



International



SAFE FUTURES.

**REDUCING VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH
DISABILITY IN CAMBODIA.**

A LEARNING PAPER.

Project funded by:





ADDRESSING A COMPLEX CHALLENGE WITH A COORDINATED APPROACH.

In Cambodia, women and girls with disability (WAGWD) face multiple, distinct and compounding challenges. Most live in poverty and many are victims of violence. Compounding these difficulties is the fact that WAGWD are discriminated against because of their gender and because of their disability, and they often have limited information about services that can protect them from and help them survive violence. Survivors of and those vulnerable to violence are often not aware of their rights under existing law and the services that are available to them.

The Royal Government of Cambodia has committed to addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG), including those with disability, but service providers are not effectively following through on those commitments due to poor capacity and lack of coordination. There is limited overlap in the work in Cambodia on disability rights and VAWG. This results in violence prevention activities that do not adequately address the rights of women with disabilities as their voice is not included and current efforts do not always reach them.

Additionally, VAWG service providers do not design essential services and responses that are inclusive of WAGWD. And policy makers, while recognizing the need to be inclusive of WAGWD, do not have adequate information on gaps and possible good practice models.

This intervention has sought to address these complex challenges through partnership, coordination and capacity building. A leader in addressing VAWG (Cambodia Women's Crisis Centre) has partnered with a leader in disability rights (ADD International) to embed disability inclusive practice in a district based multi-sectoral network approach to improve prevention and response services.

A core component of the intervention is strengthening the capacity of groups of people with disability - self-help groups and Disabled People's Organisations - to prevent violence and identify and refer survivors of violence to appropriate services - including legal services, counselling, health care, and physical and emotional rehabilitation services.

The remainder of this paper presents observations, emerging learning and practice with potential from the intervention's first year of implementation.

ABOUT THE PROJECT.

The intervention has completed its first year, and it is clear that the challenge is complex. While learning is emerging and some areas of practice show promise, it is too early to consider these reflections as indications of patterns to replicate. In the following section we have identified emerging learning and potential practice, grouped by observations on possible ways to reduce violence, the role and process of capacity building and the prevalence and nature of disability-based violence.

**Project delivered in partnership with the
Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre (CWCC):**



OBSERVATION.

POSSIBLE WAYS TO REDUCE VIOLENCE.

Our observations on potential practice to reduce violence include making (both women survivors and) male offenders aware; making referral systems easier to use and understand; using empowering village volunteers (activists) to expedite safe case resolution; and sensitising police to encourage effective intervention.

PRACTICE WITH POTENTIAL.

Making male offenders aware.

Our experience suggests that awareness raising among male perpetrators of domestic violence together with their family has the potential to reduce violence in the family. Insights shared by village volunteers and feedback from the female participant suggests that it is possible that awareness raising activities, by involving all family members (not just women alone), may reduce the perceived threat of such conversation among males. We observe that most participants in awareness campaigns are female and believe there is possibly an opportunity to further reduce domestic violence if we can foster more male participation in such campaigns.

