an essential component of addressing VAWGWD. Grantees offered insights into their engagement with legal and policy systems across a number of social groups, which has the potential to enable others to secure longer-term gains.
- 5. Flexible adaption and learning in addressing VAWGWD:** Project adaptability can be planned for at design stage, but also emerges in reaction to unforeseen changes in situations. This emerged as significant for a project's capacity to address VAWGWD and respond to the specific requirements of diverse groups of women and girls with disabilities.

## Conclusions and recommendations

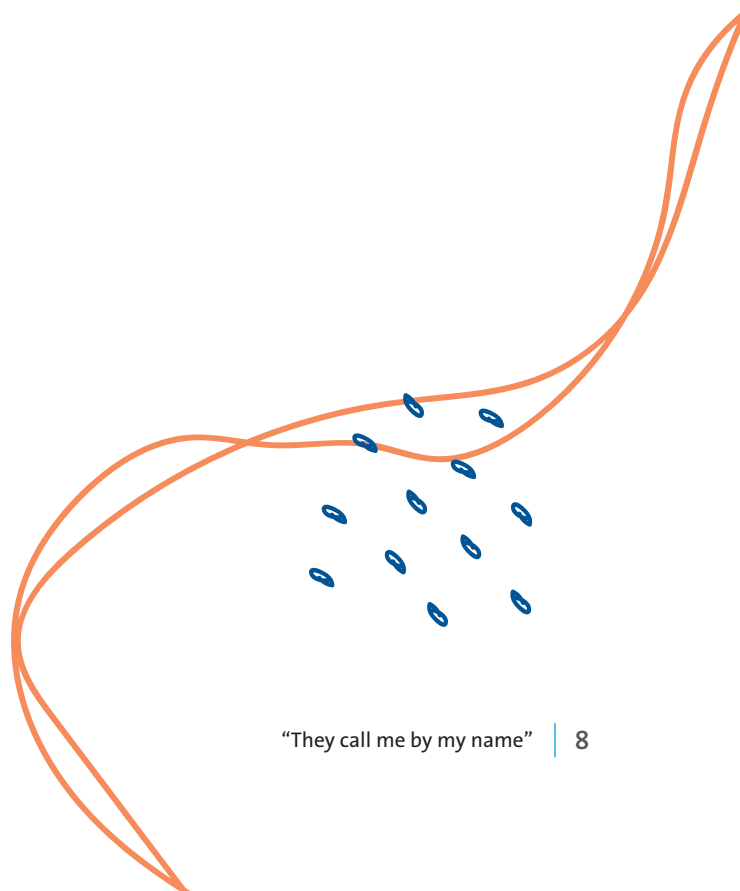
The synthesis review ends with five overarching reflections on the overall value of the Special Window as showcased by the portfolio data as a whole. These are (1) its valuable timing and specific focus, (2) its funding impact, (3) its enabling of disability-specific resources, (4) its support of a more inclusive movement to end violence against women and girls and (5) its highlighting of implementation.



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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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<b>ADD</b>	Action on Disability and Development
<b>ARROW</b>	Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women
<b>BB</b>	Beyond Borders/Depase Fwontyè yo
<b>CBM</b>	Christoffel-Blindenmission Christian Blind Mission e.V.
<b>CDIA</b>	Coordinadora por los Derechos de la Infancia y la Adolescencia
<b>CELS</b>	Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales
<b>CNIC</b>	Computerized National Identity Card
<b>COVID-19</b>	coronavirus disease 2019
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>CSO</b>	civil society organization
<b>EVAWG</b>	ending violence against women and girls
<b>FGD</b>	focus group discussion
<b>FUSA</b>	Fusa para la salud integral con perspectiva de genero y derechos asociación civil
<b>IDEH</b>	Initiative pour un Developpement Equitable en Haiti
<b>LCDZ</b>	Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe
<b>LEGIS</b>	Desarrollo Legislativo y la Democracia
<b>MDRI-S</b>	Mental Disability Rights Initiative of Serbia
<b>MoU</b>	memorandum of understanding
<b>MTM</b>	Mujeres Transformando el Mundo
<b>NCAV</b>	National Center against Violence
<b>NDWA</b>	Nepal Disabled Women's Association
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>NUWODU</b>	National Union of Women with Disabilities of Uganda
<b>OHANA</b>	Organisasi Harapan Nusantara
<b>OPD</b>	organization of people with disabilities
<b>P&amp;H</b>	Paz y Esperanza
<b>SHS</b>	Stars of Hope Society
<b>SOLIFE</b>	Society for Life Changers and Good Parental Care
<b>SRHR</b>	sexual and reproductive health and rights
<b>SWAGAA</b>	Swaziland Action Group against Abuse
<b>UNABU</b>	Umuryango Nyarwanda w'Abagore Bafite Ubumuga
<b>UN Trust Fund</b>	United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women
<b>VAWG</b>	violence against women and girls
<b>VAWGWD</b>	violence against women and girls with disabilities
<b>WCC</b>	Women Challenged to Challenge
<b>WDDF</b>	Women with Disabilities Development Foundation
<b>WRO</b>	women's rights organization

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introducing the intersection of gender, disabilities and violence

Sixteen per cent of the world's population are estimated to be living with a disability. This means that over 700 million women and girls with disabilities worldwide are being left behind by human rights and development communities, despite international legislation around persons with disabilities (WHO, 2022). Disability is identified within current statistics as being more prevalent among women than men (Meyer et al., 2022), with the *Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities* (WHO, 2022) estimating that, globally, 18% of women have disabilities, compared with 14% of men. However, unreliable data collection means that these figures may not give an accurate representation of true numbers worldwide (Andrae and Holly, 2019; Meyer et al., 2022). A disability and development gap has been identified: the levels of poverty and well-being of persons with disabilities have often remained stationary while those of people without disabilities have improved (Groce and Kett, 2013). This is why the Sustainable Development Goals call for increased attention to be paid to the inclusion of persons with disabilities within the development agenda, including on issues of gender equality (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015, 2015). As a result, a range of international instruments addressing women and girls with disabilities have recognized the importance of a cross-cutting gender and disability perspective. These include General Recommendation No. 18 of the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (United Nations, CEDAW, 2010) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nations General Assembly, 2006).

A recent scoping review (Meyer et al., 2022) on violence against women and girls with disabilities (VAWGWD) points to how the conceptual frameworks of intersectionality and feminist disability theory can shed valuable light on the patriarchal systems and social constructs that underpin this violence. However, it also notes that these frameworks have so far been applied mainly in Western, high-income

### Key terms

**Disability:** The United Nations CRPD recognizes that disability “is an evolving concept and results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (United Nations General Assembly, 2006). This report will often use the term “disabilities” to draw attention to the diverse range of disabilities, including physical, psychosocial, intellectual, sensory and invisible conditions. This avoids a tendency to homogenize disability and shows that disabilities also form a complex continuum of impairment levels (Andrae and Holly, 2019).

**Disability-based violence:** This includes direct and indirect violence against persons with disabilities. It is linked to the social stigma associated with disabilities, and is based on the power imbalance between those with and without disabilities. Direct violence can include physical, psychological and economic violence. Indirect violence refers to structural violence, characterized by norms, attitudes and stereotypes regarding disabilities (Andrae and Holly, 2019).

**Intersectionality:** Intersectionality is a way of understanding that many social categories interrelate in the lives of women and girls. Diverse identity categories (e.g. disability, race and gender) or wider circumstances (e.g. occupation, migration and health status) can intersect in compounding ways to produce new forms of risk to VAWG. These categories and circumstances shape each other in complex, non-linear and often unpredictable ways. As a result, interlocking systems of oppression emerge in which women and girls can feel trapped (Palm and Le Roux, 2021).

**Ableism:** Ableism is a social prejudice that defines persons with disabilities by their disabilities and characterizes them as being inferior to those who do not have a disability. Conscious or unconscious ableism may be embedded in institutions, systems or the broader culture of a society. An “ableist” belief system that devalues and limits the potential of persons with disabilities often underlies negative attitudes, stigmatization and stereotyping (WHO, 2022).

**Note on United Nations disability-inclusive terminology:** This review seeks to use the standard terminology recommended by the United Nations guidelines. (United Nations, n.d.) However, we also recognize that this is an evolving space across many diverse languages. Where grantees use another term, or where changing the term would lead to the meaning becoming unclear, the original term has been retained.

contexts, and need to be grounded in data based on different forms of disability and violence and different contexts. Three specific evidence gaps in relation to measuring this area are also identified in the literature: a lack of sex and disability disaggregation, limited adaptation of data collection methods to ensure that research activities are accessible for women with disabilities, and limited engagement with the differential relationships between types of disability and exposure to violence (Meyer et al., 2022). The literature also notes that “significant limitations remain in current understandings of the relationship between disability and violence against women, including that some analyses do not adequately account for gender and its shaping of vulnerability to violence” (Meyer et al., 2022, p. 2). These insights reinforce the findings of the global shared research agenda (SVRI and EQI, 2021), which highlight the need for qualitative research that focuses on programmatic interventions and how to improve them as a top priority, and also the need to prioritize overlooked populations (such as women and girls with disabilities), to pay attention to the specific or additional types of violence that these populations may be at particular risk from (such as support person and institutional violence) and to pay more attention to perpetrators.

**The purpose of this review is to make an evidence-based contribution to these priority areas on the specific issue of VAWGWD by centring and learning from existing programme implementation in diverse low-income contexts.** However, it does not focus on overall results or issues of sustainability across the portfolio, as at the time it was commissioned, external evaluations for most projects were in progress. A brief focused on those findings will be produced in 2023.



*Distribution of certificates to participants in the Training of Trainers on reducing gender-based violence against women with disabilities*

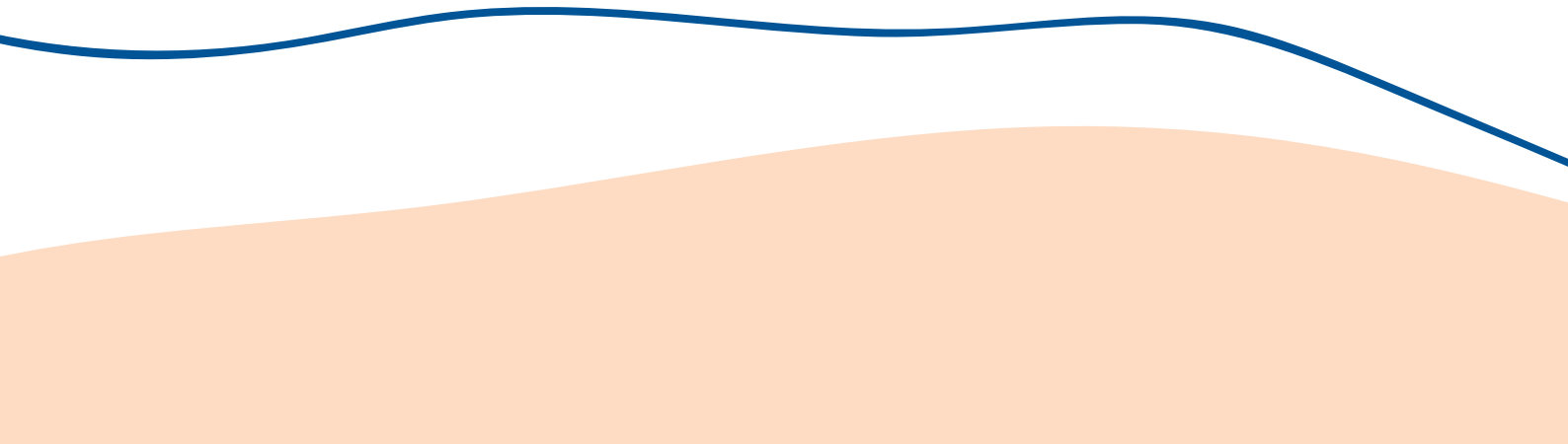
## 1.2 Women and girls with disabilities and the heightened risk of violence against them

The CRPD recognizes “that women and girls with disabilities are often at greater risk, both within and outside the home, of violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation” (United Nations General Assembly, 2006). While persons with disabilities of any gender are at particular risk of physical, emotional and social abuse, the literature shows a clear intersection between violence against women and disability that may increase the level of violence experienced by women and girls with disabilities, and may also make certain forms of violence against them invisible (Dunkle et al., 2018; Andrae and Holly, 2019; Meyer et al., 2022).

**Studies suggest that women and girls with disabilities are up to three times more at risk of experiencing sexual assault, and are twice as likely to experience other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG), including domestic violence, than women and girls who do not have a disability** (Dunkle et al., 2018). They also face increased risks of sexual harassment (UN Women, 2020). Furthermore, women and girls with disabilities are more likely to experience sustained abuse with serious injuries and consequences (Orteloeva and Lewis, 2012). While they experience many of the same forms of violence as women and girls without disabilities, there are also specific types of violence that women and girls with disabilities can face. These include reproductive and institutional violence; coerced institutionalization; restraint and isolation; withholding of medication, mobility aids or communication tools; threats to withhold care; and purposeful neglect (Andrae and Holly, 2019; UN Women, 2018).

**Women and girls with disabilities can also be targeted by perpetrators because of their social exclusion, limited mobility, lack of support structures, communication barriers, and negative social perceptions and cultural norms around disability.** In many cases, the people who perpetrate VAWGWD are family members or other support persons, with violence happening either in homes or within institutional settings. Women and girls with disabilities may find themselves trapped by violent partners or other family members for the long term because they are financially and socially dependent on them (Dunkle et al., 2018; Meyer et al., 2022). Women and girls with disabilities are also not a homogeneous group. Different disabilities, and the extent of the disabilities, coupled with the multiple and intersecting identities of the women and girls, may place some at higher risks of some types of violence. For example, evidence suggests that women and girls with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities face greater risks of violence (Andrae and Holly, 2019).

**This reality affects children too.** A recent systematic review found that 31.7% of children with disabilities have experienced violence, which is double the average of children without disabilities. Furthermore, those in economically disadvantaged contexts are identified as especially vulnerable (Fang et al., 2022). Various studies have highlighted that girls with disabilities experience significantly higher levels of sexual abuse than girls without disabilities (Somani et al., 2021; UNFPA, 2018). While there is growing interest in disability and gender, a gap has been identified regarding the limited research on the intersectionality of the two areas, which can lead to generalized myths predominating (Meyer et al., 2022)

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of a blue wavy line above an orange wavy line, creating a stylized horizon or wave effect.



### 1.3 The United Nations Trust Fund Special Window on ending violence against women and girls with disabilities

In 2018, the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) launched a special funding window for projects implemented by civil society organizations (CSOs) with the aim of preventing and ending VAWGWD. The UN Trust Fund Special Window on ending violence against women and girls with disabilities (henceforth “the Special Window”) was informed by a recognition of the historical underfunding of efforts in the area. The Special Window was situated as part of the UN Trust Fund’s commitment to leaving no one behind, with recognition of women and girls with disabilities as a group seen to be at specific risk of violence and of being left behind by many initiatives for ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG). While gender equality was already identified as a key focus for many donors, less attention had been paid to VAWG in relation to women and girls with disabilities, with various stakeholders agreeing that more needs to be done (UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, 2021). The creation of the Special Window was an attempt to address this specific gap and various challenges and barriers to addressing VAWGWD that had been identified. Focus group participants noted that the Special Window offered the opportunity to bridge gaps between disability and gender-based violence, bringing together the issues in intersectional ways that also resonated with recent scholarship.

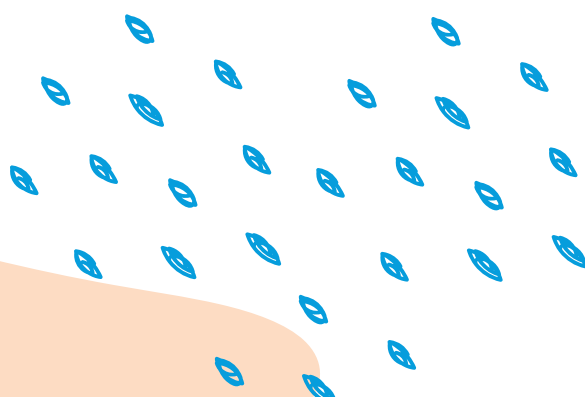
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*Gender-based violence has always been treated as a separate issue under a separate ministry, but disability has always been in a different corner. Now the Special Window allowed us to bridge the two issues and to have a deeper understanding of intersectionality and having some tools to address (it) (focus group discussion (FGD) 2, October 2022).*

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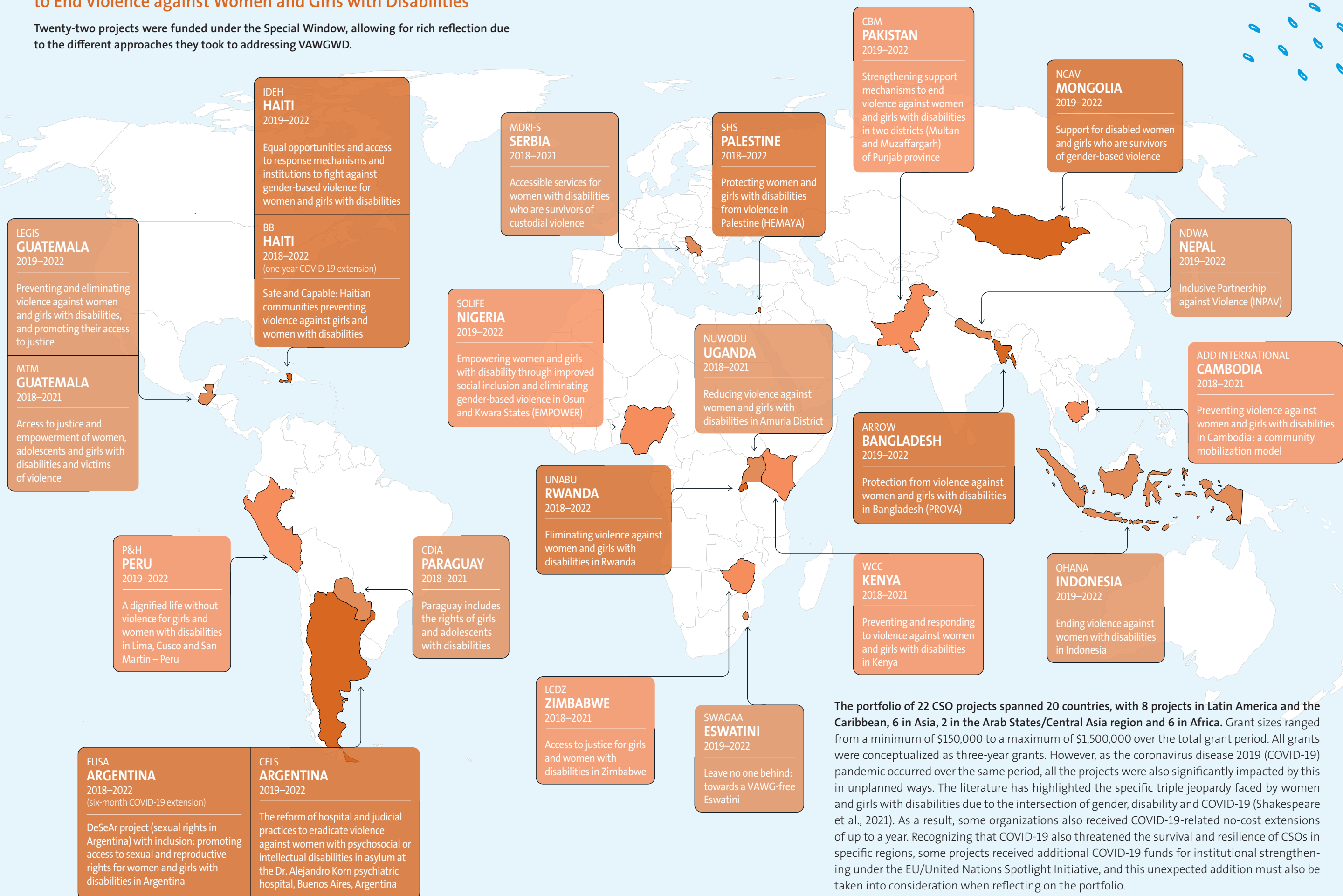
The Special Window primarily focused on developing inclusive prevention and response mechanisms, including providing essential, safe and adequate multisectoral services for women and girls with disabilities who are survivors of or at risk of violence, and advocating the implementation of intersectional laws and policies. The aims of the Special Window were to shed light on one specific under-resourced area of EVAWG programming, and to encourage applicants to work in a more intersectional way. A midterm review noted that the Special Window grants had been effective in bridging the divides between organizations with different areas of expertise and in building complementary partnerships, especially between women’s rights organizations (WROs) and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) (UN Trust Fund, 2022). The Special Window intentionally focused attention on the types of organizations that could apply for funding and prioritized those with pre-existing intersectional experience of disability inclusion in relation to VAWG. All proposals had to be led by or meaningfully involve OPDs. This aligned with UN Women’s strategy of developing inclusive, intersectional approaches to disabilities that support equal partnerships (UN Women, 2018).

