Implemented by: CARE Bangladesh

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Women & Girls' Safe Spaces
A Promising Practices Guide

"In a patriarchal society where men are very dominant in the public sphere and women are not allowed to even go out alone, the existence of a WGSS is very critical and important."

- CARE Türkiye-Northwest Syria

Women and Girls' Safe Spaces are a key strategy for the protection and empowerment of diverse women and girls affected by humanitarian crisis.

Women and girls around the world are disproportionately affected by crises. The prevalence and risks of gender-based violence (GBV) increase in time of emergency. Providing safe spaces for the diverse women and girls affected by emergencies is the most widely implemented GBV prevention and response intervention in humanitarian contexts. These spaces are established to promote healing, well-being, protection, and empowerment opportunities.

CARE's GBViE Guidance Note recognizes **Women and Girls' Safe Spaces (WGSS)** as an important GBV response activity and our evidence highlights the impact of WGSS on the lives of women and girls.[i] This document highlights the key principles and interagency standards for the design and implementation of CARE WGSS interventions. It outlines **why WGSS are an important part of CARE's GBViE programming** and **what teams need to know about establishing and managing WGSS.**

It draws on structured key informant interviews with CARE teams implementing WGSS in eight countries.[1] Examples from these are included to illustrate how programs are applying international standards in practice and highlight potential approaches for teams to consider. This guide is relevant for all CARE staff implementing WGSS in humanitarian settings, in frontline, technical support, fundraising, advocacy or supervision and management roles.

Contents:

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[1] Bangladesh, Egypt, Lebanon, Nigeria, South Sudan, Türkiye-Northwest Syria, Uganda and Yemen. Learn more.

Women & Girls' Safe Spaces: What you need to know

A safe space is a place where diverse **women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe**, free of violence, the fear of violence and abuse. It is somewhere they can feel free to express themselves without fear of judgment or harm and is a place where they can work together in solidarity, to mobilise and find their voices and space/fora to raise them.[ii]

During emergencies. WGSS are a vital **entry point** for diverse women and girls to report protection concerns, voice their needs and receive physical and emotional safety. They provide **access** to multi-sectoral GBV response services and psychosocial support. They offer **opportunities** for diverse women and girls to re-build social networks for mutual support and collective action in their community and engage in targeted knowledge and skill building.

INTER-AGENCY MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN EMERGENCIES

The 16 Interagency Minimum Standards establish the minimum GBV prevention, response and risk mitigation actions for programming in emergencies.

Standard 8 covers the minimum requirements for WGSS. This states that WGSS should be available, accessible and **provide quality services, information and activities** that promote **healing, well-being and empowerment**.

Read more in the full Inter-Agency Minimum Standards >

Safe spaces should be **women-and-girls-only spaces**. This is important because, in general, men and boys have more access to community spaces as they do not experience the same limitations in freedom of movement as women and girls.[2]

WGSS may be mobile or may be established in a fixed location. They are different to **one-stop centers**, which provide a direct response to a survivor who has experienced an incident of violence, including health services. WGSS support access to one-stop centers or other GBV response service while providing a broader range of support and opportunities tailored to the specific needs of diverse women and girls.

WGSS have proven effective in emergency response for risk reduction. They are an ideal approach for GBVIE interventions as they are logistically feasible, cost-effective, and can be applied in even the most complicated contexts.

A safe space is a formal or informal place where **women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe**.

A safe space provides somewhere for women and girls to:

- Socialize and re-build their social networks
- Receive social support
- Acquire contextually relevant skills
- Access safe and non-stigmatizing multi-sectorial GBV response services (psychosocial, legal, medical)
- Receive information on issues relating to women's rights, health, and services.

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KEY RESOURCES

Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility: Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies

International Medical Corps (IMC) & International Rescue Committee (IRC): 2019 WOMEN AND GIRLS' SAFE SPACES Toolkit

UNFPA: Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Guidance Note based on lessons learned from the Syrian crisis

UNICEF: Gender Based Violence in Emergencies: Program Resource Pack, Building Girls' and Women's Safety and Resilience

CARE: Examining Women and Girls' Safe Spaces in Humanitarian Contexts: Findings from Northwest Syria & South Sudan

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2 See page 4 below for further detail on LGBTQI+ engagement.

How is a Women & Girls' Safe Space relevant to CARE's goals?