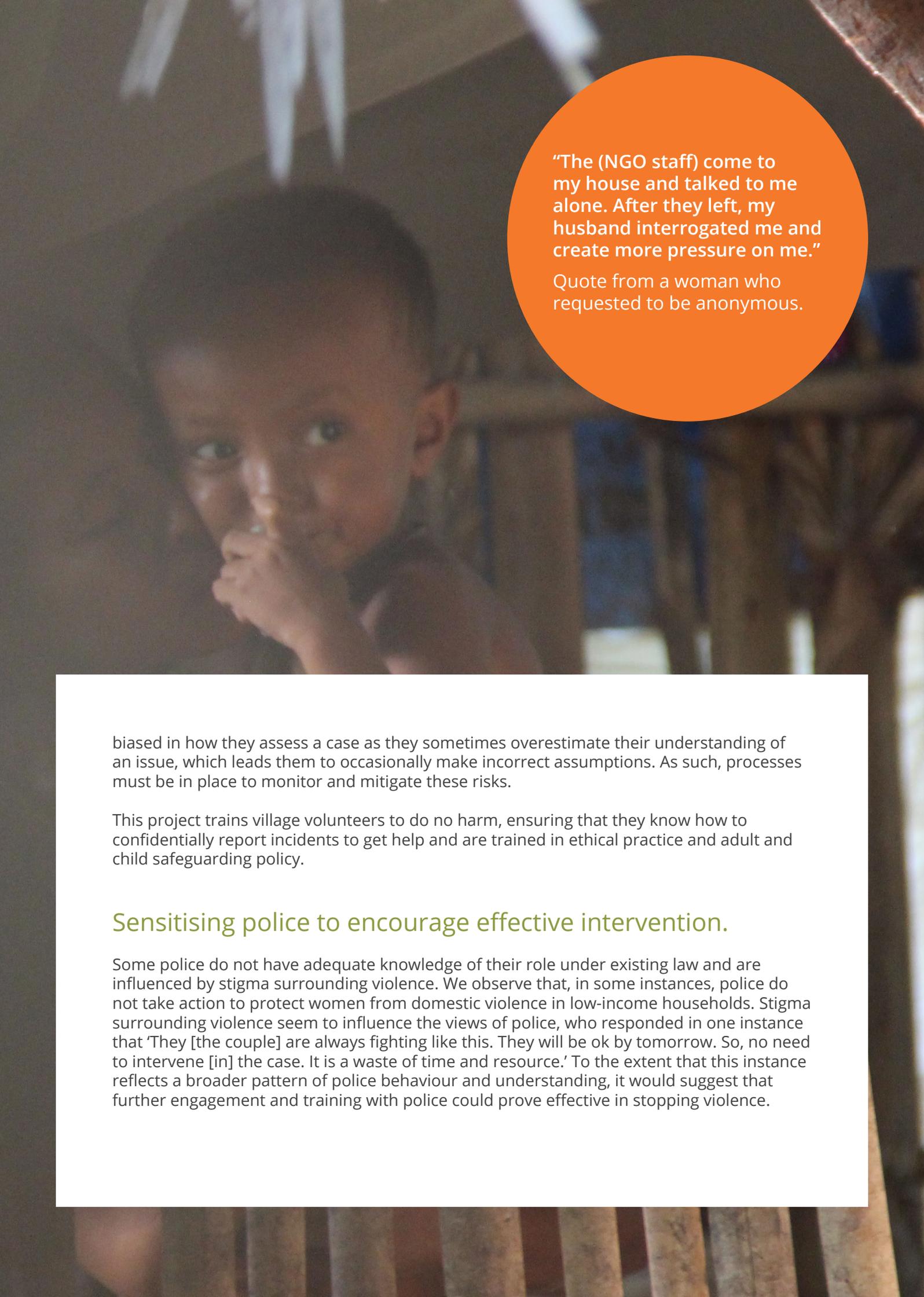
Making referral systems easier to use and understand.

The referral system contains technical terms that local people, including DPOs, SHGs and some commune council members, find difficult to understand. Beyond training these actors on how to use the referral system, further consideration should be given to re-designing the system itself to make it easier to use for those vulnerable to violence.

Empowering village volunteers.

The village volunteer plays a key role in making changes in their community. They live in the village, know everyone in the village and understand the context of the village. They put their heart into their volunteering role because of their attachment to the community, their neighbours and their relatives. In environments where legal processes are weak, village volunteers are also, for better or worse, often inevitably the first responders to reported cases of violence. As a volunteer's role as an intermediary is at times inevitable, we must build their capacity to process reports as quickly and as safely as possible, transferring cases to the appropriate authority and connecting such cases to the appropriate service providers.

Empowering local volunteers for reporting purposes carries risks, including among other things, the possibility that a volunteer compromises survivor anonymity, which may put the survivor or volunteer at potential further risk of violence in retaliation. Volunteers can also be



"The (NGO staff) come to my house and talked to me alone. After they left, my husband interrogated me and create more pressure on me."

Quote from a woman who requested to be anonymous.

biased in how they assess a case as they sometimes overestimate their understanding of an issue, which leads them to occasionally make incorrect assumptions. As such, processes must be in place to monitor and mitigate these risks.

This project trains village volunteers to do no harm, ensuring that they know how to confidentially report incidents to get help and are trained in ethical practice and adult and child safeguarding policy.

Sensitising police to encourage effective intervention.

Some police do not have adequate knowledge of their role under existing law and are influenced by stigma surrounding violence. We observe that, in some instances, police do not take action to protect women from domestic violence in low-income households. Stigma surrounding violence seem to influence the views of police, who responded in one instance that 'They [the couple] are always fighting like this. They will be ok by tomorrow. So, no need to intervene [in] the case. It is a waste of time and resource.' To the extent that this instance reflects a broader pattern of police behaviour and understanding, it would suggest that further engagement and training with police could prove effective in stopping violence.