The Special Window is not the only approach that the UN Trust Fund has been using to ensure a focus on VAWGWD. In its *Strategic Plan (2021–2025)*, the UN Trust Fund adopted a “twin-tracks approach” to focus on women and girls with disabilities as a specific underfunded intersection at a particular time (via the Special Window), while also taking simultaneous steps to mainstream intersectional approaches across its entire portfolio and to support approaches that are inclusive of women and girls with disabilities within its wider work (UN Women, 2018). An analysis of the UN Trust Fund’s work in mainstreaming disability inclusion across its full portfolio is beyond the scope of this paper and will be covered in a separate paper.



## 1.4 Portfolio of Projects under UN Trust Fund Special Window to End Violence against Women and Girls with Disabilities

Twenty-two projects were funded under the Special Window, allowing for rich reflection due to the different approaches they took to addressing VAWGWD.



The portfolio of 22 CSO projects spanned 20 countries, with 8 projects in Latin America and the Caribbean, 6 in Asia, 2 in the Arab States/Central Asia region and 6 in Africa. Grant sizes ranged from a minimum of \$150,000 to a maximum of \$1,500,000 over the total grant period. All grants were conceptualized as three-year grants. However, as the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic occurred over the same period, all the projects were also significantly impacted by this in unplanned ways. The literature has highlighted the specific triple jeopardy faced by women and girls with disabilities due to the intersection of gender, disability and COVID-19 (Shakespeare et al., 2021). As a result, some organizations also received COVID-19-related no-cost extensions of up to a year. Recognizing that COVID-19 also threatened the survival and resilience of CSOs in specific regions, some projects received additional COVID-19 funds for institutional strengthening under the EU/United Nations Spotlight Initiative, and this unexpected addition must also be taken into consideration when reflecting on the portfolio.

In analysing this portfolio, it became apparent that an overarching typology is not helpful given the rich diversity of the tailored, context-specific approaches. However, across the portfolio, there are different types of organizations, varied ways of engaging with the three main UN Trust Fund outcome result areas, differing approaches to which types of disabilities were focused on and, at times, a focus on particular forms of violence. Below is a brief introduction of the 22 projects that takes these differences into consideration. For more information on the individual projects, see appendix A.

**First, a range of types of organization were funded through the Special Window.** Four of the grantees identified as disability-specific organizations, three as WROs, five as organizations of women with disabilities, one as a faith-based organization and one as a human rights organization. One identified as a child rights network: *Coordinadora por los Derechos de la Infancia y la Adolescencia* (CDIA) in Paraguay which was an alliance of 30 child-focused CSOs that helped girls with disabilities from a children's rights angle. The other seven grantees identified only as CSOs. These organizations also varied in size; in whether they were local, national, regional or international; and in the configuration of their partnerships. Three types of organizations were prominent across the portfolio. First, there were organizations that identified as disability-specific organizations – such as the *Christoffel-Blindenmission Christian Blind Mission* e.V. (CBM), a German organization with a local country office in Pakistan. While many grantees partnered formally with OPDs, it was notable that the only OPDs that were lead grantees were women-led entities (covered below). Second, organizations that identified as WROs were also common, for example the *Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women* (ARROW), a regional organization from South-East Asia that partnered with a women-led disability-specific organization. Third, the portfolio included a number of OPDs whose core mandate and leadership structures modelled the specific intersection of gender and disability. Those funded as lead grantees were specifically organizations (including networks) of women with disabilities. For example, *Women Challenged to Challenge* (WCC) in Kenya was a members' network of women and girls with disabilities who focused on building their own capacity to speak out on various issues.



*Mujeres Transformando el Mundo staff receives sign language training at the Educational Association for the deaf (ASEDES)*



**Second, some grantees focused on different types of disabilities, shaped by their respective contexts.** Sixteen grantees appeared to include all types of disabilities. For example, *Umuryango Nyarwanda w'Abagore Bafite Ubumuga* (UNABU) in Rwanda set up 120 self-advocacy groups at community level for women with diverse disabilities to expand their awareness of their rights. Three grantees focused attention only on the areas of psychosocial and/or intellectual disabilities (often termed “mental” disabilities by grantees). For example, *Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales* (CELS) in Argentina focused primarily on one psychiatric hospital and the health practitioners and individuals within it. Finally, three grantees worked across a wider group of women and girls, but with a commitment to engaging with all disabilities within that work. These included the *Swaziland Action Group against Abuse* (SWAGAA), which mentored adolescent girls and young women broadly, but also intentionally included those with disabilities to improve their agency and safety, through asset-building clubs and small-group sessions.

**Third, grantees across the portfolio engaged with the UN Trust Fund's three outcome focus areas in different ways.** While the majority worked across more than one outcome area, showing the importance of not viewing these areas as silos, six focused primarily on the prevention of VAWGWD, eight on service provision and eight on access to justice. **For those focused on prevention, primary prevention often emerged as a priority.** For example, international disability organization Action on Disability and Development (ADD) International aimed to improve the protection requirements of women and girls with disabilities in six districts of Cambodia, where the primary prevention approaches did not address their specific realities. Primary prevention was also a focus for *Beyond Borders/Depase Fwontyè yo* (BB) in Haiti, which researched, designed, developed and piloted a companion set of disability-specific resources entitled “Safe and Capable” to accompany the community mobilization EAWG models it was already running with local partners. **Others took a service delivery focus to tackle barriers and increase accessibility for women and girls with disabilities.** For example, the *National Center against Violence* (NCAV) in Mongolia built and piloted a model shelter for women and girls with disabilities who had survived violence, while the *Stars of Hope Society* (SHS) undertook capacity development of public sector institutions and CSOs in Palestine to reduce the barriers that women and girls with disabilities face when trying to access services. *Nepal Disabled Women's Association* (NDWA) in Nepal worked with one-stop crisis management centres across 27 districts, in close coordination with 77 local municipalities, to build service providers' capacity regarding VAWG in order to improve the services they provided for women and girls with disabilities. *Organisasi Harapan Nusantara* (OHANA) in Indonesia provided community-level capacity-building to local service providers, and developed survivor support circles for individual women and girls with disabilities. **Finally, some grantees primarily paid attention to increasing access to justice for women and girls with disabilities.** They worked with a range of legal and policy institutions and systems, and statutory duty bearers within the judicial system, and lobbied for legal and policy reforms around issues affecting women and girls with disabilities. For example, *Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe* (LCDZ) worked with the police and local magistrates' courts to build a more disability-inclusive justice chain, while also lobbying for standardized protocols. *Mujeres Transformando el Mundo* (MTM) in Guatemala worked to facilitate strategic litigation regarding women and girls with disabilities, and to promote a comprehensive approach to supporting those who are also survivors of violence, including training them on human rights and access to justice. *Desarrollo Legislativo y la Democracia* (LEGIS) in Guatemala focused its attention on the national regulatory legislation level, and on educationally equipping legal duty bearers within the Institute of Public Criminal Defense. *Initiative pour un Développement Equitable en Haiti* (IDEH) in Haiti prioritized the leadership development of women with disabilities as political activists through training sessions and debate clubs. Organizations took different entry points to their approaches in this area. For example, *Fusa para la salud integral con perspectiva de genero y derechos asociación civil* (FUSA) in Argentina focused its project on promoting the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of women and girls with disabilities within a range of legal and policy spaces, while *Paz y Esperanza* (P&H) in Peru trained women with disabilities as political activists and then accompanied them as they developed advocacy strategies in their areas.



**Grantees across the portfolio also took different approaches to which types of violence were their focus.** The majority, 12 grantees, worked across all types of violence that they found to be emerging in their contexts. This often included verbal discrimination and neglect as forms of violence that were common for women and girls with disabilities. However, a significant number of grantees focused on a particular type of violence, with four looking at, for example, sexual violence and/or economic violence; two focusing on violence against the girl child; and three focusing on particular contexts of violence, such as within institutions, by the State or within families. For example, the *Mental Disability Rights Initiative of Serbia* (MDRI-S) in Serbia worked in custodial institutions to challenge entrenched patterns of forced institutionalization and abuse. The *National Union of Women with Disabilities of Uganda* (NUWODU) in Uganda trained women with a range of disabilities as community paralegals so they could help report family violence, and created training that also included these women's family members. Some grantees worked with schools for children with disabilities: *Society for Life Changers and Good Parental Care* (SOLIFE) in Nigeria set up school clubs led by girls with disabilities, and trained teachers already working in schools for children with disabilities on addressing different forms of violence, including gender-based violence.

**While many grantees had a primary focus, most worked across more than one issue and at multiple levels simultaneously.** Some grantees chose to exclusively focus on women and girls with disabilities, rather than working with integrative approaches; some chose between working with all forms of disabilities and focusing on a particular category; some made specific connections between certain disabilities and the risks of particular forms of VAWG; and some decided whether to work with only women and girls with disabilities or with all people with disabilities while considering disability through a gender lens. These introductions should be seen in the light of these decisions, with section 2 offering a more in-depth exploration of what grantees did and how.

## 1.5 Methodology

**The synthesis review followed the approaches and methods associated with qualitative meta-synthesis, which aims to bring together findings on a chosen theme in such a way that the results should (in conceptual terms) be greater than the sum of the parts (Finlayson and Dixon, 2008).** The synthesis review therefore emphasized interpretation of the qualitative data, providing insight into the 22 interventions overall. Therefore, it is exploratory in nature, to expand an understanding of VAWGWD interventions. The main objectives were to synthesize and analyze key lessons emerging from the portfolio, to reflect on the Special Window, and to identify key lessons for funders on supporting EVAWG programming with women and girls with disabilities.

**The synthesis review engaged with selected project-specific monitoring reports and a small number of external evaluations and published knowledge products (where available) from the 22 projects included in the women and girls with disabilities portfolio.** A two-stage desk-review analysis and synthesis process involving these documents was followed, and two FGDs were also conducted with representatives of the 22 grantees. These focus groups served two purposes: they were data collection exercises, and functioned as validation exercises in which the preliminary findings of the synthesis review were shared for feedback and input. Finally, while a literature review was not formally part of the methodology, a set amount of time was spent on checking and connecting selected academic and grey literature particularly relevant to themes that emerged from the analysis process. For more details on the methodology, please see appendices B, C and D. The first stage of the review process was guided deductively by a set of research questions. However, during the cross-case analysis conducted during the second stage of the research process, an inductive approach was used. The findings and learnings considered in section 2 below are reflective of this inductive approach. Therefore, key themes emerged from the data, and findings are not organized according to the research questions.

## 2 KEY FINDINGS

This section is structured around five key themes that emerged from grantee project data:

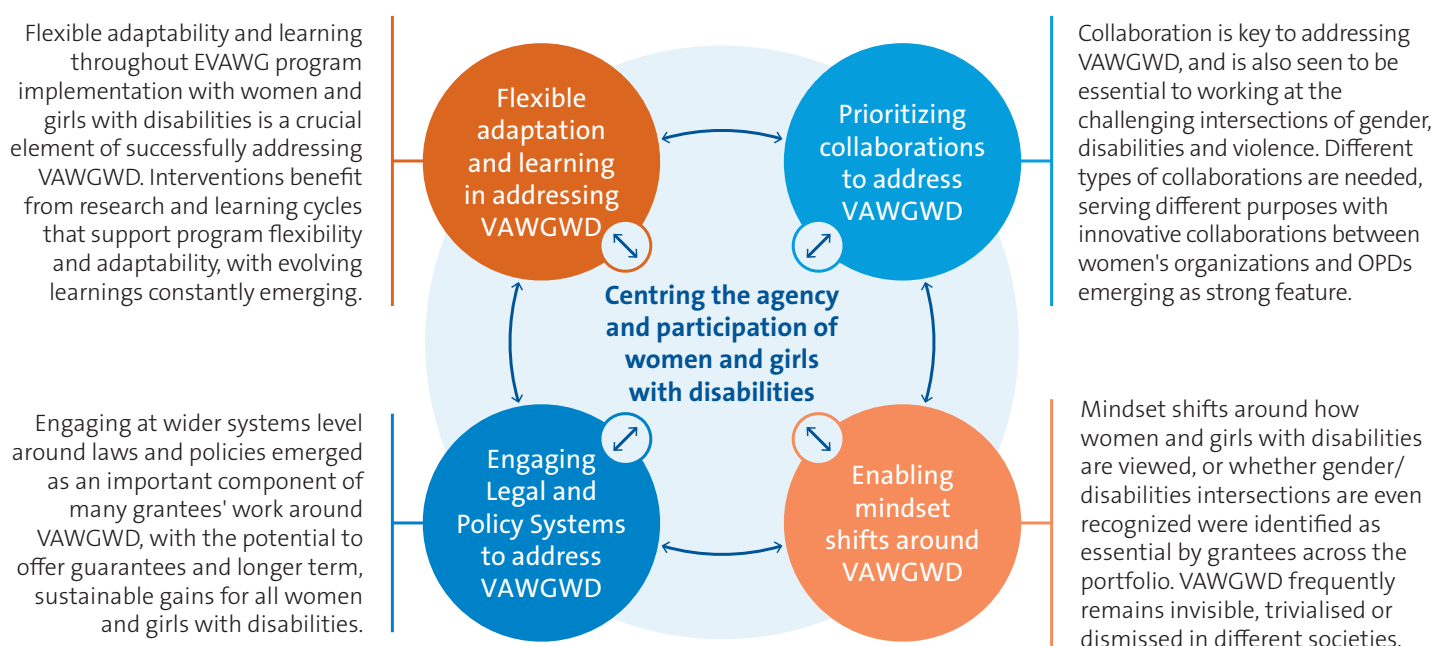
1. prioritizing collaborations to address VAWGWD
2. enabling mindset shifts around VAWGWD
3. centring the agency and meaningful participation of women and girls with disabilities
4. engaging with legal and policy systems to address VAWGWDs
5. flexible adaptation and learning in addressing VAWGWD.

While these themes are discussed as five separate sections in this review, they are also deeply interconnected in the projects that address VAWGWD – as illustrated in Figure 1 below. This diagram showcases how these five interlinked elements of EAWG programming are all crucial to addressing VAWGWD effectively.

To end VAWGWD, the portfolio as a whole showed that EAWG interventions need to fundamentally **centre both the agency and the participation of women and girls with disabilities**. Agency and participation are the overall environment within which the other four elements are present (or absent). The centring of agency and participation is critical and also helps to tackle the misperceptions that women and girls with disabilities cannot make decisions on their own or engage in civic participation. These misperceptions fuel violence, invisibility and reduced social status, and also limit solidarity among women and girls with disabilities. The agency and participation of women and girls with disabilities has to be centred throughout the intervention (design, implementation, and monitoring and learning processes) as a fundamental prerequisite for addressing and ending VAWGWD. Centring agency and participation forms the environment that enables the other four elements to be most effective, and those four elements in turn reinforce the agency and participation of women and girls with disabilities. Together, these five areas form the structure of the sections that follow.

FIGURE 1:

Visual Representation of themes identified in the projects addressing VAWGWD



## 2.1 Prioritizing collaborations to address violence against women and girls with disabilities

Collaboration emerged as a crucial element for the success of programming addressing VAWGWD, and also as essential for working at the challenging intersections of gender, disabilities and violence. Formal and informal partnerships were needed to apply for, secure and implement a UN Trust Fund grant, with different types of collaborations emerging among the 22 projects. Aside from supporting the achievement of project goals, these collaborations also served many other purposes.

### 2.1.1 Types of collaborations

**Grantees collaborated with different kinds of organizations and networks in formal partnerships in order to successfully secure UN Trust Fund grants and in the course of programme implementation.** These “implementing partners” were formally written into the initial project proposal and received some of the project funds, and the partnership was often formalized in a memorandum of understanding (MoU). In reflecting on the implementing partners of the various grantees, and the roles and responsibilities assigned to these partners, it emerged that partners brought different specializations, focuses and reach to the goal of addressing VAWGWD. For example, MDRI-S in Serbia focuses on the protection and promotion of those with intellectual and “mental disabilities”, and partnered with FemPlatz, which focuses on women’s rights and gender equality, in order to help women with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities live free from custodial violence; SWAGAA in Eswatini focuses on addressing gender-based violence, and partnered with Bantwana Initiative Eswatini, an organization that focuses on vulnerable children, to implement a project focused on adolescent girls and young women who are refugees and/or have disabilities; and SHS in Palestine, a woman-led OPD, partnered with Al Marsad, a group of Palestinian academics and researchers who monitor social and economic policies in Palestine, to ensure essential, safe and adequate multisectoral services for women and girls with disabilities. As illustrated by these examples, intersectional work requires collaboration with others, as it is rare for one organization to have expertise in all the varied areas needed. Across the portfolio, the combination of WROs and OPDs often emerged, as the combination of expertise on both gender and disabilities is critical for projects that aim to address VAWGWD. This reinforces the current reality noted in the literature that these types of organizations may struggle to access funds currently, and the value of leveraging their expertise more widely within the EVAWG sector itself (UN Women, 2018).

**Across the portfolio, formal project partners often operated at different levels – local, national and international – in order to implement their projects, each offering specific contributions (because of how they are positioned) to ensure that VAWGWD is addressed effectively.** CBM’s project in Pakistan illustrates this well. CBM, the lead grantee for the project, is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) for people with disabilities. It partnered with the CBM Pakistan Country Office, Bedari (a national-level NGO working with women and children to protect and promote their human rights) and several local OPDs. While CBM was the main grantee and managed the technical requirements of the grant (e.g. financial and reporting requirements), Bedari managed project implementation, based on its knowledge and experience of working with women and children and of VAWG in Pakistan. The project prioritized lobbying the local and national governments about the accessibility of Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) registration for those with disabilities. CNIC registration is crucial to ensuring that those with disabilities receive government-sanctioned support, and that women and girls with disabilities can access critical support and services. Shahnaz Bibi, one of the participants in CBM and Bedari’s project, shared her story, explaining how her left hand was amputated after an accident while working in the fields. Afterwards, Shahnaz’s husband divorced her, forcing her to live with her parents, who ill-treated her. She credits Bedari’s intervention with changing her life:

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*I met the project staff and started attending their sessions in my village. This made me aware that I can have a special “Disabled Person Card” (CNIC registration stipulating her disability) for myself, which can ensure a constant financial support to me and my family. Bedari representatives also supported me for registration ... Now I am quite comfortable in my life and help other people in getting “Disabled Person Card” with the active support of the project team (monitoring report, CBM, 2021).*

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Both CBM and Bedari also highlighted how important their local OPD partners were for project implementation, for these organizations had strong existing links and good reach in the targeted communities. While Bedari could lobby local and national governments about CNIC registration, it faced challenges in identifying women and girls with disabilities that still needed CNIC registration. The local OPDs, on the other hand, could more easily identify and engage with women and girls with disabilities in the target communities thanks to their trusted presence and relationships with persons with disabilities in these communities. Partnerships with OPDs were also identified as critical for success in the literature (Dunkel et al., 2018).

