

CREATING SPACES TO TAKE ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS THEORY OF CHANGE



Photo: Kieran Doherty / Oxfam / Nepal

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Photo: Irina Werning / Oxfam / Pakistan

This narrative and the accompanying visual (**Annex 3**) describe the Theory of Change underpinning the Creating Spaces to Take Action on Violence Against Women and Girls project. Creating Spaces seeks to reduce Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Philippines and Nepal. The project contributes to the Oxfam Strategic Plan (2013-2019), and in particular, the Gender Justice Change Goal outcome which aims to reduce the social acceptability and incidence of VAWG/GBV.

The Theory of Change comprises three strategic pillars that work together to contribute to the changes the project seeks to support:

PILLAR 1: Engaging key community actors to support and promote positive gender norms

PILLAR 2: Supporting women and girls who have experienced violence

PILLAR 3: Building knowledge and capacity of institutions and alliances to influence change

BOX 1

Creating Spaces for what?

- **Creating Spaces** where key community stakeholders can identify, take responsibility for and nurture positive gender equitable attitudes and norms (*key to prevention*)
- **Creating Spaces** for women and girl survivors to access safe spaces in relation to support services and empowering economic opportunities (*key to response*)
- **Creating Spaces** for CSOs, especially WROs, other institutions and networks to connect, reflect, share, learn and adapt their approaches to reducing VAWG and the prevalence of CEFM, based on new knowledge and innovation, including mobilizing promising ICTs (*key to sustainability*)

As depicted in **Annex 3**, the project will take an integrated and multi-faceted approach, acting on multiple levels (individual, community, institutional and societal) with diverse actors.

Underpinning the Theory of Change are the **10 Guiding Principles that Shape Oxfam's Approach** (**Annex 1**) to changing negative attitudes, social norms and behaviours.

Building on Oxfam's experience of working to shift power relations, the Theory of Change **takes a non-linear view of change**, recognizing that work to reduce VAWG and CEFM is likely to provoke backlash or attempts to push back or reverse previous gains – these results must be anticipated and managed.

The Theory of Change builds on Oxfam's understanding that **Southern-based civil society organizations (CSOs) are key agents in determining the direction of change** in their societies. As such, building the capacity of project partners to work effectively to reduce VAWG and CEFM is key to long-term sustainability, and therefore a central component of this project.

Being clear about how we are using key terminology is important for the Theory of Change; **Annex 2** offers proposed 'project' definitions for key terms, while acknowledging that these may need to be refined on a country by country basis in relation to specific contexts.

This narrative document outlines the evidence or rationale behind each project pillar, along with its related strategies to describe how the project intends to achieve the desired outcomes. Specific sets of activities for each the project strategies are outlined below. For each pillar there is a description of assumptions upon which these strategies are based, along with an effort to name the specific social change theories (drivers of change) implicit in the selected strategies, explaining why the strategies are likely to support the desired outcomes.



Photo: Oxfam / Indonesia



PILLAR ONE: ENGAGING KEY COMMUNITY ACTORS TO SUPPORT AND PROMOTE POSITIVE GENDER NORMS

Strategies and activities for this pillar target three groups: influencers, youth/adolescents and women and girls who are community leaders, with the desired outcome of strengthening their engagement to advance women’s leadership and rights, and to reduce VAWG and CEFM.

RATIONALE:

Emerging evidence suggests that in order to shift harmful gender norms and inequalities that perpetuate VAWG and CEFM, and thereby reduce violence, project strategies should support shifts in ‘social’ expectations — not just ‘individual’ attitudes about gender equality and social acceptability of VAWG/CEFM — to catalyze and reinforce new norms and behaviours. Influencers, for example, can be powerful forces in shaping community members’ attitudes and behaviours by changing social expectations and promoting positive social norms, as well as by acting as supporters (or blockers) of gender equality laws, policies, regulations. Likewise, working with youth to develop and reinforce gender-equitable