CARE's 2030 Vision places the specific needs of women and girls at the heart of all that we do. WGSS offer opportunities to further this in our humanitarian work.

Women & Girls' Safe Spaces in CARE's approach to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (GBViE)

GBViE is a core pillar of CARE's approach to Gender in Emergencies (GiE). CARE's programmatic approach to GBViE consists of three pillars—**Risk Mitigation**, **Response** and **Prevention**—which at times overlap and together comprise a comprehensive approach to addressing GBV in emergencies.

⚠ **Risk Mitigation**	👤 **Response**	👪 **Prevention**
Interventions to reduce the risk of GBV exposure	Interventions to address the consequences of GBV after it has occurred	Interventions to stop GBV from occurring in the first place

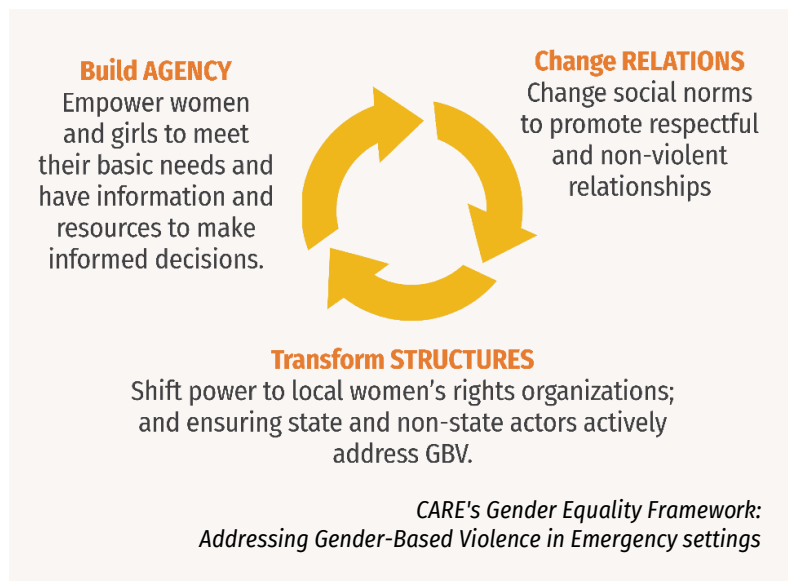*See CARE's GBViE Guidance Note for further details.*

Establishing a WGSS can be one of several components within a GBV program. WGSS are a **GBV response** intervention—acting as an entry point for reporting protection concerns and accessing response services including psychosocial support and case management. WGSS may also support **GBV prevention** programming by acting as a venue for interventions addressing the social and cultural norms that increase vulnerability to GBV, such as awareness raising of rights and positive gender norms.

WGSS may also provide opportunities for women and girls to develop leadership skills and contribute to humanitarian planning and decision-making. WGSS provide an opportunity for women and girls to safely express concerns and provide their input to improve the quality of humanitarian programming provided. The space is also an entry point to encourage safe reporting of safeguarding incidents.

Women & Girls' Safe Spaces and CARE's Gender Equality Framework

The Gender Equality Framework acts as CARE's overarching Theory of Change, including in humanitarian settings. This highlights our focus on addressing the root causes of gender equality across all aspects of women and girls' lives.

Typically, WGSS excel in **building agency** through programming focused on individual empowerment. WGSS also offer opportunities to **change relations** by shifting social norms to promote respectful and non-violent relationships. WGSS may be one component of a comprehensive gender synchronized approach to this which includes engagement of men and boys. However, any components which engage men and boys should be separate to the WGSS as part of wider programming. While less evident, established WGSS have opportunities to **transform structures** through providing platforms for engagement with local women's rights organizations and less formalized women groups and movements, enabling grassroots advocacy campaigns and creating opportunities for engagement with local authorities.

Build AGENCY
Empower women and girls to meet their basic needs and have information and resources to make informed decisions.

Change RELATIONS
Change social norms to promote respectful and non-violent relationships

Transform STRUCTURES
Shift power to local women's rights organizations; and ensuring state and non-state actors actively address GBV.

CARE's Gender Equality Framework: Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Emergency settings

WGSS are a proven model for **meeting humanitarian needs, promoting change across the Gender Equality Framework** and **scaling CARE's impact in emergency contexts**.