In these partnerships, the lead grantee was not always the international partner. For example, in Kenya, it was the community-based organization WCC that was the lead grantee, with the implementing partners being Advantage Africa (an international organization supporting people affected by poverty, disabilities and HIV) and Kibwezi Disabled Persons’ Organization (a local OPD). The lead grantee and/or implementing partners themselves can also represent collaborations. CDIA in Paraguay, for example, is a network of 30 CSOs working on children’s rights. Thus, in its project (focusing on enhancing inter-institutional and inter-sectoral coordination around violence against girls and adolescents, including those with disabilities), 30 organizations were involved in responding or capacitated to respond to the needs of girls and adolescents with disabilities, which can be significant for the longer-term impact of the project.

**A number of key learnings emerge from reflecting on the collaboration between implementing partners.**

First, in working at the intersections between disabilities, gender and violence, one organization will rarely have the full reach and range of expertise needed. Collaboration with other partners emerged as a crucial success factor in working on VAWGWD. One added benefit is that, during the collaborative process, all partners increase not only their understanding of VAWGWD, but also their own intersectional awareness of how disabilities are viewed within society and affect the lives of persons with disabilities.

Second, OPDs, especially those at local level, emerge as crucial formal partners. Their ability to influence other partners’ understanding of disability is critically important, not only during the funded project’s life cycle, but also in the longer term. They are influencing partners in that they recognize the importance of the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the longer term. Furthermore, in these collaborations, OPDs are rightly recognized as experts, which, in turn, shifts the power dynamics within civil society, but also the EAWG field specifically. OPDs becoming peer experts to other partners is reshaping the EAWG sector itself. It does so by helping WROs realize the specific rights and requirements of women and girls with disabilities, and helping capacitate them to respond to it, but also by moving national-level policy discussions towards a more inclusive women’s rights agenda.

Collaboration is also crucial for OPD inclusion, as OPDs are often relatively small and many only function at local level. This local presence is very important for reaching and working directly with women and girls with disabilities, who are often housebound owing to either their impairments or community stigma of disabilities. Yet, given the OPDs’ local positionality, and possibly also as a result of how disability has often been sidelined within development spaces, these OPDs are often (relatively) small organizations without the ability and infrastructure to apply for and manage large grants. Collaborative partnerships, such as those enabled by the Special Window, allow them to partner with larger organizations in ways that assist them in meeting all the requirements of the grant.



Yet collaborations were not limited to formal partnerships written into initial project proposals, as all grantees also formed alliances with organizations and institutions that were not identified as implementing partners in their project applications, yet were nevertheless often very important to project implementation. In most of the grantee projects, the identification and formation of such collaborations was an intentional part of the project design, planned for right from the start and designed as critical for project success. Some grantees might not yet have known who exactly the collaborations were to be with, but they allocated time and activities to identifying the right organizations and institutions. For others, collaborations emerged organically, and sometimes unexpectedly, during project implementation, in response to their constantly evolving context or as an unforeseen result of project activities. This happened especially where grantees engaged in the training or capacity development of other organizations. For example, SHS in Palestine ran training and capacity-building for institutions (both State and civil society), helping them modify their internal systems and procedures, and providing individual support according to their needs. This service enabled the formation of strategic alliances, as institutions came to know and trust SHS. The focus groups also reflected on how the ability and willingness to train and capacitate other institutions, enabled collaborations to emerge:

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*Orientation and training to government officers, (crisis management centre) teams, (and) local elected representatives about the issues of gender-based violence (against) women with disabilities and accessible services was one of the effective and innovative programs to date. (The) majority of the participants got such training for the first time in their life, it helped in building rapport with stakeholders and further coordination and collaboration also (FGD, written response, October 2022).*

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**Unforeseen circumstances also offered unplanned opportunities for collaboration**, of which COVID-19 is a key example. While this is discussed in more detail in section 2.5, several partners experienced COVID-19 as offering opportunities to collaborate. For example, the move to virtual spaces permitted some grantees, such as CDIA in Paraguay, to pursue new alliances (e.g. with the Departmental Secretariats for Children and Adolescents, and the Departmental Secretariats for Education), while CBM and Bedari in Pakistan and ADD International in Cambodia were offered new opportunities to work with the local government on COVID-19 prevention and response. In turn, these collaborations as part of the COVID-19 response allowed relationships to develop and are helping the organizations in the longer term. Therefore, while it is important for grantees to carefully and strategically choose implementing partners at project design stage, there must also be flexibility and adaptability to develop the unforeseen, yet needed, collaboration opportunities that emerge during project implementation.



*Guests during the project's launch using sign language to celebrate.*

## 2.1.2 Purpose of collaborations

**As seen in the discussion of types of collaborations, grantees engaged in collaborations to ensure that they were able to implement their projects.** Both formal and informal partnerships, whether part of project design or emerging organically, contribute to ensuring that the projects' goals are met. However, there are also other reasons why grantees engaged in collaborations.

**Some grantees identified developing new alliances and collaboration as a key aim of their projects right from the design stage.** SHS in Palestine, for example, identified the establishment of multiple partnerships with key duty bearers as crucial to achieving its project goal of including women and girls with disabilities in available EVAWG programming and services. SOLIFE in Nigeria also identified partnerships as pivotal to improving VAWG service delivery, and therefore almost immediately created the State Partnership against GBV against Women and Girls with Disabilities network, a multi-sector partnership that consists of 30 members representing different important stakeholders necessary for the elimination of VAWG. In addition, during the FGDs, the importance of planning for and implementing partnerships from the start of project roll-out emerged as a key takeaway from grantees:

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*Another key lesson is (that) partnerships with the relevant stakeholders and their engagement right from the start of the project made the project implementation successful, as it was easy to penetrate through to the project beneficiaries (FGD, written response, October 2022).*

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**Many grantees also established collaborations during project implementation that would enable them to implement specific project activities.** These were with CSOs, government partners, educational institutions and even media partners. For example, CBM in Pakistan signed an MoU with the Ending Violence against Women Authority of Punjab, which then enabled project staff to visit communities to provide information about the services it was offering to the women and girls targeted by the project.

**Collaborations were also established with specific organizations to capacitate these organizations regarding the intersection of gender and disabilities.** EVAWG organizations were identified as places where support is often still required to assist them to integrate issues of disabilities into their current approaches, and disability-specific organizations were also seen as needing support to better understand gender issues. A number of grantees brought these types of CSOs together so they could learn from each other and build synergies that can help overcome a history of unintentionally siloed practices. One FGD participant noted that this remains an ongoing task where “the wider sector working on violence against women must understand the need to take into account the situation of women with disabilities in their work and must be aware of the issue of disability in care and services against VAWG” (FGD, written response, October 2022). Tailored, ongoing accompaniment was identified as essential, as opposed to taking a one-size-fits-all approach to capacitating CSOs. For example, realizing the unique circumstances and needs of each organization and institution, SHS in Palestine provided individualized accompaniment to 96 NGO and CSO members and 48 government staff.

**Collaborations also played a role in facilitating the longer-term sustainability of the organizations' agendas for improving the rights and lives of women and girls with disabilities.** A number of grantees highlighted that formal or informal collaborations during project implementation led to the establishment of formalized structures centred on women and girls with disabilities that would continue after the project. For example, MDRI-S in Serbia collaborated with institutions from various sectors – international NGOs, United Nations agencies, NGOs and journalists – on advocating for the deinstitutionalization and rights of women and girls with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities. This resulted in the formation of a platform called Equal in the Community, which MDRI-S believes will play a crucial role in future advocacy efforts. CDIA in Paraguay built on its project activities by rolling out a new initiative called Paraguay Includes. Different allied organizations – many of which had collaborated in the UN Trust Fund-funded project – have joined Paraguay Includes, with the aim of preventing violence, and promoting diversity and inclusive approaches (not limited to disabilities). This initiative continued past the completion of CDIA's UN Trust Fund-funded project.

Some collaborations were also formalized through MoUs. Particularly with State partners, MoUs facilitate longer-term collaboration, as they can (usually) survive the turnover of staff due to elections or other political matters. SHS in Palestine recognized the importance of this official institutional commitment to women and girls with disabilities, as it then does not rely (only) on the goodwill of specific individuals currently working for the institution. This is why SHS signed seven MoUs, including with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, the Police/Family Protection Unit, the National Society for Rehabilitation (in Gaza), the Psycho-Social Counseling Center for Women (Bethlehem), Ma'an Organization (Gaza) and Community-Based Rehabilitation.

**While collaborations emerged as very important in efforts to end VAWGWD, it is important to keep in mind that good collaboration takes time, patience and effort, and grantees discussed several challenges common to multisectoral collaboration to address VAWGWD.** A key challenge, experienced by almost all grantees, was the turnover of partners' staff. Engagement with political actors and government institutions at local and national levels is often challenged by turnover, as national or local election results often call for a complete restructuring of staffing, which can derail or delay project efforts. This is what IDEH experienced in Haiti when staff changes in the local authorities delayed the signing of agreements, which in turn delayed project activities. IDEH also found it very hard to engage with State authorities without a specific personal contact within the institution – which again challenged IDEH when elections led to a turnover of elected officials.

## 2.2 Enabling mindset shifts around violence against women and girls with disabilities

Mindset shifts around how women and girls with disabilities are viewed or whether the gender/disabilities intersection is even recognized were identified as essential by grantees across the portfolio. Grantees pointed to the reality that VAWGWD frequently remains invisible, trivialized or dismissed in different societies and, as a result, grantees' work to shift these patterns of denial was crucial. Four focus areas emerged as being effective across the portfolio: (1) awareness-raising on the nature and extent of the specific violence experienced by women and girls with disabilities, (2) transforming the mindsets of specific groups within society, (3) facilitating shifts towards new disability-related paradigms and (4) knowledge production and dissemination for primary prevention of VAWGWD. These four areas are discussed below.

### 2.2.1 Awareness-raising around violence against women and girls with disabilities

FGD participants highlighted what they themselves termed an almost total invisibility and denial around current realities of VAWGWD, with one participant noting that “initially people are surprised to hear that it happens” (FGD 1, October 2022). This is despite an awareness of wider VAWG realities. This compounded invisibilization, which is also recognized as a concern in the literature (Palm and Le Roux, 2021; Andrae and Holly, 2019), meant that grantees had considerable work to do in countering widespread, ignorant patterns of denial that lead to exclusion and inaction. At the same time, harmful ableist beliefs around disabilities and gender, such as thinking that women and girls with disabilities are cursed and should not have children, come together to exacerbate the tolerance of VAWGWD, themes that the literature has also drawn attention to (Chisale, 2018). These beliefs were named by some grantees as an underlying cause of a culture of stigma and silence driven by a lack of recognition of the personhood and rights of women and girls with disabilities. This reinforces the literature, which identifies the reality that there is a high level of disability stigma, often underpinned by patterns of ableism (Dunkle et al., 2018; Rohwerder, 2018; WHO, 2022). This multi-faceted denial and its accompanying tolerance of VAWGWD became an essential issue for many grantees to address:

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*There is the denial of disability violence itself. People tend to minimize or undermine the existence of disability-related violence. That denial will make the people less willing to hear, to address the issue of violence. This is why we built our advocacy campaign around raising awareness of the community, to admit now that there is violence (FGD 1, October 2022).*

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**Considering these realities, grantees emphasized how important it was to first raise awareness of disabilities.** This enabled people to understand that persons with disabilities have human rights; to know what the different types of disabilities are and to see how disabilities intersect with a range of other issues, including gender; and, as a result, to recognize that VAWGWD exists. Grantees noted a lack of very basic awareness of VAWGWD, even in parts of the EAWG sector. For example, a FGD participant who was a woman with a disability and represented a grantee organization noted that barriers still exist within the broader women's community regarding understanding VAWGWD as part of VAWG, and the disability sector not seeing the impact of gender on this violence the impact of gendered dimensions:

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*The intersectional lens is still not being fully taken up by the broader women's community and those working on VAWG, and also from the disability community itself not understanding fully the gendered dimensions of violence against women and girls with disabilities (FGD 1, October 2022).*

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This awareness-raising at community level also played a practical role in attitudinal and behaviour change within local communities, especially in the first year of many projects, as was described by Uwineza, a woman with a disability living in Rwanda:

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*People in the community at large you see they no longer treat people with disabilities as objects. Mindsets are changing sincerely because of better understanding; they are not called by dehumanizing names ... discrimination and psychological mistreatment has reduced: personally, I was not aware of the law punishing VAWGWD. People committed to protect them. We never paid attention to them before. For now, we give them priority for available support in our village. We help them to overcome isolation and hopelessness (monitoring report, UNABU, 2019).*

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## 2.2.2 Transforming mindsets across five domains within society

**Across the portfolio, five main groups emerged as benefiting from work on mindset shifts. These were individual women and girls with disabilities, family members, civil society structures and organizations, service delivery providers, and national law and policy stakeholders.** Grantees showcased work within each of these social domains.

**First, individual women and girls with disabilities noted the value of self-recognition of their rights, including the right to be free from violence.** One FGD participant explained that, in their context, women and girls with disabilities were very uninformed about different forms of violence, often because communication challenges excluded them from most EAWG messaging. Women with disabilities, such as 19-year-old Louise from UNABU in Rwanda, pointed to how they internalized the stigma and underlying ableism that surrounded them, and even felt guilty and responsible for their disability. This need to focus more on the internalized perceptions of women and girls with disabilities has been identified as a gap in current research (Andrae and Holly, 2019). Louise identified the UNABU project as helping to shift her self-beliefs so she could see herself as a person with rights:

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*Before joining this (women with disabilities self-help) group I was not happy. People used to stigmatize me, even some members of my family treated me as useless, and I felt myself guilty as if I am responsible of my disability. The group helped me understand my rights and what can I do to voice out violence against girls and women with disabilities (monitoring report, UNABU, 2020).*

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**Second, family members within communities were identified as a particularly essential group, because of the roles they often fulfilled in the lives of women and girls with disabilities.** Some are lifelong support people, and grantees note that they may play a potentially dominant and harmful role over all aspects of their lives, sometimes in the name of protection. This was seen to be especially the case with children with disabilities. Grantees such as NUWODU in Uganda and SHS in Palestine stressed the value of intentionally engaging family members alongside women and girls with disabilities, to build a shared awareness across both groups, which was also seen to create more positive and supportive relationships as a result. Working with parents of children with disabilities to build the parents' awareness of VAWGWD can help to shift harmful practices that have become normalized, such as parents hiding children from educational settings:

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*So (with) parents (and) how they perceive disability also, it's so important to work on the parenting (and) family relations with woman with children with disabilities because this can prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities starting from a very early age (FGD 1, October 2022).*

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**Third, engaging staff at community-level civil society structures and organizations, who may reflect negative stereotypes around disabilities and/or perpetuate unwitting exclusion as a default position, was important.** This is also the case with some women's organizations and others in the EVAWG sector, as highlighted by a recent review of EVAWG policies across Africa (Making it Work, 2020). Many of the grantee organizations themselves became more aware of underlying attitudes and assumptions within their own and their partners' staffing and institutional structures, leading to them becoming more intentional about asking for assistance from local disabilities networks, OPDs or women with disabilities to address this issue. This shows that even organizations working to address inequalities and violence can perpetuate exclusions. One focus group participant noted that it was essential for CSOs to see disability inclusion not as "just a tick-box exercise" (FGD 2, October 2022), but as requiring ongoing critical engagement and self-reflective training on disabilities awareness for all their staff.

**Fourth, grantees highlighted the importance of working with service delivery providers.** Because of their disabilities, many women and girls with disabilities require regular access to a range of specialist support services across health, social, educational and economic sectors. As a result, local service providers are essential stakeholders for them. Grantees noted, however, that paternalistic mindsets and outdated paradigms remain common in this area. For example, in Cambodia, ADD International's baseline study showed that 83% of women with disabilities that the survey sampled felt excluded by service providers and, in Argentina, FUSA's baseline study noted that only 20% of them were accessing formal health services. Without mindset shifts in how they are perceived and treated, many women and girls with disabilities do not feel comfortable accessing formal services, and, as a result, may remain overdependent on families, which can create excessive pressure on particular family members (often also women). This lack of access to other service providers can even fuel risks of family-level violence, which a number of grantees noted as a concern. For example, to address this risk, OHANA in Indonesia worked with service providers to help them carry out their own disability accountability audits to recognize and then address patterns of exclusion in their own standard operating health and social services procedures.

**Finally, working with stakeholders within national-level law and policy systems was key.** Grantees show that personnel within wider systems also need mindset shifts around VAWGWD to support disabilities-specific legislation, and ensure that disabilities are intentionally considered in other legislation and policies. For example, SHS in Palestine found that some individual policymakers resisted policy changes that would include women and girls with disabilities, as these policymakers believed that VAWGWD did not really happen and/or was not a national concern. Focus group participants also noted that some government actors minimize VAWGWD by presenting it as an individual issue that governments should not have to concern themselves with. Official duty bearers' attitudes to VAWGWD and disabilities more broadly may shape a lack of policy uptake, and grantees, such as FUSA and CELS in Argentina and LEGIS in Guatemala, focused attention on transforming these system-level mindsets (this is explored further in section 2.4).

Grantee work across all five of these social domains shows that changing mindsets on women and girls with disabilities is possible and has concrete implications for ending VAWGWD. However, grantees noted that it takes time and is rarely a linear process. It is also not just one mindset that needs to change for collective recognition to emerge, but rather a cluster of related perceptions. For example, community members may accept physical disabilities, while still stigmatizing psychosocial and intellectual disabilities. Just as disabilities are diverse, so are the mindsets attached to them. FGD participants made strong arguments for the need for longer-term programming in the specific area of transforming mindsets and pointed to some early evidential success in changing mindsets, which needs to continue. For example, ADD International's external evaluation in Cambodia saw a 43% decrease in experiences of violence against their target group of women and girls with disabilities over the three-year project lifespan, and a remarkable decrease in the number of those feeling excluded by different groups of stakeholders, despite more work still being needed. Positive emotions also emerged with regard to women and girls with disabilities reporting that they received greater respect and dignity within their communities. One project participant shared that previously others had referred to her only by her disability (i.e. "the blind woman"), but that "now they call me by my name" (external evaluation, ADD International, 2021).

### 2.2.3 Paradigm shifts in how disabilities are understood

Grantees play important roles in helping societies move away from harmful or outdated paradigms of understanding disabilities. For example, one key paradigm is often tied to medicalized and individualized models of rehabilitation founded on assumptions of incapacity, and this is frequently accompanied by a pity or charity paradigm (Meyer et al., 2022), as noted by NDWA in Nepal, CELS and FUSA in Argentina and P&H in Peru. Instead, a social model of disabilities, grounded in human rights and the capacities of women and girls with disabilities, needs to be intentionally embedded. These three models of disabilities (charity, medical and social) have been documented in detail in the wider literature (Andrae and Holly, 2019; United Nations, n.d.). While this particular paradigm shift was globally catalysed by the CRPD in 2006 (United Nations General Assembly, 2006), to which most of the countries grantees worked in are signatories, it still needs concrete enactment in local contexts. This goes beyond an awareness of disabilities alone, to making sustained shifts in how disabilities as a whole are understood and addressed, unlearning old ways of viewing diverse disabilities, and developing new approaches of autonomous accompaniment in line with a wider human-rights-based approach, as was taken, for example, by CELS in Argentina and P&H in Peru.



Participants in the first workshop for women with disabilities who will be agents of change. Moreno, Buenos Aires (2019).