attitudes and behaviours, including healthier relationships and alternative lifestyle options, is known to be an effective strategy for long-term sustainable change. Related to this, evidence is mounting that working with men and boys is a key strategy for reducing VAWG. Building on Oxfam’s work on transformative women’s leadership, we also know that empowering women and girl leaders in communities to understand their rights and to build their capacity to claim their rights is a long-term strategy that can upset the gender ‘status quo’ and model positive gender norms. Finally, most of the countries implementing the project have legislation and policies in place regarding VAWG and CEFM, but these are often poorly understood and unevenly implemented; emphasis will be placed on building knowledge among influencers of these legal frameworks, along with strengthening accountability mechanisms, particularly informal systems (e.g. those upheld by traditional and religious leaders, community safety/neighbourhood watch groups, shelters and survivor support groups, women’s rights organizations) to support implementation.



TABLE 1:

Broad Strategies	Social Change Theories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Awareness raising and positive gender attitudes and behaviours modeling workshops ■ Media, edutainment and public awareness campaigns ■ Knowledge and skills training on legal frameworks and implementation ■ Women’s leadership training ■ Advocacy, lobbying and political campaigning ■ Monitoring implementation of formal and informal laws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Peer group strategies for mobilizing positive gender norms and modeling positive behavior ■ Tipping points/building critical mass of supporters ■ Women’s empowerment and leadership ■ Legislative and policy change

ASSUMPTIONS:

- Training will increase the capacity of influencers to change or implement laws;
- Exposing influencers and youth to alternative gender norms and opportunities to reflect on and discuss these norms with peers will support attitude and behaviour change;
- Women and girls will become more active in demanding their rights if there are concomitant changes in the attitudes and behaviours of people around them;
- Advocating for changes in laws and rules can reinforce changes we are seeking in attitudes and behaviours;
- Strengthening of (formal and informal) accountability mechanisms at different levels makes clear the expected behaviour to which people will be held to account, and helps to sustain and reinforce positive behaviour change, including at individual (personal) responsibility and collective (political) responsibility.

PILLAR TWO: SUPPORTING WOMEN AND GIRLS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE

Strategies and activities in this pillar target women and girls who have experienced violence, including CEFM, along with staff of key institutions (CSOs, especially women’s rights organizations, state and private sector) that offer either social and legal support services or economic opportunities, with the desired outcome of improving access by women and girls to such services.

RATIONALE:

Evidence suggests that access to services is key to preventing violence from re-occurring by building women and girls’ choices and control over their lives, in addition to meeting the immediate needs of those who have experienced violence. As such, essential

service provision is crucial to both preventing and responding to VAWG and CEFM. Many of those experiencing violence often do not know about available services and how they can access them. Furthermore, many women and girls are not even aware of their right to demand and access quality services. At the same time, social and legal service providers (i.e. social workers, therapists, legal support workers and police) and their respective organizations are often the first point of contact for women and girls who have experienced violence. They play a crucial role in both supporting women and girls to feel comfortable accessing services, as well as in challenging negative social attitudes and stigmatization. Table 2 maps project strategies and underlying social change theories for this project pillar.

TABLE 2:

Broad Strategies	Social Change Theories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Connecting those who experience VAWG/CEFM with quality social and legal services ■ Awareness raising and leadership skills building targeting women and girls who have experienced violence ■ Training women and girls who have experienced violence in economic and livelihood opportunities ■ Financial support to services (shelters, counselling/psycho-social support, legal aid) ■ Building capacity of key service providers to deliver quality social and legal services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Women’s empowerment and leadership ■ Women’s economic empowerment ■ Modelling positive behaviour

ASSUMPTIONS:

- The quality of services can be improved through skills training and awareness raising to shift attitudes and behaviours of key service providers;
- Women’s awareness about available services will enable them to better access these services, particularly if concomitant community efforts shift attitudes about social acceptability of violence and reduce stigmatization of those who experience violence;
- Building life skills, especially economic and livelihood skills, builds women and girls’ independence and resilience, enabling them to make choices and control decisions about their lives.



