

Gender-based violence: recognizing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV) in community conservation

Gender-based violence is common

GBV is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetuated against a person that is based on their biological sex, gender identity, or perceived adherence to culturally defined expectations of what it means to be a man, woman, boy, or girl. It is one of the most widespread forms of violence, affecting individuals and communities everywhere, and defies class structure, age, religion, education levels, and geography.

GBV is rooted in structural inequality and power imbalances and exploits societal norms regarding masculinity and femininity. Although people of all genders can experience GBV, a large proportion of GBV is aimed specifically at women, girls and gender non-conforming people. GBV is a systemic social problem that crosscuts sectors. It is shaped by and reinforced through patriarchal social norms, unequal relationships, discriminatory laws and unresponsive institutions.

Owing to multiple forms of discrimination, indigenous women are significantly more likely to experience GBV than non-indigenous women, with an estimated 1 in 3 indigenous women raped during their lifetime¹.

Gender-based violence is closely linked to the environment

Extensive research from IUCN/USAID highlights the very interconnected nature of GBV and the environment, underscoring that *GBV is a barrier to equitable, effective, rights-based conservation*. For example:

- GBV is used as a means of control over the access, use, management, and ownership of natural resources. Increasing resource scarcity and environmental degradation due to climate change and humanitarian disasters exacerbates tensions and results in heightened instances of GBV.
- Areas with wildlife crime and illegal resource extraction overlap with high rates of GBV.

What is GBV?

- **Sexual violence:** rape, assault, molestation and unwanted/unsolicited touching, sex trafficking.
- **Psychological violence:** harassment, bullying, insults, controlling behavior, exploitation; can occur in real life or online (cyber violence).
- **Physical violence:** beating or abuse in general, which may also lead to injury or death.
- **Socio-cultural violence:** social ostracism, discrimination, political marginalization, biased communal justice or other negative social norms.
- **Economic violence:** complete control over the victim's money, economic resources or activities; restricting access to financial resources, education or the labor market.

¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli Corpuz (2015)

- GBV is used to discourage and stop women from speaking out for their rights and their communities' rights.

Gender-based violence impacts conservation success

GBV is a barrier to achieving project goals. The presence of GBV within a community or household shapes how people interact with each other, and ultimately impacts community projects or programs. GBV negatively affects the long-term health, wellbeing and productive capacity of survivors. Many of CI's field programs have reported that violence is present within the communities where we work and impacts the implementation and sustainability of our conservation and human wellbeing initiatives.

GBV can be an unintended project impact. Despite good intentions, project activities can perpetuate or increase GBV given that they often include socio-economic benefits and empower people. As examples: increasing household income can lead to increased alcoholism and associated GBV; women gaining control of money and/or leadership can cause a backlash from male relatives; project activities require participants to travel or stay in places that may put them at greater risk of GBV.

The shadow pandemic: GBV + COVID-19

COVID interacts with existing chronic and acute stressors to increase vulnerabilities; already vulnerable groups such as women, children and indigenous peoples are experiencing COVID impacts disproportionately.

Around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased sexual and gender-based violence. As people are forced to stay at home, some are at a heightened risk of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, child abuse, and other forms of GBV.

Because disasters exacerbate pre-existing gender inequities and power hierarchies, violence in the home may worsen as prolonged quarantine and economic stressors increase tension in the household. Women and girls are isolated from the people and resources that can help them, and they have few opportunities to distance themselves from their abusers.

See IUCN's note on [GBV + environmental links during COVID-19](#) for more information.

Key steps for preventing and responding to GBV in conservation projects

1. Engage diverse community members and partner organizations in project planning.

This will help to ensure that the project's impacts (positive or negative) on community norms and existing gender roles and inequalities are well understood. CI's [Gender + Social Equity Guidelines](#) can help to guide the design of gender-responsive projects. Gender-responsive, socially inclusive project design is a critical step to mitigating violence and preventing exacerbation of existing violence. Developing strategies and activities to prevent exacerbation of GBV should include proactively engaging men and boys² and partnering with gender or GBV-focused organizations to define joint activities³. Ensure that any project-level grievance system is designed to capture GBV-related project grievances.

Gender-sensitive grievance mechanisms

A well-designed grievance mechanism should capture and respond to reports in a safe and appropriate way for GBV survivors:

- Involve local women's groups and women leaders in developing the mechanism.
- Ensure that communication about the mechanism is done in a method and in venues accessible to all.
- Methods for responding should be confidential and secure.
- Grievance mechanism manager, if not equipped to respond to a GBV report, should an appropriate delegate.