For example, FUSA in Argentina focused its attention on driving a social shift from a paternalistic mindset to an autonomous accompaniment approach to women and girls with disabilities. FUSA promoted this shift at different levels simultaneously, from transforming legislative and policy frameworks, to tackling institutionalized attitudes within communities and health systems, and by also building the beliefs of women and girls with disabilities that they are people with rights and agency. A protectionist mindset was identified as underlying various SRHR issues and FUSA worked towards both transforming mindsets on the bodily autonomy of women and girls with disabilities, and developing patterns of autonomous accompaniment by all who surround them. FUSA had a number of concrete successes in terms of changing how women and girls with disabilities were being treated as “non-persons” under the law, or in paternalistic or ableist ways by health professionals, and also in building these women and girls’ self-beliefs. This was noted by one project participant, who is also a woman with a disability:

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*(The project) gives us tools for autonomy to know what we can do, why others cannot decide for us, it seems essential to me that women can decide with knowledge, that we can prevent situations of abuse, identify them, know what to do if it happens to us ... I believe that through disinformation there are erroneous beliefs about disability and those beliefs are acted upon and rights are violated (external evaluation, FUSA, 2022).*

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**Making paradigm shifts is important but also challenging. Grantees noted that harmful myths around disabilities and the gender/disabilities intersection is often underpinned by entrenched religious and cultural beliefs,** which reinforces what the literature has documented (Aley, 2016; Andrae and Holly, 2019). For this reason, a number of grantees also engaged faith-based and traditional leaders in their approaches to changing wider mindsets, an area that the literature has emphasized is needed (Claassens et al., 2019). Focus group participants also noted that many women and girls with disabilities internalized these harmful myths or feared speaking up, especially when the perpetrators were family members and/or their support persons, and often held positions of power in their lives.

**A second paradigm shift that also emerged as crucial, and was especially noted by the FGD participants, was a need to move away from tackling gender and disabilities separately and towards a better understanding of how they form intersecting realities that have an impact on VAWGWG.** Grantees felt that there is still limited recognition of the fact that gender and disabilities need to be addressed as interconnected issues:

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*The unique specific challenges of doing VAWG work with women and girls with disabilities are levels of awareness and understanding how to work on this intersection. There is still a separation issue for community and government stakeholders including service providers and the justice system where disability, women and violence are not seen as interconnected (FGD written response, October 2022).*

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**Grantees in many contexts identified mindset changes around the gender/disabilities intersection as critical for moving VAWGWD higher up the agenda of different government, non-government and community institutions.** The changes are also important for addressing the reality that local myths about disabilities and entrenched patriarchal social norms compound to both trivialize and legitimize VAWGWD:

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*(As a result of) various local myths, knowledge about disability in (specific country) is neglected or despised in general and specifically with regard to disabled women. This makes the intersection between gender and disability very difficult to grasp ... violence against women and girls with disabilities is not on the agenda of certain institutions (including state ones). What’s worse, it is trivialized ... Various support approaches, especially at the level of justice, are hampered by patriarchal mores ... customs that trivialize or legitimize violence against women and girls at several levels (FGD written response, October 2022).*

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Some grantees worked to explicitly enable these paradigm shifts to become institutionalized nationally through embedding a social and human rights approach within national legislation and policy, and by including a specific focus on gender within national disability plans. The effectiveness of these strategies was often tied to an external social context of high-level political will and legal commitments regarding disabilities in some places as a result of country-specific ratification of the CRPD from 2010 onwards. International shifts such as these take time and effort to be translated and institutionalized nationally. The Special Window was well positioned to help embed this overarching paradigm shift at country level and to capitalize on existing sociopolitical momentum in certain contexts (see section 3 for a more detailed reflection on the Special Window overall). Interventions such as this went beyond individual mindset changes, contributing to long-term shifts in collective recognition, including engaging with how VAWGWD and responses to it are embedded in a wide range of government and non-government institutional frameworks.

#### 2.2.4 Knowledge production and dissemination for primary prevention

**A range of practical strategies emerged regarding how grantees went about generating and sharing knowledge that could enable mindset shifts. All of these centred around generating context-specific knowledge and the creative communication of this through documenting research, developing resources and partnering with media.**

**First, participatory action research formed a key strategy for many grantees to better understand what specific issues needed to be tackled in their context and by their programmes and communications materials.** To effectively change mindsets, understanding the current mindsets in specific contexts and what drives them is an essential first step. That is why research was so important. FGD participants emphasized that comprehensive approaches require first identifying where specific challenges in the context are and then deploying approaches that target these issues. ADD International in Cambodia was an example of a grantee that took a participatory action research approach to its baseline study that centred women and girls with disabilities to explore disability/gender stigma that can underpin VAWGWD. Context-specific research data were valuable for both its immediate project design and developing an evidence base as a foundation for future work (ADD International, 2016). Its research identified an entrenched culture of silence around the intersection between gender and disabilities, and ableist patterns of ignorance and outdated beliefs and practices as root causes of VAWGWD. It also identified higher risks of violence for those with intellectual disabilities, as noted in other reports (Human Rights Watch, 2014). As well as disabilities-specific research, grantees also highlighted the need to disaggregate data by disabilities in other themes.

**Second, a number of grantees focused on developing disability-specific, tailored resources to accompany and be integrated within EVAWG work.** For example, both BB in Haiti and ADD International in Cambodia adapted the EVAWG community mobilization methodology SASA! (originally developed by Raising Voices in Uganda) in different disabilities-specific ways. They drew on the expertise of disabilities networks to develop and pilot a range of complementary disabilities-related resources in their contexts that addressed underlying social norms and power relations. BB in Haiti found that mainstreaming disabilities into its existing EVAWG programmes was challenging, and that disability-specific engagement was a precursor to effective inclusion in the longer term. As part of an earlier disability inclusion approach, it had included images of women and girls with disabilities in their existing SASA! test materials. However, the responses to these materials at community level reinforced the reality that existing disability-specific harmful norms were so strong in the communities that it decided to remove the images, realizing that the task of integrating disabilities into VAWG spaces required intentional disabilities-specific engagement to first tackle these issues with those communities. Targeted funds for ending VAWGWD enabled them to develop, review and test a set of companion resources, entitled “Safe and Capable”, focused on VAWGWD and disabilities-specific social norms. Only once this work had been done could these resources be integrated into existing SASA! and Power to Girls methodologies. This was particularly important because community mobilization strategies often operate in pre-existing community spaces from which women and girls with disabilities are already excluded,



so additional strategies and careful attention were needed to ensure the full inclusion and leadership of women and girls with disabilities in the community change process.

**Third, many grantees developed multimedia communication techniques to support mindset change.** These included disability-specific digital platforms, inclusive radio directorates, and interactive dramas or videos to create story-based public discussion of the gender/disabilities intersection. Many of these centred the agency of women and girls with disabilities, and ways of making diverse forms of disabilities visible. Rebecca, a young woman with a physical disability who was part of a community drama group involved with BB in Haiti, noted that:

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*The dramas we perform help the community see a lot of things, like the fact that women and girls living with disabilities have an objective, a dream, somewhere they want to be someday ... People are always mistreating women and girls living with disabilities ... But they don't know there's somewhere we want to get to. We don't want to depend on people (monitoring report, BB, 2019).*

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Many grantees shared stories of effective media engagement that had led to unexpected positive developments, and had happened as a result of shifting the mindsets of media professionals. For example, as a result of training a large group of over 60 media professionals, ARROW then signed formal MoUs with 16 of the trained journalists to focus on changing mindsets on women and girls with disabilities in Bangladesh through their writing. FUSA's work with a range of social media contributed to the unexpected creation of a Television and Radio Directorate of Gender and Diversity for inclusive communication in Argentina.

**As a result of the shifting mindsets of media professionals, this sector then became a resource leveraged by many grantees to help change public perceptions and improve collective recognition.** For example, SOLIFE in Nigeria developed a weekly TV interview series with disabilities experts, and featured success stories of women and girls with disabilities, which also referred people to a free reporting helpline. In the first few months, over 5,000 calls were received. One community member noted that “the TV program helped me understand ways in which an individual, communities and society can be of help to women and girls with disabilities ... My mind is now clear on the little things we as a community do to contribute negatively to the(ir) social inclusion” (monitoring report, SOLIFE, 2021). Women with disabilities shared stories of accessing the freephone line through the programme and being supported by SOLIFE to resolve diverse issues of violence that they had encountered, including support to access legal counsel and to leave their abusers.

## 2.3 Centring the agency and participation of women and girls with disabilities

Centring the agency and participation of women and girls with disabilities emerged as an integral component of effective project execution, and also as having an important impact on their empowerment, visibility and sense of solidarity. This is why this theme forms the underlying basis for our conceptual framework diagram in section 2 (see Figure 1). Insights emerged across the whole portfolio regarding why this form of participation that centres agency is critical for working with women and girls with disabilities, and also in identifying different spaces where their meaningful participation and individual agency was being supported. These two areas are explored in detail below.

### 2.3.1 Why meaningful participation is crucial for working with women and girls with disabilities

The meaningful participation of women and girls with disabilities emerged as an essential component of grantee work across the portfolio. In exploring reasons for this, participation was identified by grantees as uniquely relevant for women and girls with disabilities who are not only often left behind in development

work but are also frequently left out of everyday community activities and discussions, with their agency sometimes denied. Harmful stereotypes that women and girls with disabilities are unable to participate because of their disabilities were also common. In some contexts, this intersected with social norms excluding women from certain activities and roles. Entrenched misperceptions of passivity, inability, dependency and helplessness were problems for many women and girls with disabilities, and created a vicious cycle of exclusion. FUSA in Argentina noted that these led to an “infantilization” of women and girls with disabilities, whereby others made decisions on their behalf. Centring their participation created practical spaces within which women and girls with disabilities became empowered alongside others through the project’s support of a commitment to their agency and ability to act on their own behalf, in alignment with the cornerstone slogan of the disability rights movement, “nothing about us without us” (United Nations General Assembly, 2006). LEGIS in Guatemala noted that its centring of the participatory agency of women and girls with disabilities was a first in their national context and was crucial:

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*One very important topic is CRPD compliance. It should be in the centre of any initiative in relation to persons with disabilities and if we are talking about ending or preventing violence against women and girls with disabilities we should have in the centre, Article 16 of CRPD and Article 6 and any other Articles related to consulting (with) organizations of women with disabilities as it is crucial (FGD 2, October 2022).*

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Meaningful participation emerged as instrumentally valuable in improving other strategies adopted by the programme by involving women and girls with disabilities in design and implementation. However, it also made an integral contribution to the desired end goal of ending VAWGWD by countering underlying social factors, such as the perceived lack of agency, inability to participate or inferior social status of women and girls with disabilities, which often drive forms of VAWGWD. It helped women and girls with disabilities to reposition themselves from dependent, passive or helpless victims, as they were too often viewed, to participatory agents who are included and active within social processes. This involvement shaped problem identification, and project design, implementation and evaluation by enabling women and girls with disabilities to be part of driving project actions and not merely positioned as end beneficiaries. This reinforced the recent literature that has highlighted the importance of centring the participation of women and girls with disabilities as a way to support their agency (Dunkle et al., 2018; UN Women, 2018; Slater et al., 2018; WHO, 2022). The self-representation of project beneficiaries also provided valuable expertise to help others think through the gender and disability intersection by bringing the beneficiaries’ lived experiences to bear on how to interact with other stakeholders such as governments or communities, as noted by FGD participants:



*Facilitators and beneficiaries in a training event in the city of Quetzaltenango*

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*We believe that women with disabilities are more familiar about the different circumstances and issues that they can face in their lives and how they need to introduce their case in front of their families, caregivers and different stakeholders in the State or non-State actors ... as an OPD we are 100% women with disabilities, they are the decision makers (FGD 1, October 2022).*

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**Participation also supports sustainability by engaging with women and girls with disabilities as active citizens whose skills and talents have often been left out of wider community endeavours.** This reinforces the literature, which focuses on viewing persons with disabilities as citizens whose abilities can only be unlocked if they are first recognized (Friedman, 2019). When this participation was an intentional strategy adopted by grantees, they consistently showed that it also had positive effects for empowerment, visibility and solidarity. For example, 14 women with disabilities founded UNABU in Rwanda and based it on the principle of self-advocacy, which places decision-making in their hands. As part of their project, UNABU set up 120 community self-help groups run by women with disabilities, which then mobilized nearly 2,500 women with disabilities. As trust and solidarity were built, those women then decided to set up mutual savings and loan groups together, alongside the existing social activities, to address their economic dependence, which they identified as a root cause of a lot of VAWGWD. However, this required flexibility to be built into initial project design to allow spaces for decisions to be made after the self-help groups had formed. Developing a vision for the future and experiencing the leadership empowerment and solidarity that came from their participation in these groups also led to certain women with disabilities being elected into local government positions, showing the unexpected results that can emerge from the visibility that these participatory models can enable, and led to changes in families that had tended to try and prevent women with disabilities from going out, as experienced by a woman from Rongi who was part of UNABU's project in Rwanda:

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*I have a "mental" disability and never got out of my home but now I go to community meeting like others. Before my family members kept on asking me where I was coming from when I tried to go out of the home which is not the case today. They even give me money to help other group's members in need. I feel even change in my disability, I am better (monitoring report, UNABU, 2019).*

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**This increased visibility also emerged as a valuable interconnected benefit of meaningful participation. Women and girls with disabilities are often hidden in multiple ways.** When they are involved in projects as lead project actors at multiple levels of society, it helps to counter these endemic patterns of invisibility, silence and stigma that have been documented extensively in the literature (Rohwerder, 2018; Herzog, 2018; Mostert, 2016; Orteloeva and Lewis, 2012). Once engaged as valuable stakeholders, women and girls with disabilities could contribute insights into how the violence they experienced was being viewed and conceptualized. For example, FGD participants noted that their direct participation offered a particular perspective on how violence is approached by using "the discourses, approaches and experiences of disabled and vulnerable women who experience it on a daily basis" (FGD, written response, October 2022). The literature reinforces the connection between visibility, inclusion and participation (termed in recent literature as "VIP") which has been identified as a key strategy in relation to work with persons with disabilities (UNFPA, 2019).

**Centring women and girls with disabilities and supporting their agency involved paying attention to other intersections that also affected their decision-making capacities, for example, sexual orientation, migrancy status and age.** For example, if the early decision is made by adult family members to keep girls with disabilities out of school, the girls' risks of immediate violence may increase and their capacity to make informed decisions later in life can also be permanently limited. A number of projects specifically showcased centring the agency of children with disabilities as a way to tackle this stigma and ableism early on, to prevent the childhood/disabilities intersection, often additionally compounded by gender, from increasing the child's lack of agency. For example, CDIA in Paraguay prioritized reflective storytelling to enable the active participation of children and adolescents with disabilities, creating platforms for their voices to be heard at national and



international levels. This also involved shifting the ways that adults approached conversations with children to enable joint reflection to take place. A peer-to-peer participatory role was identified by ADD International in Cambodia in its work with children that centred participatory agency to help change social norms:

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*Girls and boys with disabilities can be the best agents for change to influence their peers with and without disabilities to not perpetuate negative attitudes and behaviours into their future lives (monitoring report, ADD International, 2021)*

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Some grantees noted the risks of perpetuating stigma by treating women and girls with disabilities as “special” or labelling them as a separate group. This needs to be carefully considered in approaches that focus solely on women and girls with disabilities. “Participation+ models” were instead recommended, in which women and girls with disabilities are engaged in activities alongside their family members in ways that can build positive relationships and become part of recalibrating these power relations. This was an approach adopted by, for example, NUWODU in Uganda. However, it is important that equipping these family members or support people includes the direct participation of women and girls with disabilities to avoid reinforcing existing paternalistic power relations.

Finally, centring women and girls with disabilities in EVAWG programming requires intentional accessibility and inclusion measures. These include solving communication issues, which requires an intentional approach. FGD participants highlighted that a key learning for them was the importance of “seemingly minor things” that supported accessibility. For example, the size of font used on a poster or flashing lights in a video can be significant issues of concern for women and girls with disabilities. As a result, FGD participants insisted that projects need to be both detail-oriented and deliberate in their design approaches. Including the participation of women and girls with disabilities in existing systems and structures was also identified as important to avoid setting up parallel processes that further separated or segregated women and girls with disabilities, and could even risk reinforcing their excluded status as “special”. For example, some focus group participants endorsed the value of a twin-tracks model, which is also a recommendation found in the UN Women literature (UN Women, 2018). This worked to integrate (or include) disability in wider VAWG projects, while also undertaking disability-specific work with only girls and women with disabilities. However, FGD participants noted that this approach required those without disabilities to already be willing and equipped to adjust to working alongside persons with a range of diverse disabilities, which was not always the case. This twin-tracks model should not be used to suggest that approaches should exist side by side in segregated silos, but should emphasize that both disability-specific and disability-inclusive approaches may be needed. This remains a challenge to navigate in practice.



*Community members from Nyabihu district talk about gender-based violence against women and girls living with disabilities*



### 2.3.2 Spaces that centred the participation and agency of women and girls with disabilities

**Participation was being supported within various project spaces across the portfolio.** This gives insights into how grantees centred the participation and agency of women and girls with disabilities in many diverse, practical ways.

**First, participation through capacitating “by-and-for” organizations, such as OPDs, women with disabilities networks and organizations founded and/or led by women with disabilities, formed a significant and valuable part of the portfolio.** The literature has already highlighted these as crucial components of operationalizing intersectional approaches more widely (UN Women, 2019). While these organizations played valuable roles at many levels, their role at local level emerged as particularly significant. FGD participants noted that equipping pre-existing local by-and-for organizations and networks with improved skills and capacities also developed a sustainable pool of activists in the sector. By-and-for organizations already involve women and girls with disabilities at many levels within their own organizational structures as founders, volunteers, trainers, staff, material reviewers, board members and accountability consultants. The organizations can bring this participatory expertise to bear on those they partner with, but can also be further capacitated to enable those women to take on other roles related to civic responsibility. For example, ARROW, a women’s regional organization in South-East Asia, partnered with the Women with Disabilities Development Foundation (WDDF), a by-and-for organization staffed entirely by women with disabilities in Bangladesh, in its UN Trust Fund-funded project. WDDF’s organizational capacity was developed so that it could provide shadow reports to uphold the rights of women and girls with disabilities in Bangladesh, providing step-by-step accompaniment that helped them to become more visible and vocal on the international policy stage. WDDF was also helped to set up a National Advisory Council, staffed by national leaders with disabilities, which operated as a watchdog organization for improved government accountability on the national practical ramifications of its international disability commitments.

This intentional investment in women with disabilities networks was identified by FGD participants from these networks as increasing the networks’ organizational credibility and increasing recognition of their existing work on ending VAWG as disability-focused organizations. Capacity-building for women with disabilities as organizational leaders was also identified by focus group participants from other organizations as critical for enabling them to carry out critical reflection on their own situation:

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*We must contribute to strengthen the capacity of women with disabilities in leadership so that they have a better reflection and analysis of their social situation, develop ideas and strategies to strive for their integration and inclusion in society while promoting their self-esteem (FGD written response, October 2022).*

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**Second, the participation of women and girls with disabilities in voluntary self-help and peer-to-peer support groups was identified by a number of grantees as successful in reducing the risk of violence.** This approach went beyond providing services, to equipping important hubs for activism, implementation, peer-to-peer learning and referrals between women and girls with disabilities, who remained highly isolated without such groups. A number of these groups across the portfolio also developed an economic empowerment component that was driven by women with disabilities themselves. These jointly addressed the specific requirements women and girls with disabilities had for both economic and social empowerment. For example, NUWODU in Uganda trained women with disabilities and set up social support groups for them. These groups helped with economic empowerment, featuring a village saving-and-loan association component where women with disabilities learned to save money together and to support each other in the process of economic empowerment. In these groups, trained women with disabilities also provided vital information about disability rights to other women within the group, who were often wary of approaching formal legal and government systems of protection and justice (e.g. the police) for fear that the systems would

treat them badly on account of their disabilities. By playing peer-to-peer roles, these women with disabilities gained visibility and credibility within their communities as active participants assisting other women. Supporting women and girls with disabilities to take on roles of civic and economic participation within their local society built a sense of their own agency that they applied to other areas of life. One participant said “Knowing the feminist slogan ‘my body my decision’ ... in many cases women with disabilities find it difficult to exercise that slogan in everyday life and this project helps make this slogan possible for us too” (external evaluation, FUSA, 2022).