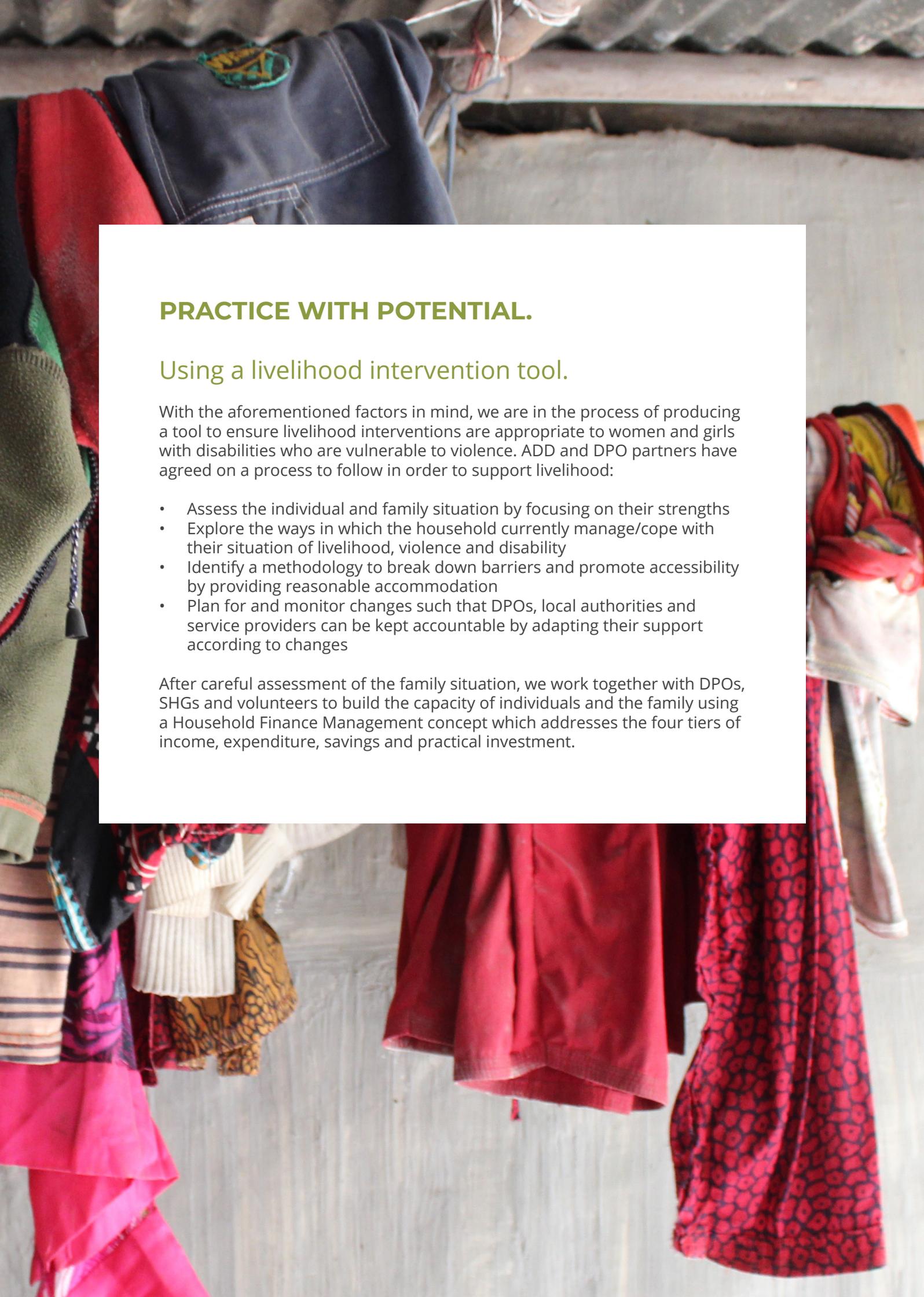
EMERGING LEARNING.

To better address violence, address livelihoods and take care to do no harm.

A household's financial situation can be both a cause and effect of violence. Violence creates a vicious cycle: violence negatively affects household finances, and in turn, negative impacts on household finances may increase violence against women and girls, and in particular for those with disabilities. Through practical experience across ADD country programmes, we have observed a heightened level of intra-household violence towards WGWD, including violence coming from female members of the household. In the Cambodian context, it is possible that violence stems from dynamics surrounding household finances.