2. Learn about GBV norms and prevalence

as part of the project's gender analysis or community engagement process for the project or program. Data can be gathered from government agencies, on-line⁴, from development/humanitarian organizations working in the same location, local women's organizations and community leaders. Understand what national laws and strategies exist regarding GBV, including any specific procedures or considerations if the survivor is a minor. If you cannot find any specific data on GBV prevalence for the project area, remember that GBV takes place everywhere, thus it is safe to assume that some level of GBV exists in the area where you will be working.

3. Create a 'referral list' of GBV services

so that staff are prepared if GBV emerges or is disclosed as an issue during the project. GBV survivors should be referred for appropriate assistance, for their safety, health and psychological wellbeing. The list should include **formal** (local authorities, health facilities + personnel, social welfare specialists, CSOs/NGOs working on GBV) and **informal** (women's groups, trusted individuals, religious + community leaders) actors and networks. Identifying and connecting to the right services may be challenging, especially in the remote areas where CI and partners often work. See below for example.

² [MenEngage](#) is an international alliance focused on engaging men and boys in gender equality, many with member organizations in CI's operating countries. [Promundo](#) is a global leader in advancing gender equality and preventing violence by engaging men and boys.

³ [Prospera](#) is an international network of women's organizations with members in many of CI's operating countries; this can be a good place to start gathering information and making partnerships.

⁴ Sources for GBV data include: [national Demographic and Health surveys](#), [UN Women's Global Database on Violence against Women](#), or a simple search for "GBV + (your country)"

- 4. Develop a procedure** to guide staff and partners in understanding how to respond, particularly if GBV is considered to be a risk in your project (either it is common in the area of intervention or the project has the potential to exacerbate/contribute to GBV). This procedure should have a survivor-centered approach (decisions driven by the survivor themselves). Below is a sample protocol, which can be adapted to specific project contexts. This procedure should be in place to support staff if they feel they may have encountered someone who is a GBV survivor.
- 5. Provide training for staff and partners,** especially those who work closely with communities, to understand CI's role and responsibility in these situations and how best to respond if staff or partners witness or are told of incidences. Training should include: the country's laws and legal requirements relating to GBV, basic GBV concepts, skills and procedures for responding to GBV when disclosure occurs including clear roles/responsibilities of staff.
- 6. Add GBV-relevant monitoring** to your projects in order to ensure that project activities are not exacerbating the situation. For example, plan for regular check-ins with women and men engaged in the project to see how project activities are impacting their lives, monitor the project's grievance system to see if GBV incidences are reported and engage with key informants/community leaders to document any unintended consequences of the project. Make sure that any engagement related to GBV is sensitive, survivor-centered, and that anyone engaging with GBV information is trained to do so.
- 7. Ensure that staff have support for personal trauma** that may occur from being involved in an incident. Being confronted with GBV can be very hard on the person receiving and supporting the survivor, and it is important that CI staff have the assistance and resources to cope with personal distress. In addition to CI field teams/colleagues being a source of support, CI staff can access 24/7 support from [Workplace Options](#) including immediate contact with a professional counsellor (available in all of CI's main languages).

Key sources of additional information:

How to support survivors of gender-based violence when a GBV actor is not available in your area (13p): available in [English](#), [Spanish](#), [French](#), and [Portuguese](#).

Guidance for Gender Based Violence (GBV) Monitoring and Mitigation within non-GBV Focused Sectoral Programming (32p): available in [English](#).

Gender-based violence and environment linkages – IUCN (272p): available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). And associated [GBV-ENV Learning Center](#).

UN Women module on working with men + boys to end violence against women + girls (module walks you through the project cycle giving step-by-step guidance with case studies and links to tools and other resources): available in [English](#), [Spanish](#), and [French](#)

Video: What is Gender based Violence? (3 minutes): in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)

Example: Procedure for responding to GBV incidents

GBV survivors (victims) or someone on their behalf (a reporter) may disclose an incident to CI or partner staff during the course of program activities, engagements, and interactions.



Example: GBV referral list

Service provider/organization	Services provided	Location/address	Contact info	Target group(s)
Informal, local (e.g. women's groups, places of worship, trusted individuals, community organizations, etc.)				
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
Health/medical care				
1.				
2.				
GBV case management				
1.				
2.				
Psychosocial support services				
1.				
2.				
Children/Child survivors of violence				
1.				
2.				
Safety and Security				
1.				
2.				
Legal services				
1.				
2.				