**Third, many grantees involved individual women with disabilities in delivering their programming. Women with disabilities had decision-making and leadership roles in problem identification, programme design and implementation, training, material review, and monitoring and evaluation within organizations.** For example, WCC in Kenya (which is a large grass-roots membership organization for all women) trained women with disabilities as programme implementers, part of the baseline research team, peer activists, dramatic actors and community referral points for reporting violence to the formal authorities. This shows the diverse leadership and expert roles that women and girls with disabilities can play through their active participation in the project processes of research, design and implementation, and the impact that this can potentially have on integrating their insights and involvement into other organizations and systems. For example, MDRI-S in Serbia worked alongside women with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities within custodial institutions to design participatory publications that featured the women’s voices, such as the report [The Walls Have Ears](#). This further enables the visibility of these women within the data, which traditionally disregards the intersection of gender and disabilities intersection, and creates an improved understanding of the women’s stories of harmful institutional treatment, as documented in other settings (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

The literature also emphasizes the need for a shift from only seeing women and girls with disabilities as end beneficiaries to engaging with them as rights holders (UN Women, 2018). Grantees noted that this often involves intentional work to give women and girls with disabilities an awareness of what this means. However, this sort of engagement with women with disabilities on equal participatory terms also created discomfort between partners at times, as they became more aware of the many real barriers that prevented meaningful inclusion. This was explicitly noted by a government official, and points to the need for those currently in positions of power to be able to listen and learn from the lived experiences and expertise of women and girls with disabilities:

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*When we began to exchange with groups with disabilities, discomfort and contradiction are generated because one realizes that there is still a lot to do to give concrete and real content to that inclusion (external evaluation, FUSA, 2022).*

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**Fourth, some trained women and girls with disabilities engaged in advocacy within political and legal spaces. They played strategic participatory roles by working together to lobby wider government and legal systems.** They were often able to exert unique pressure thanks to their lived experiences of the intersection of disabilities and gender, with a catalytic impact on carefully selected high-level duty bearers with which some projects engaged. Engaging women with disabilities in this way led to some successes at political system level when their voices were heard in those forums on equal terms with the voices of other women:

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*Women with disabilities from grass-roots level visited the Legislative Assembly of Punjab Province, where they presented their demands to the lawmakers ... It not only boosts their confidence, but they have a say of their own when they present their own demands. So that is, for me, the highlight of the project ... participation (as) providing equal opportunities for women with disabilities (FGD 1, October 2022).*

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This important role as political activists was also noted by SHS in Palestine, where amplifying the voices of women with disabilities as focal points and working with OPDs to create a popular movement on disability were critical parts of their work. The voices of Palestinian women with disabilities as citizens were identified by SHS as carrying more weight with the government than the voices of international disability experts.

Equipping women with disabilities in leadership and decision-making capacities also helped to reposition them as powerful political leaders within society. For example, P&H in Peru set up a School of Women Leaders, which empowered and trained women with disabilities already working within the region as political activists regarding gender-based violence by focusing on citizenship engagement and public policies related to gender and disabilities. It then accompanied these women to help them start advocacy initiatives in their own regions.

Centring women and girls with disabilities through meaningful participation also reinforces the literature on intersectional approaches that identifies participation as crucial (Palm and Le Roux, 2021). Many types of organizations identified this aspect as a key highlight, despite the practical challenges it involved. The operationalizing of this aspect of the CRPD also supports the literature on disabilities that moves away from the potentially negative framing of “leaving no one behind” towards a positive framing of “putting the last first” (Gorgens and Ziervogel, 2019).

## 2.4 Engaging legal and policy systems to address violence against women and girls with disabilities

**Engaging with laws and policies at wider system level emerged as an important component of many grantees’ work on VAWGWD.** Country commitments to disability rights under the CRPD have also shifted disability from being seen as just a private, individual or family matter to being a national legal and policy issue (United Nations, Human Rights Council, 2021). This shift has key implications for national legal and policy systems that have the potential to offer guarantees and longer-term changes that can have sustainable impacts on the lives of all women and girls with disabilities. Four main tiers of systems-level engagement related to VAWGWD were identified across the portfolio: (1) doing legal and policy advocacy for new laws and policies at national level, (2) working to harmonize legal regulations and government policies with new laws, (3) capacitating statutory duty bearers and (4) legal accompaniment for individuals. Many grantees worked simultaneously across a number of these four tiers, which shows how strategies often intersect in practice.



*Sensitization session on COVID-19 prevention with women living with disabilities.*

### 2.4.1 Legal and policy advocacy around women and girls with disabilities

In the first tier, grantees worked to hold governments and their legal systems accountable for their existing international and/or national commitments on disability and VAWGWD. This took place at a very specific moment for disability rights worldwide, given that the relatively recent ratification of the CRPD brought about increased interest from government signatories in adopting new provisions into national laws and policies. This offered an opportunity for CSOs in different places to exert pressure on these systems to adopt or amend their existing laws to comply with these disability-related provisions, specifically in relation to issues of VAWGWD.

Some grantees insisted that legal and policy advocacy needed to be a focus of the VAWGWD work of CSOs in order to produce sustainable changes that could affect all women and girls with disabilities and offer them the long-term guarantees that CSO programming cannot provide on its own. **A legal and policy framework that supported the rights of women and girls with disabilities and recognized and responded proactively to the risks of VAWGWD due to the intersection of gender and disabilities was identified by many grantees as critical for all their other work.** Many grantees collaborated with others in advocating legal and policy changes, engaging with the higher levels of these systems to advocate and lobby for introducing specific new laws, repealing outdated laws, introducing reforms and improving the integration of the different parts of these systems. For some grantees, this included amplifying the voices of women and girls with disabilities to generate popular pressure movements that called on governments for change. Others lobbied for improved legal systems for perpetrator accountability as part of a governmental duty to protect all its citizens. The importance of strengthening the wider legal and policy framework has already been documented as an essential task for preventing and responding to VAWG (Palm, 2022), and grantee findings pointed to this area as a particularly relevant area of focus at this point in time owing to a number of international legal instruments on disability.

For example, both CELS and FUSA collaborated with other legal organizations over a two-year period, taking advantage of positive political momentum around rights in Argentina (where both are based) to place pressure on lawmakers and government commissions to vote in favour of their draft legal reform of the Law on Surgical Contraception, a law that negatively affected many women and girls with disabilities and allowed judges to authorize their sterilization, as they were seen as not having legal capacity. This could also affect girls with disabilities as early as when they begin menstruation, and shows the connections these grantees made between ending VAWG and realizing SRHR, a connection also made in the recent literature (UNFPA, 2018). At the same time, they also worked to influence the national disability plans being developed in Argentina. Legal and policy advocacy at this tier recognizes a long history of legally endorsed violations against women and girls with disabilities, for example, via the medical system, and the need for fundamental changes to the legal framework, as noted by a senior health professional with whom CELS and FUSA engaged:

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*The law is essential to have the necessary legal framework to accompany the processes of bodily autonomy, and all kinds of autonomy in women with disabilities, people with the ability to gestate, and other groups of sexual diversity. I think it is a very good and necessary starting point, especially because of the history of the violations they had been experiencing in this sector. It seems to me that the regulatory framework is very important as a starting point to work, and more so on surgical contraception (external evaluation, FUSA, 2022).*

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Other grantees also worked at this tier by advocating for national-level legal and policy reforms, often through supporting partners to become more effective at lobbying. For example, the regional organization ARROW supported WDDF in Bangladesh to place pressure on the government to comply with its international commitments on gender and disability. ARROW and WDDF achieved this by using international human rights forums and contributing to shadow-reporting mechanisms. FGD participants highlighted that legal



and government policy systems are key for VAWGWD prevention and require comprehensive attention to all aspects of these systems, including frameworks, visibility, implementation and access:

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*Violence prevention cannot happen without proper legal frameworks, countries have laws and policies but (they) are never visible/known and if they are known they are never implemented making it hard to engage the law (FGD, written response, October 2022).*

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However, many challenges remain. Government policymakers may be reluctant to view VAWGWD as a priority. CSOs can play important roles in convincing those within these systems that intersecting issues of gender, violence and disability require their attention. Efforts at this tier, while game changing when they succeed, are also slow, unpredictable and affected by wider environmental factors. For example, MDRI-S in Serbia worked to lobby government institutions regarding the violence experienced by women with psychosocial and/or intellectual disabilities within institutions, and the urgent need for supported deinstitutionalization. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the progress MDRI-S had made in this area was reversed, as many women became reinstitutionalized. Likewise, contexts of sociopolitical crisis such as those in Haiti or Palestine made system-level work challenging because other political issues took priority.

#### 2.4.2 Working for regulatory harmonization and policy uptake at national level

**In this second tier, grantees identified what they called “regulatory harmonization” and national policy uptake as critical.** These also include the governments’ formal allocations of budgetary support for this alignment to take place. Despite the importance of the first tier, international-level legal or policy changes, without changes to the legal and policy bureaucracy at national level, grantees noted that these top-level laws and policies can often remain rhetorical. Intentional work is needed to harmonize or align them with existing country-level regulations, to adapt and develop appropriate policies and protocols that can be decentralized, and ensure that legal and government systems are accountable and can implement these changes in practical ways. This was a focus, for example, for MTM in Guatemala as it developed State protocols on gender and disability related to VAWGWD; for LCDZ, which lobbied successfully for the standardization of psychiatric assessment protocols at court level for people with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities across Zimbabwe, which had a specific impact on women survivors of sexual violence being able to access justice in the courts; and for ARROW in Bangladesh, which supported its partner WDDF in setting up a National Advocacy Committee formed of senior leaders with disabilities to help continuously hold government systems to account.

LEGIS in Guatemala focused attention on both national and State-level regulatory legislation in light of high-level laws having been adopted in line with the CRPD but not having been translated into binding legal regulations yet. LEGIS partnered with duty-bearing officials (such as lawyers, protection system officials and policymakers) within these legal and policy systems to create State-level protocols, frameworks and toolkits for translating high-level laws and policies into enforceable legal and policy practices across different concrete areas of policy and law, such as property, citizenship, medical institutionalization or family decision-making. LEGIS explicitly identified this as a second vital step in enabling what it termed “normative harmonization” with new laws. For example, the commitment to centring people with disabilities as rights holders sits at the heart of the CRPD, but could be seen as a threat to outdated systems that tackle disability in a different way. This was also a politicized task, as these changes often had implications for current disability-related stakeholders, who could, at times, even become liabilities. For example, in Guatemala, the governing body of the disability sector, the National Council for Attention to Persons with Disabilities, finally pronounced itself as in opposition to the legislative harmonization objective of Initiative 5125 (which aimed to institutionalize the rights-based approach of the CRPD), after many years of hidden resistance, because the initiative requirements threatened the council’s current leadership structure. This required LEGIS to take a different approach to the partnership with the council from what had been originally planned within its UN Trust Fund project.

**Placing sustained pressure on governments to provide social protection floor assistance to women and girls with disabilities was identified as critical to prevent grantees from trying to only provide direct assistance, which can create dependency and even do harm when these projects inevitably end.** A lack of government social protection can also lead to a vicious cycle whereby women with disabilities remain overly dependent on their families, creating opportunities for abuse. At the same time, women and girls with disabilities may also struggle to access existing social protection systems that would enable them to benefit economically. For example, CBM pointed to various challenges encountered by women and girls with disabilities within government systems in Pakistan, even in relation to obtaining their disability-specific legal identification document, which was identified as a vital precursor to their civic participation in other social and legal protection services. This shows the importance of developing coordination between government systems that can work together to ensure that statutory support is connected and accessible in practice. The literature also suggests that most current government policies, including those that are specifically focused on VAWG, still have a long way to go to become disability inclusive (Making it Work, 2020). **Some grantees noted the effectiveness of working with State institutions with strong pre-existing community connections,** for example, municipalities and transit authorities. These can be an effective entry point for public pressure, as other political interests can often influence national entities' priorities more than public interest in VAWGWD.

### 2.4.3 Capacitating duty bearers within statutory systems

**This third tier focused on engaging and capacitating existing duty bearers within formal statutory systems, including assisting them in finding ways to work together.** Grantees identified and engaged with a range of protection system officials and institutions, for example, the police, State health professionals, justice system personnel, social workers and State education heads, to capacitate them with practical skills related to the gender/disability intersection and VAWGWD. This was an essential task to operationalize accessible services, and to remove attitudinal and practical barriers. For example, both WCC in Kenya and UNABU in Rwanda noted that professionals in education and health care, the police and the judicial services are often poorly equipped to provide legal support to women and girls with disabilities. In addition, State-run welfare facilities, such as shelters for survivors, are often inaccessible to persons with disabilities. As a result, and as already noted in section 2.2, many survivors of violence, their families and the community do not trust the authorities, and find them unhelpful and untrustworthy. For this reason, it was important to not only enable mindset shifts among duty bearers, but also capacitate official duty bearers to provide the legal and statutory services that they are obliged to provide in a way that helps build institutional trust with women and girls with disabilities in the longer term. A number of grantees noted that many women and girls with disabilities still tend to seek help from non-governmental groups (such as disability-specific CSOs) rather than government services. This was seen by some grantees as a problem in the longer term for holding governments accountable, and because of the reality that many services provided by CSOs are time limited and rely on temporary external funding. Building the capacity of official systems to respond adequately as part of their statutory responsibility was seen as critical in the longer term and part of institutionalizing the view that addressing VAWG is a government responsibility.

A number of grantees took upstream approaches to the task of institutional strengthening by educating a new generation of duty bearers. Some identified specific educational institutions and partnered with them to equip those being newly trained as protection system officials nationwide (such as social workers, police officers and lawyers) with the skills to engage intersectionally across gender and disability to end VAWGWD. For example, P&H in Peru discovered (through baseline surveys) that nearly half of all women and girls with disabilities in Peru do not file violence complaints with any justice institutions, and, of those who do, 37% were dissatisfied with the care they received. As a result of these findings, P&H partnered with the University of San Martín de Porres and the Spanish Confederation of Persons with Disabilities to develop a diploma course in gender violence and gender and disability approaches. Eighty-four protection system officials from the judiciary, the national police, public ministries and women's emergency centres across three provinces completed the course, and were accompanied in integrating their learning back into their

institutions. Similarly, LEGIS in Guatemala worked with the national Institute for Public Criminal Defence to develop a new gender/disability module, which was then provided to 900 justice system professionals. The institutionalization of this knowledge into existing professional training ensures that training outlasts the project lifespan and becomes an integrated part of the training of future justice professionals. While this process is often slower to develop initially (compared with grantees running independent training sessions), it has a longer-term impact on these professional institutions and reaches a wider target group. Developing courses embedded in professional institutions such as this is not the only route, however. MDRI-S in Serbia registered and received accreditation for its own bespoke training package to secure continuing professional development points for participating social workers.

Other grantees targeted just one group of duty bearers. For example, both CELS and FUSA in Argentina focused on capacitating health personnel in hospitals to support women and girls with disabilities in ways that protect against specific forms of institutional violence as part of improving the wider health and legal system. FUSA developed high-quality, inclusive care toolkits, including audiovisual material for consultations, accessible formats, an orientation guide and recommendations for health teams. This was used to train health-care and hospital workers at national level in collaboration with the National Directorate for SRHR and the Directorate on Adolescents and Youth, and in working with professionals from gynaecological and paediatrics societies. CELS, on the other hand, focused on working with one psychiatric hospital that catered for girls and women with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities. This included interrogating harmful practices such as the forced adoption of children, which is based on an underlying (and harmful) premise that women with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities are unfit to be mothers. CELS illustrates this well through its narration of the story of N. N was a woman with psychosocial disabilities who was separated from her baby son, who was transferred to the children's hospital when she was forcibly admitted to a psychiatric facility, where she was given an injection and tied to the bed as a standard entry practice. N shared that during her hospitalization, she was locked up, never allowed to go out and treated badly. Her wish to go and live with her sister was ignored for many years until the project intervened to make this possible (monitoring report, CELS, 2021). This story highlights the harsh realities of specific forms of institutional VAWGWD, including those related to SRHR. Issues of sexual and reproductive violence within custodial and psychiatric institutions have also been highlighted by the literature as a concern for women and girls with disabilities (Andrae and Holly, 2019; Al-Bustanji et al., 2018; Aley, 2016; Women Enabled International, 2018).

CELS addressed violence both within the confines of this institution and also back in the community by developing violence prevention protocols and disability-friendly processes. It focused on training hospital professionals to move away from an approach that pathologizes or overprotects women and girls with disabilities to an approach that better recognizes that it is often the logics of the systems encountered through their confinement, including overmedication, that lead to harmful behaviours. From its experiences in this one hospital, CELS also made wider recommendations for care in psychiatric facilities to the Ministry of Health and filed collective public action suits on behalf of women with disabilities within the hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic. The wider literature has consistently raised this issue of the heightened and compounding risks of institutionalization that face women and girls with disabilities (Andrae and Holly, 2019), and the issue of their mistreatment (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

#### 2.4.4 Individual-level legal accompaniment

**The fourth tier identified was where grantees offered individual-level accompaniment for women and girls with disabilities to help them to safely and effectively navigate and access formal legal and policy systems.** For example, FUSA and CELS in Argentina and LEGIS in Guatemala all offered forms of legal accompaniment for women with disabilities, providing a combination of free legal aid, psychosocial support, and strategic litigation to change the legal realities for larger groups of women with disabilities as well. LEGIS accompanied women with disabilities who were detained in prisons to support their rights and also filed a successful collective habeas corpus appeal for over 300 persons with disabilities who had been illegally institutionalized at

a psychiatric hospital, deprived of their right to liberty, and subjected to cruel and degrading treatment. This work builds on the literature that draws attention to the invisibility of women who are institutionalized and their needs for access to justice (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Other grantees found ways to offer informal legal accompaniment to individuals within communities to bridge gaps between formal and informal systems of justice and work towards a disability-inclusive justice chain. For example, NUWODU in Uganda identified the need to capacitate women and girls with disabilities, and their family members, on available referral pathways to wider legal systems. Therefore, they trained 45 women with disabilities as volunteer community paralegals who educated other women and girls with disabilities about legal rights and processes and accompanied them through these formal legal systems. This helped hold duty bearers accountable, ensured cases were reported, and engaged relevant stakeholders such as local leaders, the police and district officials with a new Women with Disabilities District Association formed as a result of the activities of volunteer paralegals.

**Across all four tiers discussed in this section, grantees noted that their engagement with law and policy systems and actors helped to position VAWGWD as a cross-cutting issue that needs to be addressed within all formal systems and by multiple stakeholders, and not segregated into one specialist silo.** This draws attention to the reciprocal intersections between these systems that have a significant effect on many issues related to disabilities, including VAWGWD, which should not be seen as the responsibility of only one department:

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*Disability related laws, policy and facilities should be explained to all stakeholders ... doctors, nurses, police officers, judicial bodies, teachers and other CSOs. Disability is a cross-cutting issue, it should be addressed in every spectrum of development, disability friendly services should be provided in all sectors (FGD written response, October 2022).*

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Working to influence system-level change and capacity around wider laws and policies helped reduce the reliance of women and girls with disabilities on charity, communities and family members, which can place undue pressure on families and underpins the normalization of coping patterns of neglect and violence. Instead, it helped build institutional policy guarantees to end VAWGWD at formal duty-bearing system level. This is in line with the CRPD, which emphasizes public accountability for VAWGWD. However, this work is politically sensitive, complex, slow, non-linear and affected by many factors outside the grantees' direct control. While not all grantees are positioned to do this type of work well, at its best it highlights the catalysing role that CSOs can also have on wider legal and governmental systems to sustainably change the lives of all women and girls with disabilities beyond the project's life cycle and for generations still to come, in ways that also reduce the risks of these women and girls experiencing violence. This moves away from a vicious circle of exclusion from access to justice towards developing a virtuous circle of legal and civic empowerment. This cross-cutting work across bureaucratic silos also operationalizes calls to firmly centre an intersectional approach to human rights frameworks on VAWG (Sosa, 2017).