For Khmer people, tradition holds that the husband earns the money while the wife looks after the money (like a bank). This traditional view affects the way men think and behave. As most Cambodian men do not manage household finances, they often do not know how money is spent. This lack of knowledge means a husband can come to doubt or mistrust his wife, which can then lead to violence in the home. Making men more aware of household finance, by reducing mistrust, could reduce violence and even improve the way in which a household manages their finances.

While better access to independent income generating activities for women with disabilities could help reduce the risk of violence, we are also aware that this independent access could provoke backlash from other members of the household. For this reason, "do no harm" principles and safeguarding mitigation strategies must be in place in order to appropriately address livelihood in practice, as outlined below.

A photograph of various colorful clothes hanging on a line against a corrugated metal wall. The clothes include a dark blue long-sleeved shirt, a red garment, a green sweater, a white ribbed sweater, a yellow patterned garment, a red patterned garment, and a red patterned skirt. The background is a light-colored wall with a corrugated metal texture.

PRACTICE WITH POTENTIAL.

Using a livelihood intervention tool.

With the aforementioned factors in mind, we are in the process of producing a tool to ensure livelihood interventions are appropriate to women and girls with disabilities who are vulnerable to violence. ADD and DPO partners have agreed on a process to follow in order to support livelihood:

- Assess the individual and family situation by focusing on their strengths
- Explore the ways in which the household currently manage/cope with their situation of livelihood, violence and disability
- Identify a methodology to break down barriers and promote accessibility by providing reasonable accommodation
- Plan for and monitor changes such that DPOs, local authorities and service providers can be kept accountable by adapting their support according to changes

After careful assessment of the family situation, we work together with DPOs, SHGs and volunteers to build the capacity of individuals and the family using a Household Finance Management concept which addresses the four tiers of income, expenditure, savings and practical investment.

OBSERVATION.

THE ROLE AND PROCESS OF CAPACITY BUILDING.

Our observations on the role and process of capacity building include: when civil society is trained to put disability in the centre, their involvement can enable authorities to better respond to VAWGWD; forging a relationship between a DPO and local government can have a positive reciprocal effect; and assessment is a process that in itself builds capacity.

EMERGING LEARNING.

When civil society is trained to put disability in the centre, their involvement can enable authorities to better respond to violence against disabled women and girls.

DPOs, commune facilitators, village volunteers support authorities to respond to VAWGWD through putting disability in the centre. In one instance, there was a wrong assumption made on a rape case because the investigator initially refused to recognise the case as 'rape' because the girl did not shout for help. After the civil society actor consulted with the investigator and shared knowledge and experiences from training that was provided by ADD Cambodia on intellectual disability, the girl survivor was identified as living with intellectual disabilities. Because of the identification of disability, the case was then investigated in more depth than general cases, leading ultimately to the case of 'rape' being eventually confirmed. It is possible that the impact of this particular case may endure. A statement from one local authority we worked with was encouraging:

"Supporting women and girls with disabilities survivors of violence to get justice is mandate of my commune. By involving to the project, my commune has responded to VAWG better than before."

Path Sophear, Commune council member in Samrong Year commune.

As a result of the knowledge sharing and coordination that took place between a disability-focused organisation (ADD), a civil society organisation (CWCC) and the local authority in this case, we believe that, going forward, the investigating authority will be more likely to take disability into consideration as they assess future cases of violence.

A relationship between a DPO and local government can have a positive reciprocal effect.

As part of ADD capacity building activities, DPOs are connected with local government. Having made this connection, DPOs receive support from local authorities to address VAWGWD, which in turn may make local authorities more likely to include disability into their work. The ADD capacity building process helps DPOs identify their needs and supports DPOs as they seek to align local government planning and budgeting priorities according to those identified needs.

We note that local government budgets tend to be focused on needs that are easy to see (eg infrastructure projects) but as the needs of those with disabilities are less visible, those needs are often overlooked by local budgets. We see some evidence that DPOs change that. We have



observed several instances where the commune budget has been allocated for supporting livelihood for women with disabilities. As one DPO leader put it:

“Our organization has built strong relationship with commune office in Phneay and Khtum Kraing. We participate to commune meeting every month. In these meetings, we raise issues face by people with disabilities to the commune to get support. The communes have included disability interventions into the commune plan. The commune had supported us intervene violence cases on girls with disabilities by referring the case to police and intervene livelihood support to the victims.”