BOX 2

VAWG Organizational Capacity Assessment

To guide capacity building efforts for partner organizations, Creating Spaces will use a ‘fit for purpose’ methodology reflecting best practice from Oxfam Canada’s successful organizational capacity assessment tool (CAT) and the International Center for Research on Women’s VAWG organizational capacity assessment tool. The methodology guides project partners in a self-assessment of current capacity across a range of dimensions, including health and social support services, legal aid, advocacy, media and communications, capacity building and training (which includes reflection on social norms), learning and adapting from best practice, alliances, linkages and relationships. Assessment allows the identification of areas for capacity improvement, and revisiting the process annually tracks changes in capacity over the life time of the project.

PILLAR THREE: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY OF INSTITUTIONS AND ALLIANCES TO INFLUENCE CHANGE

Strategies and activities in this pillar target partner CSOs, especially women’s rights organizations, and national and regional networks and alliances. The desired outcome is to support the increased use of innovative knowledge, including best and emerging practice for response, prevention, and accountability mechanisms to end VAWG and CEFM.

RATIONALE:

CSOs, and particularly women’s rights organizations, the latter often led by women who have experienced violence, play a key role to play in working to prevent VAWG and require ongoing support in this capacity. At the same time, across the sector there is growing understanding that ‘evidence’ informed programming, advocacy and influencing is needed to strengthen

policy and practice. Work to reduce VAWG and CEFM can be strengthened with a broader understanding of what constitutes ‘evidence’ and ‘knowledge’ and ensuring that projects are informed by academic research and experiments, as well as by the experience of practitioners and the voices of women and girls and their organizations. This project will model transparency and accountability by ensuring that project partners, including Oxfam, have the capacity required to design, implement, evaluate and learn from effective and ethically grounded projects, advocacy and partnerships to reduce VAWG and CEFM (see Box 2 on the proposed capacity building methodology). The Oxfam VAWG/GBV Knowledge Hub will play a key role in generating and disseminating project learning, insights and evidence (see Box 3).

TABLE 3:

Broad Strategies	Social Change Theories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational capacity building (VAWG specific) Research, including participatory action research Synthesis and dissemination of knowledge and learning (internal/external digital platforms) Methodology development of ICTs for real time feedback loops to monitor social services and (formal and informal) policy implementation Convening and facilitating linkages and alliances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge and evidence has a role to play and can be mobilized in support of fostering social change Collective power and social movements (especially women’s rights organizations)

ASSUMPTIONS:

- Projects, advocacy and influencing can become more effective in reducing VAWG and prevalence if greater emphasis is placed on generating and using new research, best practice and learning;
- Improving capacity of project partners to design, implement and learn from VAWG initiatives contributes to more effective work to reduce VAWG and CEFM and is key to long term project sustainability;
- By modelling accountability and transparency, project partners take responsibility for and contribute to global accountability on VAWG/CFEM;
- Collective power of alliances and networks, particularly of women’s rights organizations, is critical for influencing lasting and long-term sustainable change.

BOX 3

Oxfam’s VAWG/GBV Knowledge Hub

The VAWG/GBV Knowledge Hub exists to support Oxfam program colleagues in countries and regions to:

- Improve the quality and coherence of Oxfam’s VAWG/GBV programs;
- Improve VAWG/GBV influencing work; and
- Support efforts to increase funding for these programs and initiatives.

The Knowledge Hub bases its work on two key principles:

- The majority of its’ work must respond to need and interests expressed by our primary audience – Oxfam program colleagues in countries and regions working on VAWG/GBV; and
- The Knowledge Hub prioritizes amplifying the wealth of their knowledge and insights on ending VAWG/GBV, as well as connecting them to external trends and innovation, and to each other.