*Regular meeting of social mobilizer and members of a self-help group*



## 2.5 Flexible adaptation and learning in addressing violence against women and girls with disabilities

EVAWG interventions with women and girls with disabilities benefit from research and learning cycles that support programme flexibility and adaptability. During the focus groups, this was discussed at length, with participants emphasizing that working on disabilities means that new understandings are constantly emerging, requiring programme adaptations. Grantees continuously learned and adapted programming in different ways. One of the key challenges that led to adaptations was COVID-19, with a number of key lessons learned about the importance of adaptability in EVAWG programming with women and girls with disabilities.

### 2.5.1 The importance of research and learning cycles for programme flexibility and adaptability

**As with all EVAWG interventions, research and learning are important to ensure that programming with women and girls with disabilities remains appropriate and responsive to context and requirements.** A major challenge, articulated by all grantees, is that women and girls with disabilities are often left out of or hidden within official government statistics on VAWG. In many countries, very little research has been done on the specific situation of women and girls with disabilities and their experiences of violence. This reinforces trends noted in the wider literature on the current data invisibility of this group (UN Women, 2018; Andrae and Holly, 2019). Where grantees focused on specific districts or communities, there was rarely any specific information or disaggregated statistics available on women and girls with disabilities. While grantees had articulated suggested approaches, plans and activities in their project proposals, they needed context-specific baseline research to be able to develop project approaches and strategies appropriate to their settings. This is why, for example, when NCAV in Mongolia ran its baseline survey on domestic VAWGWD and the survey revealed that the girls and women with sight impairments in its particular target groups could not read Braille, the organization decided to change its project design so that it did not develop Braille materials. Considering how invisibilized women and girls with disabilities and their specific requirements often are, and in the absence of a context-specific evidence base on which to draw, research and the flexibility to adapt based on research findings were crucial. This was also discussed during the focus groups, where participants commented on the importance of designing programming in such a way that context-specific research on women and girls with disabilities can inform project design and lead to project adaptations, as the disabilities/gender/violence intersection is extremely complex and requires intersectional approaches to reduce compounding vulnerabilities (Chaplin et al., 2019).

**It is important to highlight that many of the EVAWG programmes with women and girls with disabilities that were implemented by grantees benefited from a continuous cycle of learning and flexible adaptability throughout programme implementation.** A number of projects benefited from designing programming with women and girls with disabilities in such a way that it could continuously adapt based on research and learning processes throughout the programme cycle, not just at baseline. CDIA in Paraguay, for example, designed its project so that the programme could continuously adapt to what was learned during consultation workshops with adolescents with disabilities throughout project implementation.

**Project adaptations also emerged from practical experience and implementation-based learning, rather than from intentional research and monitoring processes.** Some grantees developed a better understanding of the specific disabilities/gender/violence intersection and the context in which they were implementing their project during project implementation, and then adapted their programming accordingly. For example, IDEH in Haiti only realized the low levels of literacy of the women and girls with disabilities they were engaging with during project implementation, which led IDEH to adapt the content and methods of its intervention.

**Some grantees also intentionally created specific structures to help ensure that they could learn and adapt their projects to better address the requirements of women and girls with disabilities.** BB in Haiti and the disability rights organizations with which it partnered originally planned to develop nine resources for use

in communities in their Safe and Capable resource pack. They appointed a disability accountability consultant, who helped them realize that more basic, foundational information on disabilities, including respectful terminology and descriptors in local languages, was needed, as was a larger set of tailored multimedia resources to ensure lasting community change. As a result, they developed 33 resources. These materials were also repeatedly adapted based on community feedback and reviews from international expert reviewers – processes that were more extensive than those foreseen during the original programme design, but were much needed.

**Grantees' EVAWG projects with women and girls with disabilities also included other systems and structures that allowed for programme flexibility and adaptability.** For example, the flexible funding offered by the UN Trust Fund, including no-cost extensions, were recognized by the grantees as being critical in allowing them to adapt their programming quickly where and when needed, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 2.5.2 Learning and flexible adaptations during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic

**Not all adaptations made by grantees were planned.** Sometimes grantees were confronted by unforeseen circumstances or challenges to their EVAWG work with women and girls with disabilities that demanded that they adjust their project to reach their end goal. For example, BB in Haiti experienced political unrest, violence, fuel shortages and extreme weather events, which prevented them from implementing project activities. This created significant delays, but also led to them starting to use virtual methods of engagement to work with community-based networks.

**COVID-19 was an unforeseen challenge that affected all of the grantees.** For all grantees in the Special Window portfolio, the majority or all of their projects were implemented after the pandemic started. The literature comprehensively shows that COVID-19 had a complex and compounding effect on many forms of VAWG (Peterman et al., 2020; Spiranovic et al., 2021; Lokot and Avakyan, 2020). It was a challenge that greatly affected women and girls with disabilities, and, with people increasingly housebound and under stress, the risk factors for VAWGWD in the domestic space also increased, as women and girls with disabilities were particularly invisible at this time, as noted in the literature (Sharma and Das, 2021). The gender/disability/COVID-19 intersection was termed by some scholars as a specific form of triple jeopardy (Shakespeare et al., 2021). Grantees therefore had to respond to the new and evolving specific requirements of women and girls with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, while at the same time struggling with how the pandemic affected their ability to implement their projects. Grantees responded to COVID-19 in many different ways, finding ways to continue addressing VAWGWD and the specific requirements of women and girls with disabilities.

**To ensure that they understood how COVID-19 was affecting women and girls with disabilities, a number of grantees conducted research, which they then used to guide project adaptations, and to advocate with government and funders regarding the need to address specifically how COVID-19 was affecting women and girls with disabilities.** These COVID-19-specific research pieces contributed to grantees' bigger agendas of raising awareness of the situation of women and girls with disabilities, and contributed to global learning on working with women and girls with disabilities during crisis situations. MDRI-S in Serbia, for example, published *Isolated in Isolation*, a publication resulting from their 14-month-long virtual engagements with a group of women with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities confined in institutions because of COVID-19. The publication provided an overview of COVID-19 conditions and how they affected women with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities in institutions, and also provided guidance for others who work with women with these types of disabilities in institutions, including during crisis situations. During focus groups, participants discussed how this COVID-19-specific research with women and girls with disabilities helped them better understand disabilities and the situation of women and girls with disabilities, which had helped them in their wider programming overall. One participant explained how it helped them to better understand how the unacceptable treatment of women and girls with disabilities by society in general (which the participant termed "abnormal") is still normalized within society:

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*There was huge (research) efforts that we did with (our academic partner) about evaluating the situation of women with disabilities during the COVID-19 situation ... (We studied which disabilities are experiencing which kinds of violence, and why) ... And it was not easy, as you know, COVID is not easy. It was a new experience for all of us ... (Our research during COVID-19) has revealed and also it gave us a deeper understanding about really the normal abnormal situation of women with disabilities (FGD 1, October 2022).*

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**In terms of changes made to project implementation, the paramount change was a shift to virtual methods of engagement.** Moving to virtual spaces meant that many grantees had to make changes to their activities, including methodological shifts. P&H in Peru, for example, learned that it had to adapt the content of its training workshops not only because of the shift to virtual spaces, but because the workshops had to be presented differently depending on whether Zoom, WhatsApp or telephone conferencing was used. The adaptability and flexibility of the workshop facilitator therefore emerged as critical for the success of workshops. But the grantees found this worthwhile, as the use of technology and engagement with virtual spaces helped to facilitate the empowerment of women with disabilities. LEGIS in Guatemala found that shifting to virtual training sessions forced it to shift away from its plan to train women with disabilities directly, as this was viewed as too difficult to do virtually, moving instead to training organizations that work with women with disabilities, which required significant modifications to the approaches and curriculum LEGIS had planned.

**Other grantees had to design entirely new activities, as planned activities could no longer happen.** FUSA in Argentina, for example, developed an online platform and an application (the first digital tool in Argentina developed from a gender and disability perspective) to provide accessible information on SRHR. This intersectional perspective may have helped FUSA to respond quickly to the new SRHR-related issues that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. This concurs with the literature on intersectional approaches, which argues for the central importance of a pre-existing intersectional approach, as this strengthens organizational resilience and promotes the ability to adapt to unexpected events such as COVID-19 (Lokot and Avakyan, 2020).

**Flexible budgeting and additional funds that allowed grantees to develop the needed technological infrastructure and skills were critical for their ability to shift to virtual spaces.** Many grantees did not have the skills or infrastructure to switch to virtual engagements. Therefore, the flexibility of the UN Trust Fund with regard to how easily it allowed budgets to be reallocated was especially appreciated, as it allowed for development of the needed skill and/or infrastructure. The additional resources received from the UN Trust Fund by grantees in Africa (funded by the EU/United Nations Spotlight Initiative) also served this purpose, as the resources went towards institutional strengthening to sustainably respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises, while maintaining or adapting existing interventions to EVAWG with a focus on women and girls at particular risk of violence. Not only did it mean that money was made available to improve skills and technological infrastructure within the grantee organization, but many grantees could also train and provide technological access to the women and girls with disabilities with whom they worked. MDRI-S in Serbia, for example, was able to reallocate budget so that it could provide mobile phones and airtime to the women with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities with whom it was working in institutions. This allowed MDRI-S to, for example, conduct research with the women, inform them of COVID-19 facts and realities, and offer them the opportunity to report violence. This was crucial to MDRI-S continuing its work with these women, as these institutions were locked down for more than a year. This also contributed insights to the wider experiences of CSOs regarding VAWG during the COVID-19 pandemic (Majumdar and Wood, 2020).

**Yet challenges remain for the virtual engagement of women and girls with disabilities.** For lack of devices and/or lack of internet access, virtual spaces are not available to all. For example, CDIA in Paraguay found that it was still struggling to reach those with disabilities by virtual means. Furthermore, women and girls with disabilities are challenged in very specific ways when accessing virtual spaces, depending on their individual disabilities. Accompaniment in virtual spaces must therefore be organized and individualized for many, and remains impossible for some.



**In response to COVID-19, grantees also designed project adaptations beyond a shift to the virtual space.** Bedari, an implementing partner of CBM in Pakistan, trained what it called “lady health workers” (government-appointed women community workers who performed door-to-door visits) to provide emergency responses to survivors. As these lady health workers could continue their work during lockdown, they became an important way of reaching women (with and without disabilities) facing violence. BB in Haiti, which ran a project with a strong school-based component through the “Power to Girls” model, was challenged when schools were closed because of COVID-19 and political unrest, but pivoted by focusing more on the community-based component of its project. For example, it ran megaphone dialogues and home visits. It also adapted existing materials to tackle new issues that emerged, such as the increase in domestic violence. BB found that, after the lockdowns were lifted, it was easier to continue activities that had been maintained in some form.

**COVID-19 also forced grantees to respond quickly to new challenges that women and girls with disabilities were facing.** For example, when the Nepalese government announced in April 2020 that it would be discontinuing the social security allowance provided to people with disabilities, the NDWA team lobbied extensively, publicly and successfully against it, thus ensuring that people with disabilities were not left even worse off during the height of the pandemic.



*Women living with disabilities receive livelihood support (including seeds) during COVID-19.*



### 2.5.3 Key lessons learned from adaptations

Reflecting on the various adaptations grantees made in their projects, a number of key lessons emerge in relation to working at the disabilities/gender/violence intersection. **First, a project working with women and girls with diverse disabilities cannot plan too far ahead without risking making stereotypical or inaccurate assumptions about what project beneficiaries with disabilities want and require.** A clear understanding of the realities and specific requirements of the people with whom a project engages can only emerge as the project works with them. Projects have to be designed to be agile and responsive to the need for ongoing programme and budget adaptations. This means both being willing to adapt the project blueprint along the way, and intentionally leaving spaces in initial project design, based on the understanding that only at a future point will it become clear what is needed in certain contexts.

**Second, if adaptations are to be appropriate, adequate, timely and continuous, then robust monitoring, evaluation accountability and learning processes are needed.** In an environment of continuous learning, programmes are able to adapt flexibly in the ways needed. There should be timely feedback loops that allow the need for specific adaptations to be identified and implemented.

**Third, agile adaptation is enabled by good communication between implementing partners, and between the funder and the grantee.** Adaptations affect budgeting and timelines, and open and honest two-way communication is needed so that all parties understand the crucial need for ongoing adaptations and how it affects overall outcomes. A number of grantees commented on how the UN Trust Fund's swift support and approval of budget reallocations for the COVID-19 response was what enabled them to adapt well and quickly to its impact on their projects and participants. In the absence of such a fast response and rapid adaptation, women and girls with disabilities would have been at risk of being left even further behind the general population.

**Fourth, unforeseen challenges can lead to the improvement of programming and organizations.** For example, the lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic led to an acceleration of the development and uptake of tools and technology that enable virtual connection and engagement. Women and girls with disabilities can benefit in the longer term from communities (and a world) that have embraced virtual methods of engagement and technology. Furthermore, the budget reallocations and additional funds that resulted from the COVID-19 crisis enabled many of the grantees to create an infrastructure that not only would enable them to cope better with COVID-19, but had long been needed for them to work with persons with disabilities in a sustained way. At the same time, timely responses are also needed to make the most of unexpected opportunities. In fragile contexts especially, it is important to use every possible opportunity to work with women and girls with disabilities, and to promote the agenda for ending VAWGWD, for the political will and momentum may quickly change again. UNABU in Rwanda was an example of a grantee that was able to pivot and capitalize quickly on the opportunities offered by the COVID-19 pandemic. It performed a rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 for women and girls with disabilities, and then used that assessment to successfully fundraise for the organization and project. UNABU actively applied for special funding opportunities that became available because of the COVID-19 crisis, managing to secure funding for one of its self-advocacy groups that was affected by COVID-19, and this flexible funding permitted UNABU to invest in its own organizational resilience, including developing its new five-year strategic plan.

# 3 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS ON THE SPECIAL WINDOW

The Special Window supported a unique portfolio of 22 projects, all focused on addressing the Violence Against Women and Girls that happens at the intersection of disabilities and gender. Section 2 synthesized and discussed common learnings and lessons that emerged from the work of the grantees within the portfolio as a whole. Concluding this report is a reflection on five valuable contributions that resulted from the Special Window, followed by 11 recommendations to the EAWG sector, funders and researchers.

## 3.1 The Special Window's valuable timing and its specific focus on violence against women and girls with disabilities

All 22 projects were implemented between 2018 and 2023, capitalizing on the increased global sociopolitical will regarding disabilities that has been generated by many countries ratifying the CRPD over the last decade. **The Special Window, viewed retrospectively, was well positioned to contribute to this wider momentum,** and to help to translate these high-level global political shifts into positive, practical realities for women and girls with disabilities in local contexts. In many of the grantee settings, favourable national legal and political climates were identified as critical for the success of EAWG programming focused on women and girls with disabilities. The Special Window provided many grantees with the opportunity to engage at national and local levels to help ensure that CPRD ratification translated into appropriate national laws, policies and social practices, and to support measures to ensure their consistent implementation.

The COVID-19 pandemic also affected the projects of every grantee in the portfolio, with all grantees noting that this placed women and girls with disabilities at a greater and unforeseen risk of violence and of being left behind in the response. Again, **the Special Window was in a unique position to equip all grantees to respond swiftly and in specific ways** to this new intersecting vulnerability for women and girls with disabilities, and to draw attention to how women and girls with disabilities face new intersectional risks in the light of COVID-19. In this regard, it has to be emphasized that the Special Window allowed grantees to improve the situation of the women and girls with disabilities that they worked with at a time when they were at particular risk because of COVID-19, and to filter additional resources via the Spotlight Initiative into existing partnerships that were essential for institutional strengthening and disaster management.

The value of the Special Window in drawing specific attention to VAWGWD should not be underestimated, as the learning that emerged across the portfolio emphasized that recognition is a prerequisite for responsive engagement. **The Special Window has enabled research and learning specific to the disabilities/gender intersection that can be pivotal in confronting and transforming the invisibilization of women and girls with disabilities that is still prevalent.** The Special Window shone a spotlight on VAWGWD across multiple continents simultaneously, and this can be seen as a sustainable impact of the entire portfolio, separate from the many individual grantees' successes. Once the issue (VAWGWD), the intersection (gender/disabilities) and the people (women and girls with disabilities) have been acknowledged, the knowledge gained during these projects has the potential to be long-lasting. This in itself justifies the Special Window's specific focus. The Special Window built on theory regarding VAWG generally and intersectional approaches more widely to operationalize this gain in practice in relation to one concrete intersection.

## 3.2 The Special Window's funding impact for those working with women and girls with disabilities

In FGDs, many OPD grantees noted the significant value of being able to apply for organizational funds under a Special Window focused on VAWGWD. This meant not having to compete with other EVAWG agendas and the organizations that focus on those agendas. Many of the grantees that are OPDs felt that they are often unable to compete in open funding calls, as they have such a specialized focus. For example, one grantee stated that, as “this special funding window had a focus on just them (women and girls with disabilities), competition with the mainstream was not there and it gave an opportunity for the organizations of women with disabilities to receive funds that focused on disability” (FGD, written response, October 2022). This reinforces the need for a long-term deliberate commitment to ending VAWGWD that many other grantees noted. A competitive funding approach that is too quick to move to disability-inclusive models of mainstreaming may at times be counterproductive in the light of the need for disability-specific work as a prerequisite for more effective inclusive models in the future.

**The flexible nature of the Special Window funding also allowed grantees to be responsive to their evolving understanding of the requirements of women and girls with disabilities.** Grantees could adapt programming during implementation when their research and learning processes showed that changes were needed. Grantee experiences highlighted the importance of flexible funding, not only for EVAWG programming in general, but especially for EVAWG programming focused on women and girls with disabilities, for which there is often very little evidence and learning on which to base initial project design. The wide diversity and evolving realities of disabilities, and the specific requirements that emerge from different participants, require an agility of response to be built into all work related to VAWGWD.

Finally, the Spotlight Initiative funding that grantees in Africa received to support sustainable responses to COVID-19 and other crises has **highlighted the ongoing need for funding that allows for the institutional strengthening of the grantee organization itself.** Where funding is only project specific, this may not allow the organization to develop and grow in a way that ensures its own sustainability and responsiveness to the setting where it is working. With smaller OPDs especially, funding that allows organizational development and improved infrastructure accessibility can be crucial to ensuring the sustainability of the organization and the work it does in the longer term to address VAWGWD.



*Distribution of food hampers and personal protective equipment to girls and women living with disabilities.*

### 3.3 The Special Window enabled rapid development of disability-specific tools and approaches

The literature and practitioners have emphasized the lack of practical tools, knowledge and evidence focused on the gender/disability intersection and ending VAWGWD. **The Special Window has enabled the rapid development of both a better understanding of and context-specific evidence on EAWG programming with women and girls with disabilities, and a sustainable repository of disability-specific curricula, tools and materials.** BB in Haiti and ADD International in Cambodia, for example, both worked on adapting existing EAWG methodologies specifically for use in work on disabilities and VAWGWD. The Special Window centred on the intersection between disabilities and gender, and allowed grantees to intentionally design programming that works at this intersection. This gave grantees the time and resources needed for the innovative development of programming and curriculum materials that address VAWGWD. The EAWG community as a whole therefore benefits from the Special Window funding, as it supported the development of disabilities-specific curricula, tools and materials, which have been made available for use elsewhere as well.