Mithona, DPO leader in Samrongtong, Kampong Speu province.

DPOs put the needs of WAGWD in sight of local government, and local budgets change as a result. Linking DPOs with local government lets the needs of those with disabilities inform priorities.

Assessment can be more than measurement.

Experience suggests that assessment of DPOs using ADD International’s Three Circles Tool is a process that in itself builds capacity and motivates performance. In the initial assessment process, DPOs create a development plan that ADD and DPOs work together toward. As ADD and DPOs re-assess to measure progress against plans, DPOs and their constituent self-help groups tell us that they feel more confident in their work as they see progress and feel more confident about the significance of their roles in society. As one DPO member put it:

When I hear about ‘organizational assessment’ at the first time, I feel very worrying. Are they coming to make judgement on us? We understand that we are not strong enough as an organization like NGO. But, when I get involve to do the capacity assessment, I found the tool is useful and quite easy for me to participate. It is a real educational process. After the exercise, I learn what we as organization should DO and not do. It helps us keeping our original identity as voice representation for people with disabilities. We learned what type of allies we need to engage with. Then, we work together to develop improvement plan for our organization.

Thong Sary, UDRK from Svay Rieng province.

In line with the statement above, other DPO board members we spoke with report having improved capacity and feeling more confident to ask questions as a result of the assessment process. Conducting regular capacity re-assessment of DPOs may in itself improve capacity.

OBSERVATION.

THE PREVALENCE OF DISABILITY-BASED VIOLENCE.

Our observations on the prevalence and nature of disability-based violence includes the observation that a large portion of violence cases involve victims with disabilities and those with greater functional difficulty seem to be at greater risk.

EMERGING LEARNING.

Half of violence cases involved women and girls with disabilities.

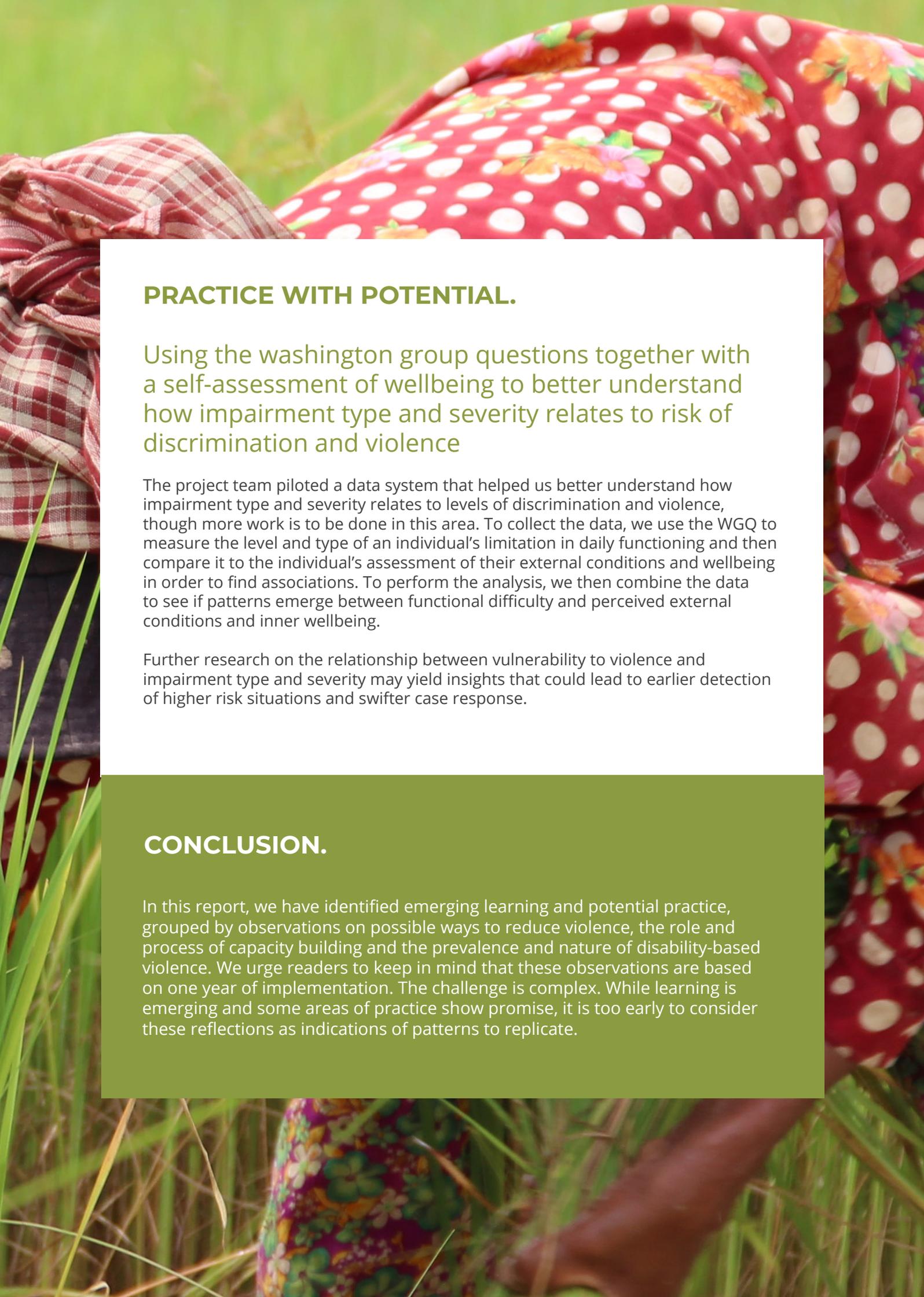
From primary and secondary data collected, half of violence cases were identified as involving women and girls with intellectual disabilities and seeing and hearing impairments. It is possible that offenders see women and girls with these particular types of disabilities as too weak to protect themselves from violence and unlikely to report the violence case to authorities. We observe that while women and girls with any type of disability generally face a higher risk of being abused physically, emotionally, economically and sexually, the type of violence seems to vary based on the type of impairment.