ANNEX 1: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

10

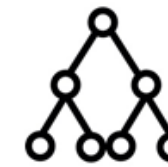
TEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES THAT SHAPE OXFAM’S APPROACH



CHANGES IN SOCIAL NORMS are critical to lasting, transformative change



ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS are critical to sustaining change in Social Norms



Programs/projects should target **MULTIPLE LEVELS, SECTORS & TIMEFRAMES**



EMPOWERING WOMEN, girls and gender non-identifying people is central to shifting imbalances in powerful and critical to targeting gender inequality



INTERSECTIONAL and CONTEXTUAL ANALYSES are central to changes in social norms



Influential Norm Setters, including **TRADITION AND COMMUNITY LEADERS ARE POWERFUL ALLIES**



Oxfam’s added value is our **TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH** along with a few other key roles like convener, ally in change, supporting capacity building



DUTY BEARERS ARE CRITICAL in both modeling positive attitudes and influencing their institutions to creating a positive enabling environment



WOMEN AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS are vital to creating lasting changes in social norms



ESSENTIAL SERVICE PROVISION IS KEY to preventing and responding to VAWG/GBV



Photo: Oxfam / Pakistan

ANNEX 2: WORKING DEFINITIONS FOR THE CREATING SPACES PROJECT

Creating Spaces will use the following definitions to guide our work — this list is not comprehensive, but will form the basis of the way we use common terminology.¹

1. **Influencers:** This term will be used to simplify references to ‘religious, community, private sector and political leaders’ and other leaders who act as custodians of customs, practices and social norms (‘norm-setters’) within communities who shape expectations about appropriate behaviour and who as duty bearers have the power to support implementation of formal and informal laws and rules.
2. **Youth:** As there is no universally agreed upon definition; the project will follow the UN definition of ‘youth’ as young women and men ages 15–24.²
3. **Adolescence:** As there is no universally agreed upon definition; the project will follow the UN definition of ‘adolescence’ as ages 10–19.³

4. **Child:** The UN Convention defines a ‘child’ as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood below this.⁴ The project will follow country specific definitions.
5. The project will use the globally recognised terminology ‘**Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM)**’. There are no universally agreed upon definitions for ‘early’ or ‘forced’ marriage; inception phase mapping studies will determine the situation specific to each project country.
6. **VAWG and GBV:** The terms violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender-based violence (GBV) are often used interchangeably. VAWG and CEFM are both expressions of GBV. GBV, however, also includes violence against men, boys, and sexual minorities or those with gender-non-conforming identities. While violence against these other groups is often rooted in the same gender inequalities and harmful gender norms, Creating Spaces will focus on VAWG, since it is the most prevalent form of GBV in the project countries.



Photo: Oxfam / Indonesia

7. **Survivors and/or victims:** As these terms are contested concepts, the project proposes using the terminology ‘**women and girls who experience violence**’ while at the same time opening up discussion around the notion of the journey from ‘victim’ to ‘survivor’. The term ‘survivor’ is important because it recognizes the agency of women and the individual recovery and healing process, while the notion of ‘victim’ reminds us of the structural and systemic nature of VAWG.⁵
 - ii) The accountability of informal (non-state) security and justice actors (e.g. traditional and religious leaders, community safety groups, victim support groups, legal aid clinics, paralegals, women’s rights organizations, neighbour watch groups) is now also recognized.
 - iii) The growing understanding of the role of individual attitudes, behaviours and social norms in underpinning the acceptability of VAWG and CEFM brings into sharp focus individual (personal) accountability.
 - iv) In addition, Oxfam’s commitment to ‘social accountability’ requires Creating Spaces to model accountability and transparency in relationships and partnerships, and to hold ourselves to account for ethical, safe, inclusive programming and advocacy on VAWG and CEFM.
8. **Women’s Rights Organization (WRO):** For the purposes of the project, the term WRO refers to autonomous organizations led by women whose mission is to advance women’s rights.
9. **Accountability:** The project takes a broad definition of accountability, keeping in mind the following:
 - i) Historically, emphasis has been placed on mechanisms to hold ‘state’ duty bearers (such as security and justice actors, including policy-makers, the police, military, judiciary

¹ Beyond clarifying definitions, with regard to definitions 2–5, the project will follow appropriate ethical standards and protection policies for working with these groups, in addition to globally accepted guidelines for working on VAWG (i.e. WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations).

² <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/One%20pager%20on%20youth%20demographics%206F.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Guiding_Principles.pdf

⁵ See <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/rahila-gupta/victim-vs-survivor-feminism-and-language>.

ANNEX 3: CREATING SPACES TO TAKE ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PROJECT THEORY OF CHANGE