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Women & Girls' Safe Spaces: key information

Definition

A WGSS is a structured place where diverse women and girls' physical and emotional safety is respected and where diverse women and girls are supported through processes of empowerment to seek, share, and obtain information, access services, express themselves, enhance psychosocial wellbeing, and more fully realize their rights.[iii]

A Women & Girls' Safe Space is a...	A Women & Girls' Safe Space is NOT a...
• **Physical space** where women and girls can be **free from violence and harassment.** • **Women- and girls-only** space distinct from public spaces inhabited by men. *See note below on LGBTQI+ inclusion.[iv]* • **Entry point** for women and girls **to voice their needs** in humanitarian settings. • **Entry point** for women and girls to **report protection concerns** and **access referrals to GBV response services**, including psychosocial support and case management. • Setting for women and girls to **gain knowledge and skills**. • Setting for women and girls to **foster solidarity** and create and **strengthen social support networks**.	• **One-stop center** providing a direct response to a survivor who has experienced an incident of violence, including health services. *See here for further information on the difference between WGSS and one-stop centers.[v]* • **Safe house** or **shelter** providing emergency housing for survivors from a few days to several months and are often kept in secret locations to protect the residents and staff from potential attacks from perpetrators. • Women's **spaces in reception areas** and health facilities. • **Multipurpose** center or **child-friendly space.** • **Protection desk** or protection integrated community centers.

Who attends WGSS?

WGSS are for diverse women and girls regardless of age, ability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, education level or any other form of vulnerability or marginalization. They are for women and girls and run exclusively by women and girls. See CARE's GBV resource on intersectionality for more information.

For CARE, girls who are in the WGSS can vary from young to adolescent girls. Adolescent girls are usually the more frequent users of WGSS as they are at a higher risk of GBV, especially child, early and forced marriage (CEFM).

> **WGSS AND LGBTIQ+ ENGAGEMENT**
>
> LGBTIQ+ organizations should be consulted to identify if WGSS would be safe for LGBTIQ+ persons. Cisgender women may discriminate against them which can lead to hostility of even "outing" them to the community and their families. Additionally, WGSS services may be accessed by same gender perpetrators in order to perpetuate their crimes.

Design & delivery modes

WGSS should be approached in ways applicable to the humanitarian setting/stage of emergency. Safety audits are important for informing the design of WGSS so these best respond to the needs and safety of women and girls across diverse communities and contexts. The choice of approach, whether static or mobile, should be done in consultation with women and girls to ensure the safe space's relevance and effectiveness. Their views may influence decisions on location, building type, security, ongoing management and more. Static safe spaces will take different forms depending on their location. Within camps these may not be permanent buildings but will have a fixed location for the duration of the program. Within host communities, safe spaces may be rooms rented within government or privately-owned buildings, or exiting safe spaces which have been rehabilitated.

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Static Women & Girls' Safe Space	Mobile Women & Girls' Safe Space
Fixed space established in an easily-reached **central location** which is open during **standard service hours** each day. **Appropriate for:** • **Formal camps** or **informal settlements** where the area of coverage for service provision is clearly delineated, the number of displaced diverse women and girls residing in the location is generally available, and all are considered in need. • **Urban or rural settings** with a relatively defined area of coverage	Safe space **teams moving to locations** where diverse women and girls are displaced, residing or in transit. **Appropriate for:** • **Acute displacement contexts** where a mobile team may be deployed as part of a GBV rapid response team. The space in this context is considered temporary. • **Protracted displacement contexts** in hard-to-reach locations. • Responses with a **geographically dispersed** or random displacement pattern.

Objectives

Five key objectives for WGSS are outlined in the IMC and IRC's 2019 Women and Girls' Safe Spaces Toolkit.