Some women and girls with intellectual disabilities are beaten by family members who do not think they are doing things properly. These women and girls also face a high risk of being raped because they are often not able to make decisions to protect themselves. Perpetrators take advantage of their intellectual impairment, offering them 1000 riels (\$0.25) or one piece of candy in exchange for sex. In some cases, these girl survivors are violated repeatedly. Those with hearing difficulties seem to be almost always affected by emotional violence from family members and at the work place.

These trends suggest that the risk of violence seems to vary by impairment type. Relatedly, we also observe a link between impairment severity and risk of discrimination, as detailed in the subsequent section.

Those with greater functional difficulty may suffer greater discrimination.

We find suggestive evidence from data collected that greater severity of functional difficulty, as identified by the Washington Group Questions, is associated with greater levels of discrimination, as identified by ADD's inner-wellbeing assessment tool. For example, people who cannot do basic daily activities by themselves like eating and self-care are, in poorer households, more likely to be locked out and kept away from others.

The background of the page features a collage of vibrant, patterned fabrics. On the left, there's a red and white checkered fabric. The top right is dominated by a red fabric with white polka dots and floral patterns in orange and pink. The bottom right shows a purple fabric with a colorful floral pattern. The entire scene is set against a backdrop of green grass, with some blades in the foreground on the left.

PRACTICE WITH POTENTIAL.

Using the Washington Group questions together with a self-assessment of wellbeing to better understand how impairment type and severity relates to risk of discrimination and violence

The project team piloted a data system that helped us better understand how impairment type and severity relates to levels of discrimination and violence, though more work is to be done in this area. To collect the data, we use the WGQ to measure the level and type of an individual's limitation in daily functioning and then compare it to the individual's assessment of their external conditions and wellbeing in order to find associations. To perform the analysis, we then combine the data to see if patterns emerge between functional difficulty and perceived external conditions and inner wellbeing.

Further research on the relationship between vulnerability to violence and impairment type and severity may yield insights that could lead to earlier detection of higher risk situations and swifter case response.

CONCLUSION.

In this report, we have identified emerging learning and potential practice, grouped by observations on possible ways to reduce violence, the role and process of capacity building and the prevalence and nature of disability-based violence. We urge readers to keep in mind that these observations are based on one year of implementation. The challenge is complex. While learning is emerging and some areas of practice show promise, it is too early to consider these reflections as indications of patterns to replicate.



International



ADD International is a disability rights organisation. We partner with organisations of disability activists in Africa and Asia and help them access the tools, resources and support they need to build powerful movements for change.

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