### 3.4 The Special Window supported a more inclusive movement for ending violence against women and girls through innovative collaborations

During the FGDs especially, **grantees expressed appreciation for the Special Window and the specific focus that it created on VAWGWD.** By funding OPDs and other organizations working with women and girls with disabilities, the Special Window highlighted the importance of and gave credibility to these organizations and their causes within the broader EAWG movement. The Special Window showcased the importance of recognizing VAWGWD as part of the EAWG agenda, and the need to work intentionally to bridge the siloed approach that has often been taken to these issues.

**The Special Window resourced practical grass-roots movement built around addressing VAWGWD and the requirements of women and girls with disabilities.** This was exemplified through the various longer-term movements, networks and multi-stakeholder collaborations that were formed during project implementation but will continue after the projects. In such movements, there is increased understanding and recognition of how disability-specific violence may take on different forms (e.g. institutional or caregiver violence) than VAWG in the general population.

**Funding OPDs, WROs and women's development networks working with women and girls with disabilities capacitated grantees themselves, developing their skills, resources and understanding of the disability and gender intersection in their specific contexts.** This leaves various specialist grantee organizations better equipped to work intersectionally on gender and disability in the future, even if their Special Window funding has come to an end, as explained by a OPD representative that took part in the FGDs:

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*This funding allowed us to institutionalize the GBV [gender-based violence] programme because it has (significant provision) for capacity-building and empowerment of the organization itself. So we have moved from project-based interventions into programmatic-based interventions. And for us this was so crucial and so strategically important for us as an ... OPD and for the disability and gender movement as a whole, as well (FGD 1, October 2022).*

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This investment in OPDs not only capacitated them, but also helped to shift the current power dynamics within the EAWG space, with OPDs noting that they are now becoming better recognized and included as experts in this space. **The Special Window has therefore contributed to the development of more inclusive EAWG spaces that not only recognize VAWGWD as a form of VAWG, but also draw practically on the expertise and contribution of OPDs.**



### 3.5 The Special Window highlighted certain implementation tensions that need further research

This reflection on Special Window grantees' experiences in implementing EVAWG interventions focused on women and girls with disabilities has highlighted a number of challenging tensions that can emerge when working at the specific intersection between disabilities, gender and violence. The Special Window has allowed attention to be drawn to these tensions, which emphasizes the need for further research into these areas.

**One of the issues that emerged from this specific programming portfolio was a tension between exclusively focusing on women and girls with disabilities, and taking inclusive approaches that work with multiple groups of (or even with all) women and girls.** Some of the 22 projects focused specifically on VAWGWD (e.g. NDWA in Nepal), while others focused on VAWG more generally, on various forms of VAWG or on VAWG experienced by specific groups (e.g. MTM in Guatemala focused on various marginalized groups, including those with disabilities). There may be risks to attempts at immediate inclusion, with women and girls with disabilities receiving less focus in interventions if there are not many of them or they are not as easy to reach as other groups. At the same time, programming focusing only on women and girls with disabilities may risk isolating women and girls with disabilities, as they are constantly placed in a specific category that requires exclusive attention. Grantee experiences suggest that a programmatic tension emerges between taking a disability-exclusive approach – which seeks to ensure that women and girls with disabilities receive needed attention to their specific requirements – and an inclusive approach – which seeks to integrate women and girls with disabilities and ensure that they are not further socially isolated. Further research is needed to help guide how this tension can be best navigated within specific contexts. For example, certain kinds of organizations may be better suited for implementing inclusive approaches, while others can be most effective when working solely with women and girls with disabilities. Certain contexts may be better suited to a disability-inclusive approach, while others may still need exclusive approaches. This specific portfolio showed that both exclusive and inclusive approaches are seen as needed to address VAWGWD. Further research can offer practitioners guidance on what to take into account and why when making these programmatic decisions, and one organization may, for example, have multi-pronged strategies that can enable both approaches.



*Workshop with children and adolescent living with disability on violence, inclusion, rights and protection systems.*

**A second tension that emerged from the Special Window portfolio was the value of working with all forms of impairments versus focusing on a particular category of disability.** Of the 22 grantees, only three focused on a specific category of disability (psychosocial and intellectual impairments). Sixteen grantees indicated that they worked with all women and girls with disabilities, irrespective of the type of impairment, while three grantees focused on wider groups of women and girls, which included those with disabilities. On the one hand, programming that includes all women and girls with disabilities is valuable, as those with disabilities often remain such a marginalized group as a whole, and because many policies and laws claim to focus on all disabilities. However, on the other hand, a question remains as to whether it was in fact always possible for these grantees to effectively reach and engage with all women and girls with disabilities, regardless of their specific impairments. The work of MDRI-S in Serbia and CELS in Argentina illustrates the very specific realities and challenges that can be connected to just one impairment (in these specific projects, psychosocial and intellectual disabilities). With such diversity within the disabilities sector, projects may need to exercise caution if they are trying to benefit, reach and work with women and girls with disabilities in their full diversity as a group. More research is needed to better understand how to navigate these questions within programming.

**A third tension raised was the ways in which some grantees made specific connections between certain disabilities and the risks of particular forms of VAWG.** Grantees and the literature suggested that a research gap remains here, with a lack of understanding around if, how and why certain types of impairment and specific types of violence may be connected. This still requires more attention in research (Meyer et al., 2022). Across the portfolio, many grantees attempted to address all forms of violence. However, some grantees took a more focused approach to identify heightened risks of certain forms of violence associated with some types of impairments in their contexts. Just as there may be a need for a more nuanced understanding and focus on specific disabilities, grantees suggested that there is also a need to better understand how and why certain forms of violence may affect girls and women with specific disabilities in different contexts. The purpose of deepening such understanding should be not to develop an oversimplified or fixed categorization of links between specific impairments and VAWG, but to enable a nuanced understanding of what may drive VAWGWD in different contexts and, as a result, which kinds of interventions may be needed. This was noted by FGD participants:

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*Which kind of violence (is happening) against specific type of disabilities? ... We need to work more deeply and (design) specific interventions in this regard ... The complexity of gender, disability and GBV [gender-based violence]. For example, (we found that) each type of disability is linked to a more prevalent type of violence, for example, hearing impairment is more linked to cyberbullying, cyberviolence ... Hygiene and neglect (is) more related to physical disability. Harassment is more linked to visual disability. Sexual violence is more related to intellectual disability ... So, we are focusing our interventions around these pillars (FGD 1, October 2022).*

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**Fourth, the portfolio raised a tension around only working with women and girls with disabilities, or working more widely with persons with disabilities, including men and boys.** Considering the challenges that all persons with disabilities face in society, focusing programming exclusively on women and girls with disabilities may at times risk unexpected harmful consequences or may even be an inappropriate entry point for an OPD with a mandate that extends more widely to assisting all persons with disabilities (and not only women and girls with disabilities). In addition, in working at legal and policy levels in relation to disability systems, it may be challenging to focus exclusively on women and girls. LCDZ in Zimbabwe, for example, found that many sexual violence cases brought to its attention involved children with disabilities, including both boys and girls. As a result, its external evaluation recommended that boys with disabilities also need to be part of its programming. This reality highlights a tension between an exclusive focus on girls and women (typical of much of the current EVAWG movement), and the broader disability agenda, which is often committed to work with all people with disabilities, including men and boys. Some organizations, such as FUSA, found innovative ways to work inclusively but to focus on engaging a specific issue particularly relevant to women, such as forced surgical contraception. Yet an underlying tension remains within this type of intersectional work, where many diverse entry points exist, and further research is needed to understand and navigate this tension more effectively.

## 3.6 Recommendations

The eleven recommendations below are offered based on the learnings that emerged from the entire synthesis review, including the concrete recommendations offered by grantees during the FGDs. The recommendations target three specific groups: (1) practitioners, (2) donors and policymakers, and (3) the EVAWG research community.

### Recommendations to practitioners

- Organizations, institutions and networks involved in EVAWG should make sustained efforts to improve their understanding of VAWGWD and of the realities of women and girls with disabilities. This includes concerted efforts to include women and girls with disabilities in meaningful ways within current programming (e.g. a staff position with disability expertise and/or organizational disability audits).
- The EVAWG sector needs to be led by the lived realities and requirements of diverse women and girls with disabilities when designing programming to address VAWGWD, rather than being led only by the ideals of top-level policy papers. This means developing context-specific, comprehensive, collaborative strategies with women and girls with disabilities that can, in time, break the vicious cycles of compounding marginalizations that fuel VAWGWD.
- Organizations, institutions and networks involved in EVAWG should actively seek collaboration and partnership with OPDs, both as a way to include VAWGWD within the EVAWG agenda, and as a mutually beneficial learning experience on the complexities of the intersection of gender, disabilities and violence.
- Interventions need to address the specific stigma, marginalization and ignorance fuelled by ableist and gendered beliefs in relation to disabilities and VAWGWD that are present within many local communities, but also in State and non-State spaces that are supposed to address this marginalization and violence. VAWGWD interventions will need to engage with this ableist reality in the spaces that are relevant to the intervention. For example, in a community-based intervention this would be through engagement with family and community members, while in a law- and policy-focused intervention this would be through engaging with service providers and/or policy legislators.

### Recommendations to funders

- Support should be given to EVAWG collaborations with OPDs and/or women with disabilities networks. Such partnerships require the development of sustained collaborative (not merely competitive) funding approaches that ensure appropriate resources and expertise are going into the delivery of shared programming.
- Funders should develop accountability systems and structures for their own organizational systems, based on a shared awareness of and commitment to CRPD compliance, such as the meaningful participation of women and girls with disabilities in decision-making processes. This includes having appropriate experts in place to design funding calls and evaluate tenders.
- Funding should address VAWGWD and meet the requirements of women and girls with disabilities. This can be done by setting funding agendas with OPDs and WROs, by tracking whether and how women and girls with disabilities benefit from funding (indirectly or directly), and by ensuring compliance with the CRPD. Some types of approaches may require longer-term commitments.
- Funders should disburse flexible funding to EVAWG programming with women and girls with disabilities, which will allow for institutional strengthening of implementing and partner organizations. This is crucial for ensuring the development of EVAWG programming that is appropriate for women and girls with disabilities, but also for strengthening organizations focused on women and girls with disabilities and addressing VAWGWD. In turn, this will also advance the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities within broader EVAWG agendas.



## Recommendations to researchers

- More research is needed to better understand and engage with the tensions that emerge when designing and implementing intersectional programming on VAWGWD. This includes research on the respective value of inclusive approaches that work with all women and girls, and approaches working exclusively with women and girls with disabilities; the appropriateness of focusing on all women and girls with impairments, and of focusing on only those with certain kinds of impairments; the need to develop a better understanding of how and why certain kinds of violence may affect girls and women with specific disabilities in different contexts; and, finally, the appropriateness of focusing all programming exclusively on women and girls with disabilities, rather than working with all persons with disabilities. Researchers must take a context-specific approach to these questions in conversation with existing practitioners, and must not seek to find one-size-fits-all answers.
- Researchers have important roles to play in convening and continuing these evidence-based conversations on the complex realities of addressing VAWGWD in intersectional ways. Approaching this complexity in nuanced ways is essential and also requires a sustained commitment to building a sector-wide evidence base and collaborative research models that prioritize practitioner knowledge. More research may need to be led by persons with diverse disabilities, and research must be done in close collaboration with these people, where feasible, to reduce ableist assumptions within research approaches themselves.
- Longitudinal research is also needed to assess the longer-term sustainability of EVAWG programming results with women and girls with disabilities. Research reflecting on the sustainability and impact of projects in the longer term (e.g. at two and five years after the project) has the potential to generate important learnings regarding the sustainability of intersectional programming focused on VAWGWD, including at wider system level and in relation to social norm changes, which frequently have far longer time frames for sustained change.





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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Project table

Description of the 22 selected projects

Grantee, country, project title, dates	Brief narrative overview
<b>ADD International</b> <b>C21, Cambodia</b> Preventing violence against women and girls with disabilities in Cambodia: a community mobilization model 2018–2021	ADD International is a UK-based international NGO. Its project in Cambodia aims to improve the protection needs of women and girls with disabilities. Although this group experiences higher rates of violence from members of their household, primary prevention strategies in Cambodia do not specifically address their experiences. The project covers six provinces, building on and expanding the work of the Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre, a UN Trust Fund grantee, and working with women and girls with disabilities who have either survived or are at risk of violence in their families. By working in partnership with two local women's organizations, two local disabled people's organizations and three women's networks, ADD International aims to strengthen the capacity of disabled women's networks to lead primary prevention efforts. These efforts include adapting the SASA! community mobilization methodology, using positive role models to contribute to changing social norms and carrying out research to better understand intersectional approaches to primary prevention.
<b>ARROW</b> <b>C22, Bangladesh</b> Protection from violence against women and girls with disabilities in Bangladesh (PROVA) 2019–2022	This project took place at national level and in five subdistricts in Bangladesh. The overall goal of this project was “for women and girls with disabilities in the project target areas experience increased confidence regarding SRHR and their right to be free from sexual and gender-based violence”. It had four main planned outcomes: (1) to increase community support of women and girls with disabilities (by sensitizing journalists, and formal duty bearers within justice systems and setting up multisectoral subdistrict committees on best practices for preventing VAWGDD; (2) to strengthen advocacy against SGBV and the right to SRHR for women and girls with disabilities (through training for local organizations/ disabled people's organizations, and disability-friendly manual development), including capacitating local government officials such as those in local courts; (3) to empower women and girls with disabilities to understand and realize their rights to SRHR, legal protection and freedom from violence by means of a range of information, education and communication materials and regular activities that include support groups for women and girls with disabilities, district-level support centre capacitation, and family/neighbour sensitization; and (4) to arrange regional dialogues on these issues for submission to international human rights/development report processes, including establishing a national advocacy committee to monitor and be a watchdog on this issue. The project includes a baseline survey on VAGWWD in Bangladesh. The project aimed to decrease violence and discrimination, both real and potential, that women and girls with disabilities have experienced or could experience (i.e. fewer violent incidents against the beneficiaries).
<b>BB</b> <b>C21, Haiti</b> Safe and Capable: Haitian communities preventing violence against girls and women with disabilities 2018–2022 (one-year COVID-19 extension)	BB is a human rights organization that helps people build movements to liberate themselves from oppression and isolation. With this project, it aimed to address the lack of existing knowledge and focus on the intersection of violence against women and disability in order to contribute to changes in social norms, social attitudes and violence prevention. Working with two partner Haitian organizations that are led by, represent and serve PODs, BB focused on women and girls with disabilities of all ages; partner organizations; members of the SASA! and Power to Girls community network; and the general public in Lavale, in Sud-Est Department of Haiti, which mostly comprises rural communities. The project included researching experiences of women and girls with disabilities; creating context-specific materials in Creole and English for interventions using SASA!/Power to Girls methodologies, called “Safe and Capable”; carrying out community mobilization using SASA!/Power to Girls/Safe and Capable resources; advocating for the implementation of relevant laws and policies; capacity-building of/providing technical support to partners in the Safe and Capable intervention, and other organizations doing EVAWG work on VAWGWD, and increasing their knowledge management capabilities.
<b>CBM</b> <b>C22, Pakistan</b> Strengthening support mechanisms to end violence against women and girls with disabilities in two districts (Multan and Muzaffargarh) of Punjab province 2019–2022	CBM is a German organization with a local CBM office in Pakistan. It worked in two districts of Punjab Province, Pakistan, with a local WRO, Bedari, and OPDs to target women with disabilities individually, and in groups, the community and institutions. The project consistently addressed violence against women and girls with and without disabilities, and worked on three tiers: (1) with women and girls (with and without disabilities) to empower and capacitate them; (2) with the communities (community members, and men and boys specifically) to reduce their tolerance of VAWG and ensure that they are standing up against VAWG; and (3) improving the systems at district and community levels so that they prevent and respond to VAWG by creating community protection mechanisms, upskilling duty bearers, establishing a district task force, and making VAWG policies more inclusive of women and girls with disabilities.



Grantee, country, project title, dates	Brief narrative overview
<b>CDIA</b> <b>C21, Paraguay</b> Paraguay includes the rights of girls and adolescents with disabilities 2018–2021	CDIA is a network of 30 CSOs working to defend, promote and monitor children’s human rights in Paraguay. Its project focused on addressing violence against girls; violence in the community, including sexual violence by non-partners; violence in schools and public spaces; and trafficking. The aim of the project was to provide members of CSOs and community-based groups, education professionals and government officials with information, training, tools, analytical data and technical assistance to enhance inter-institutional and intersectoral coordination, and to increase the effectiveness of efforts to prevent violence and address its consequences. The project was implemented in four departments (Alto Paraná, Caaguazú, Central, Paraguari) and the capital city, Asunción.
<b>CELS</b> <b>C22, Argentina</b> The reform of hospital and judicial practices to eradicate violence against women with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities in asylum at the Dr. Alejandro Korn psychiatric hospital, Buenos Aires, Argentina 2019–2022	The CELS project’s aim was to end systemic violence against women living with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities in the Dr. Alejandro Korn psychiatric hospital in Buenos Aires. The project campaigned to end violent practices in the hospital, including forced surgical contraception and forcible adoption of children; worked to ensure women who are patients there have access to justice; and advocated for the hospital to adopt a programme to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence. To achieve these goals, the project established a centre to help enable women to access justice, trained hospital staff and legal officials, raised women’s awareness of gender-based violence, and filed a landmark lawsuit to recognize the rights of women living with disabilities and any violence committed against them in the hospital.
<b>FUSA</b> <b>C21, Argentina</b> DeSeAr project (sexual rights in Argentina) with inclusion: promoting access to sexual and reproductive rights for women and girls with disabilities in Argentina 2018–2022 (six-month COVID-19 extension)	The CSO FUSA works to help women with disabilities overcome the obstacles they face in accessing sexual and reproductive health services and information in Argentina. The project aimed to reach 4,320 women and girls with disabilities, and 300 health professionals and government officials. It focused on the measures needed to achieve positive change, including the empowerment of women with disabilities to recognize and claim their rights, a transformation in the attitudes of health professionals, and the adoption of inclusive public policies incorporating gender equality and disability. To address patterns of violence and discrimination against women with disabilities, the project adopted strategies at individual, institutional and structural levels. At individual level, the project provides training and capacity-building for women with disabilities to recognize and claim their rights; at institutional level, the project provides training and capacity-building for health service providers (doctors, nurses, midwives) to become leaders and focal points for information and services related to sexual and reproductive health; and, at structural level, the project advocates with key State actors and CSOs (scientific societies, and women’s and disability movements) to promote legal, political and social changes to guarantee the provision of sexual and reproductive health services to women with disabilities.
<b>IDEH</b> <b>C22, Haiti</b> Equal opportunities and access to response mechanisms and institutions to fight against gender-based violence for women and girls with disabilities 2019–2022	The aim of the project was to ensure that women and girls with disabilities in Port-au-Prince, Gonaïves and Hinche are able to benefit adequately from the services offered by institutions in cases of VAWG. Therefore, IDEH worked to increase the capacities of women with disabilities to become leaders in their communities and to demand policy changes. It encouraged positive changes and more efficient responses to the needs of women with disabilities from government authorities and the general public. Research and evidence gathering on violence against women living with disabilities was also an important aspect of the project.
<b>LCDZ</b> <b>C21, Zimbabwe</b> Access to justice for girls and women with disabilities in Zimbabwe 2018–2021	LCDZ, a former UN Trust Fund grantee, received a second proposal for funding based on the impact and learning potential of an earlier project. It focused on six rural and underserved districts with high rates of poverty and HIV/AIDS, districts which reportedly have very high incidence rates of sexual VAWGWD. The project replicated existing strategies to provide practical assistance to women and girls with disabilities, to enhance their access to justice in cases of sexual violence and to build the capacities of key service providers. A new aspect introduced here was a focus on working with the Ministry of Health and Child Care to standardize and decentralize psychiatric assessment. This aspect is a direct result of lessons learned in the first project, which found that the legal requirement to travel to Harare for psychiatric assessment was a significant barrier to justice. LCDZ is already working closely with the government’s Victim Friendly System, which brings together different stakeholders offering post-violence services to survivors of sexual violence in the country, and has established strong partnerships with 35 disabled people’s organizations and other community groups across the country. LCDZ intended to collaborate with the joint United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Development Programme initiative Advancing the Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Zimbabwe.

**Grantee, country,  
project title, dates**

**Brief narrative overview**

<p><b>LEGIS</b> <b>C22, Guatemala</b> Preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls with disabilities, and promoting their access to justice 2019 - 2022</p>	<p>In Guatemala, a project was implemented by LEGIS, which works to improve access to justice for and to empower women and girls with disabilities. Guatemala ratified the United Nations CRPD in 2009, and a law on ending femicide and violence against women was adopted the same year. Nevertheless, national legislation has not been amended to fully reflect the rights and freedoms set out in the convention. Stigma and discrimination on the grounds of disability and gender remain major obstacles to accessing justice, as are a lack of knowledge among women and girls with disabilities about their human rights, and public awareness of, recognition of or respect for these rights. This initiative worked to raise awareness and build the capacities of the service providers and officials, including legal professionals, police officers, social workers, psychologists and health-care workers, to enable them to better address the needs of women with disabilities affected by violence. LEGIS provided training and awareness-raising, capacity-building for individuals and institutions, and free access to justice for women and girls with disabilities who are survivors of violence. It also offered technical assistance and expertise to facilitate the harmonization of existing national policies, strategies and laws with the provisions of the United Nations CRPD.</p>
<p><b>MDRI-S</b> <b>C21, Serbia</b> Accessible services for women with disabilities who are survivors of custodial violence 2018–2021</p>	<p>This project upscaled and built on earlier work with women and girls in custodial institutions funded by the UN Trust Fund. The earlier project was effective in changing the perspectives of women and girls themselves, and in generating interest in the issue among service providers. The second phase project aimed to ensure that women and girls with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities in Serbia had greater support and were empowered to live their lives free of custodial violence through knowledge and confidence-building, and by providing services if such abuse occurs. The project offered training courses, models and standards to service providers to help improve services for women with disabilities, some of whom are survivors of custodial violence.</p>
<p><b>MTM</b> <b>C21, Guatemala</b> Access to justice and empowerment of women, adolescents and girls with disabilities and victims of violence 2018–2021</p>	<p>MTM implemented a project focused on addressing the needs of marginalized groups of women and girls at risk of gender-based violence (including women and girls with disabilities) in regions with the highest rates of VAWG in Guatemala. The aim was to encourage positive changes in the lives of women and girls with disabilities through a variety of approaches. MTM worked to facilitate strategic litigation and promote a comprehensive legal, psychological and social approach to ensure effective support was given to survivors. The project also provided capacity-building and training on human rights and access to justice, provided institutional capacity-building for the NGOs and other stakeholders collaborating on the project, and maintained ongoing advocacy and dialogue with government authorities.</p>
<p><b>NDWA</b> <b>C22, Nepal</b> Inclusive Partnership against Violence (INPAV) 2019–2022</p>	<p>NDWA, a women-led organization, worked in consortium with others to implement this project in various districts of the country. It addressed the growing VAWGWD in Nepal, and the limitations of existing policies and programmes in meeting the needs of these women and girls or engaging with them to find solutions. The project aimed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empower women and girls with disabilities to prevent violence and achieve justice</li> <li>• Strengthen gender-based violence services and mechanisms</li> <li>• Establish self-help groups to carry out awareness campaigns and advocacy</li> <li>• Develop the capacity of women with disabilities to access services and campaign to end violence</li> </ul>
<p><b>NCAV</b> <b>C22, Mongolia</b> Support for disabled women and girls who are survivors of gender-based violence 2019–2022</p>	<p>NCAV, a small woman-led organization, works to end domestic violence, and protect and advocate for survivors in Mongolia. Its project involved piloting a model shelter in Ulaanbaatar for survivors of violence that provides inclusive services; the shelter is accessible to women and girls with disabilities. The project primarily supported survivors of violence in the family, including intimate partner violence, physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, economic violence and violence against girls.</p>
<p><b>NUWODU</b> <b>C21, Uganda</b> Reducing violence against women and girls with disabilities in Amuria District 2018–2021</p>	<p>NUWODU implemented a project to reduce VAWGWD in Amuria District in the Eastern Region of Uganda. It aimed to increase awareness and knowledge among local leaders, families and the women and girls themselves regarding the rights of women and girls with disabilities and the legal framework protecting them. By working to increase women and girls' confidence and knowledge about rights and forms of violence, the project aimed to empower them to take appropriate action. Selected women and girls with disabilities received training to act as community-based paralegals to promote awareness-raising and mobilization, and to engage with local leaders. The project also supported women and girls with disabilities to form local groups for peer-to-peer learning, enhancing confidence in the longer term and enabling them to speak out.</p>
<p><b>OHANA</b> <b>C22, Indonesia</b> Ending violence against women with disabilities in Indonesia 2019–2022</p>	<p>The women-led organization OHANA implemented its project to end VAWGWD in five districts of Yogyakarta city. The project worked with women and girls with disabilities with low education and literacy levels, and those living in poverty and in rural areas. Activities included capacity-building for health and social service providers and psychosocial health institutions to provide inclusive and accessible services; outreach and education through campaigns and workshops; "ohana circles" for survivors, which provide information and referrals to service providers; and advocacy at national level on a pending law to end sexual violence.</p>

**Grantee, country,  
project title, dates**

**Brief narrative overview**

<p><b>P&amp;H</b> <b>C22, Peru</b> A dignified life without violence for girls and women with disabilities in Lima, Cusco and San Martín – Peru 2019–2022</p>	<p>This project, implemented by P&amp;H, worked to increase access to services for women living with disabilities in the Lima, Cusco and San Martín Regions. The project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaigned to make the experiences, needs and rights of women with disabilities visible to prevent/end violence against them</li> <li>• Sought to improve access to/strengthens multisectoral services for women and girls with disabilities who experience violence</li> <li>• Aimed to empowers a generation of leaders of women with disabilities through training</li> <li>• Hosted discussions to assess existing policies, plans and strategies that address preventing and ending violence against women with disabilities</li> </ul> <p>The project goal was for empowered women and girls with disabilities in three locations in Peru to have access to a protection system appropriate to their needs for protection against violence. It has one main outcome: women and girls with disabilities will have improved access for to essential, safe and appropriate services to end violence against them.</p>
<p><b>SHS</b> <b>C21, Palestine</b> Protecting women and girls with disabilities from violence in Palestine (HEMAYA) 2018–2022</p>	<p>The HEMAYA project aimed to improve access to essential, safe and adequate multisectoral services for women and girls with disabilities. It sought to enhance the inclusion of girls and women with all types of disabilities in programmes and systems to end VAWG. The project was implemented in the West Bank and Gaza in collaboration with Al Marsad, an organization of academics and researchers who work on economic, social and civil rights in Palestine. It focused, in particular, on marginalized communities in refugee camps, Area C territories and Bedouin communities. Activities included analysing the factors affecting women and girls with disabilities, capacity-building, advocacy, sensitization and networking to influence key actors and institutions.</p>
<p><b>SOLIFE</b> <b>C22, Nigeria</b> Empowering women and girls with disability through improved social inclusion and eliminating gender-based violence in Osun and Kwara States (EMPOWER) 2019–2022</p>	<p>The project goal was for women and girls with disabilities in Osun and Kwara States to be better protected from gender-based violence and better supported in accessing essential services by 2022. Three main outcomes were included: (1) improved effectiveness of policies, national action plans and accountability systems to prevent VAWWG in the two States, (2) improved prevention due to changes in behaviour, attitudes and practices; and (3) institutional strengthening for SOLIFE to respond to COVID-19 and adapt VAWGWD interventions.</p> <p>The expected situation by the end of project was that a considerable number of women and girls in Osun and Kwara States would have access to essential, safe and adequate multisectoral services that contribute to EAWG in their community through the multiple EMPOWER project interventions in the targeted States. The EMPOWER project is improving the social inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in Osun and Kwara States in Nigeria by giving them the skills and services needed to eliminate gender-based violence against them. The project is also engaging with relevant stakeholders such as educational administrators, journalists, law enforcement workers, legal practitioners, health practitioners and non-State actors to ensure an environment is created that will enable women and girls with disabilities to live free of gender-based violence. A considerable number of women and girls with disabilities in Osun and Kwara States have access to essential, safe and adequate multisectoral services that contribute to EAWG in their community through the EMPOWER interventions in the target States.</p>
<p><b>SWAGAA</b> <b>C22, Eswatini</b> Leave no one behind: towards a VAWG-free Eswatini 2019–2022</p>	<p>The project worked to end VAWG by changing attitudes about gender, improving the delivery of services to those who have experienced violence, and raising awareness about refugee rights and the rights of young women and girls with disabilities. The project was implemented in communities in Lubombo Region, including the Malindza Refugee Camp. Key activities included promoting existing services through a “stop-the-bus” model, which reached remote communities; empowering girls and young women through mentoring and life skills training; addressing violence by caregivers against women and girls with disabilities through training; and using dialogue to challenge perceptions of disability.</p>
<p><b>UNABU</b> <b>C21, Rwanda</b> Eliminating violence against women and girls with disabilities in Rwanda 2018–2022</p>	<p>UNABU, an organization managed by and for women with disabilities, implemented a project to reduce economic and sexual violence among this particularly at-risk group in five districts in Rwanda. The project aimed to change attitudes and behaviours by increasing knowledge and awareness of human rights and gender-based violence among women with disabilities in 120 self-advocacy groups, and among community members. It also strengthened access to inclusive essential, safe and adequate multisectoral services for women and girls who are survivors of violence.</p>
<p><b>WCC</b> <b>C21, Kenya</b> Preventing and responding to violence against women and girls with disabilities in Kenya 2018–2021</p>	<p>The project was implemented by WCC, and focused on three ethnically diverse locations in Kenya. It aimed to reduce VAWGWD and increase the rate of conviction of abusers. WCC worked with service providers and front-line responders to improve attitudes, protection mechanisms and multisectoral services. WCC worked with two partners: Advantage Africa, a UK-based NGO with extensive experience of community development in East Africa, and the Kibwezi Disabled Persons’ Organization. The aim was to engage women in empowerment activities, support the capacity of service providers, and develop and deliver community theatre programmes through the community drama group Twaweza, which had experience in devising and performing plays about violence against women in community settings.</p>

## Appendix B: Methodology

A key focus of the UN Trust Fund over the last five years has been supporting CSOs working with marginalized women and girls experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination. Since 2018, the UN Trust Fund has been providing support – through a special funding window – to CSOs dedicated to tackling VAWGWD, with this portfolio spanning 22 projects across 17 countries. With a number of these projects closing and the Special Window coming to an end, the UN Trust Fund commissioned this synthesis review to collate the results and lessons learned across the portfolio of closed and active projects focused on WGWD.

The overarching aim of this synthesis review was to identify common learnings and emerging lessons across the women and girls with disabilities portfolio that can add value to the sector, especially for funders. The following research objectives were identified:

- To synthesize and analyse key lessons emerging from the WGWD portfolio
- To reflect retrospectively on the women and girls with disabilities Special Window
- To identify key lessons for funders around supporting EVAWG programming with WGWD

Originally, the identification and synthesis of key programmatic results (outcomes/impact) of the WGWD portfolio was also part of the research objectives. However, during the research process it was decided to make this objective part of a separate and later piece of research, partly because the majority of the final reports and evaluations had not been received at the time.

The decision was made that a synthesis review would be conducted to study the WGWD portfolio of project-specific monitoring reports, endline external evaluations and knowledge products (depending on availability at the time). A two-stage desk review process analysing and synthesizing of these documents was followed, and two FGDs were also conducted with representatives of the 22 grantees in the portfolio.

This synthesis review followed the approaches and methods associated with qualitative meta-synthesis, which aims to bring together findings on a chosen theme in such a way that the results should (in conceptual terms) be greater than the sum of the parts (Finlayson and Dixon, 2008, p. 60). The synthesis review emphasized interpretation of the qualitative data, providing insights into EVAWG interventions focused on women and girls with disabilities overall.

A cross-case thematic analysis was identified as the most appropriate, considering the overall aim of the study and the nature of the documentation available. Each grantee project was (in the first stage) approached and analysed as a stand-alone case, after which a comparative analysis (cross-case analysis) was performed. Thematic analysis was conducted at both of these stages. The first stage was more deductive, and the second stage was more inductive.

The following five research questions explicitly and deductively guided the data-mining process and the first round of analysis (discussed further below).

1. What main types of interventions emerged across the women and girls with disabilities portfolio?
2. What key results (outcomes and impact) were documented that demonstrate the effectiveness of specific intervention approaches, and what evidence is there to demonstrate this effectiveness?
3. What main lessons do the various grantees say they learned from this process of implementing EVAWG programmes for women and girls with disabilities?
4. What specific challenges and barriers to EVAWG interventions for women and girls with disabilities were identified (and how were they addressed)?
5. What supports the sustainability of these EVAWG interventions for women and girls with disabilities?

In line with the approaches and methods of qualitative meta-synthesis, after the conclusion of the deductive first stage of analysis, two of the research questions were removed to become the focuses of a separate study. These were the questions on key results (question 2) and sustainability (question 5).

Taking into consideration the varied nature of the 22 projects in the portfolio, and the different sizes and resources of the organizations implementing the projects, the decision was made to be flexible in terms of the documentation reviewed. None of the documentation was rejected based on the researchers' perception of the quality or validity of the research, although reflection on methodological rigour formed part of the analysis.



The women and girls with disabilities portfolio consists of 22 projects, for which any of the below documentation could be available:

- Two annual monitoring reports (following the UN Trust Fund template)
- A final monitoring report (following the UN Trust Fund template)
- An external evaluation conducted by an independent consultant
- Knowledge product (public document created by the grantee)

In reviewing the project documentation provided by the UN Trust Fund for the 22 projects, it was found that most did not have external evaluations. Not all projects conducted an external evaluation because of the size of the grant, and not all external evaluations of this specific portfolio have been completed (at the time the synthesis review was conducted, only 4 out of 22 projects had external evaluations, of which one was not yet finalized). Three further projects had knowledge products focusing on lessons learned over the course of the project. These formed part of the first stage of analysis in lieu of an external evaluation. Many projects (14 of the 22) had not yet completed their project and/or final monitoring reports, and thus had only two (annual) monitoring reports available.

The nature, content and quality of the various monitoring and evaluation reports also varied considerably. Therefore, the first stage of analysis focused on rapidly reviewing the disparate documents within each project to create a specific summary document for each project. The aim was to collate and synthesize the same information that was important for the study (if available) in each project's summary document, thus creating more homogeneity in the cross-project data being analysed during the second stage. This is why a flexible approach was followed.

In order of priority, the following documentation was reviewed:

- Final report narrative report section
- External evaluation (selected sections)
- Selected public knowledge products
- Annual monitoring reports (selected sections)
- Results and activity report of the final report (selected sections)

A generic coding template was created based on the research questions, identifying specific themes for which relevant data could be collated and synthesized in the project summary documents. Appropriate information was then identified and collated in 22 project summary documents using a deductive approach (following the template).

The second analysis stage used the 22 project summary documents as data sources for a cross-case thematic analysis. Whereas the first stage was deductive, guided by the research questions, the second stage was inductive, in adherence with the synthesis review's approach of respecting what emerges from the data.

Two FGDs were conducted towards the end of the second stage of analysis. These focus groups served two purposes: they were data collection exercises, and functioned as validation exercises in which the preliminary findings of the synthesis review were shared for feedback and input.

All 22 grantees were invited to attend one of the focus groups. They were also invited to ask their key implementing partners to join. In total, 14 representatives from 11 grantees and 1 partner organization joined FGDs. A further four grantees, unable to join the focus groups, submitted written answers to the FGD questions shared with them by the research team. All FGD participants completed a written consent form and, to ensure confidentiality, the recordings and transcripts of the FGDs were not shared with anyone apart from the research team. The notes, transcripts and written answers from FGDs were analysed thematically.

A literature review was not part of the methodology. However, after both stages of the analysis were completed, a very limited amount of time was spent on checking selected academic and grey literature particularly relevant to themes that emerged from the analysis process. The goal of this exercise was to make selected connections between the evidence emerging, and being discussed in the report, and the wider body of evidence.

An outline of the synthesis review was shared with the UN Trust Fund and, after feedback, the outline was finalized and the full synthesis review was drafted.

## Appendix C: Focus group discussion guides and consent form

1. The six themes emerging across the reports of all 22 projects in this meta-analysis are: participation, collaboration, systems and institutional engagement, mindset shifts on disability, adaptations and pivots, and, finally, the complex intersection of gender and disability. Do these six themes resonate with you? Do you feel that there is anything you wish to add or disagree with?
2. You all took part in UN Trust Fund-funded projects that addressed violence against women and/or girls by engaging with women and/or girls with disabilities. This intersection between gender and disabilities is a difficult one. Based on your experiences, what do you think are some unique specific challenges of doing ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG) work with women and girls with disabilities in particular?
3. In the light of these challenges, can you now share a little about what has helped in addressing these specific challenges? What has helped your specific organization to do EVAWG work with women and/or girls with disabilities?
4. Based on your specific learnings from implementing this UN Trust Fund-funded project, what do you think the wider EVAWG sector still needs to understand about doing violence prevention work with women and girls with disabilities in particular?
5. Based on your experiences with your project, what one thing do you really want funders to understand better about doing violence prevention work with women and girls with disabilities?
6. Your disabilities work was funded through a special UN Trust Fund funding window focused on women and girls with disabilities. What do you think was the value of having a Special Window for this area?
7. If you reflect back on what you've learned during the implementation of your project, and you could share one key lesson with us, what would that lesson be?

### Consent to participate in synthesis review research focus group discussions

We would like to invite you to participate in a synthesis review collecting lessons learned and results from UN Trust fund projects around women and girls with disabilities. You are invited specifically because an organization that you work or worked for implemented a project that was funded by the UN Trust Fund under the 2018–2022 Special Window on disabilities.

Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project, and contact me if you require further explanation or clarification of any aspect of the study. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you or your organization negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part. The information that has been collected from you up to that point will still be used, if you give your consent.

We are asking you (as a representative of your organization) to take part in one online focus group discussion (FGD), where we will discuss the preliminary findings of the process of collecting and synthesizing lessons learned from specific UN Trust Fund projects (including your organization's), and your specific experiences and learnings from working with women and/or girls with disabilities and share your thoughts and opinions. The discussion will not last longer than one hour.

You will remain anonymous, and your name will not be included in any reporting. You will receive a draft copy of the report to review for anywhere we reference your organization before it is published. You will not receive any payment for taking part in this study. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using codes instead of names and storing data on password-protected computers. Only the researchers will have access to any notes that are taken.

The session will be recorded. You will have the right to review/edit the recording after the session if you wish. These recordings may also be transcribed. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement and this transcription will not be shared with the UN Trust Fund.

In any reports, journal articles or presentations prepared based on the data collected during this study, you will remain anonymous.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the below Declaration of Consent and email it back to the lead researcher Dr Selina Palm (selinapalm@hotmail.com).

## Declaration by participant

By signing below, I (*add full name*) agree to take part in this research study on results and lessons learned from the UN Trust Fund Special Window on ending violence against women and girls with disabilities, conducted by Drs Selina Palm and Elisabet Le Roux.

I declare that:

- I have read the above information.
- If I am not fluent and comfortable with English, I have consulted with someone who is, who was able to translate and explain it to me.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurized to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalized or prejudiced in any way.
- All issues related to privacy and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide have been explained to my satisfaction.

Signed on \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant



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