GBV response services	**WGSS provide a vital entry point for female survivors of GBV to safely access information, specialized services, and referrals to health, protection, and other services.** They allow survivors to feel comfortable in disclosing experiences, offer empathetic first-line support, and enable survivors to make informed choices about the range of service options available to them. They may host case management services.
GBV prevention resources	**WGSS serve as a place where diverse women and girls can access information, resources, and support to reduce the risk of violence.** They may provide awareness raising on GBV and women's and adolescent girls' rights. They may encourage women and adolescent girl-led safety audits and support them in their advocacy targeting service providers and community stakeholders, based on prioritized risks and recommendations.
Knowledge & skills	**WGSS facilitate women's and girls' access to knowledge, skills, and services.** They offer women and adolescent girls the opportunity to access information, gain or strengthen skills, and receive support through access to a referral network of safe and tailored services. Activities may cover a range of topics and sectors such as literacy, bookkeeping and artisanship.
Psychosocial support	**WGSS support women's and girls' psychosocial well-being, and create social networks to reduce isolation or seclusion, and enhance integration into community life.** They provide a shared space for women and adolescent girls to relieve stress, be in the company of other women and adolescent girls in a safe environment. This may take the form of informal recreational activities or more structured group interventions.
Collective action	**WGSS encourage women and girls to use their collective power and influence over how their communities and societies are managed and led.** At a minimum, this supports women's and adolescent girls' ability to have a meaningful influence on WGSS programming through safely informing, participating and leading on decision-making within the space. WGSS provide space to plan and implement community-led initiatives that enhance inclusion and empowerment, potentially in partnership with women's rights civil society groups and coalitions.

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Activities

WGSS activities revolve around four general categories of activities.

Service delivery, including referrals	**Psychosocial support and recreational activities**	**Skills development and livelihood activities**	**Information and awareness-raising**

Designing effective safe spaces

WGSS Principles: Promising practices from CARE programming

WGSS have specific guiding principles to support organizations design, implement and monitor WGSS in an empowering, safe, and inclusive manner. These five key principles should underpin all programmatic and operational planning, decision-making, implementation, and monitoring and serve as norms for everyone associated with the WGSS. They should support teams as they operationalize the underlined five objectives of a WGSS.

WGSS Principles
Empowerment
Solidarity
Accountability
Inclusion
Partnership

The concept of empowerment is central to a WGSS—and to CARE. The WGSS principles align with CARE's programming principles and its Gender Equality Framework.

CARE also centers the principle of **Do No Harm**. At every stage of establishing a WGSS, **protection** aspects must be considered to ensure women and girls are protected from harm. Mechanisms for the prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse (PSHEA) must be in place within a WGSS, including established referral pathways, accessible complaints mechanisms and trained focal points.

CARE's WGSS experience provides examples of how teams have put these principles into practice.

Empowerment

Each woman and girl has the capacity to shape her own life and create and contribute to wider social change. Diverse women and girls are included in WGSS planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

➡ **PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: GIRLS' AGENCY**
CARE Bangladesh offered life skills activities to promote leadership skills, increase opportunities for girls to earn and build self-resilience in the community, with the aim of protecting girls from potential abuse and exploitation. Equipped with new knowledge and confidence, a once-shy 16-year-old girl is now vocal in expressing her feelings and was able to convince her parents not to force her into an early marriage.

➡ **PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP**
The *Be An Inspiration* initiative from the Agami WGSS in Egypt offered women opportunities to build their skills, experience and confidence with the aim of developing women leaders capable of participation and management who can lead the board of women leaders to manage the friendly space themselves.

Solidarity

The safe space environment enables diverse women and girls to understand their individual experiences within the broader power inequalities in which they live. The WGSS provides opportunities to connect with individuals and groups by encouraging sharing, mentoring and cooperation. These supportive relationships increase self-esteem, positive coping mechanisms and social assets central to women's, girls' and survivors' emotional safety and healing.

➡️ **PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: SOLIDARITY WITHIN GROUPS**
In Egypt, weekly VSLA meetings within the WGSS are used as an opportunity for women to gather regularly to talk and exchange experiences. As well as to promoting women's economic empowerment, this approach builds solidarity and cohesion amongst groups.

➡️ **PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: SOLIDARITY WITH WOMEN-LED MOVEMENTS**
In South Sudan, connections with women-led organizations for advocacy contributed to creating a sense of solidarity between women who participated in WGSS activities and women activists as they worked together to advocate for WGSS land ownership by the women.

Accountability

Diverse women and girls can openly share their experiences and challenges and be assured of confidentiality and support. All aspects of the WGSS location, design and programming prioritize the safety and confidentiality of diverse women and girls. Each of these components ensures the integrity of a WGSS as a place where diverse women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe.

➡️ **PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: FEEDBACK & ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS**
Different WGSS within CARE have developed various feedback mechanisms to monitor activities and provide opportunities for feedback and complaints. These have proved vital in identifying issues such as staff attitudes or breaches of confidentiality, and enable women to voice their needs.

CARE Bangladesh used Kobo Toolbox to create questionnaires for receiving and replying to issues raised as part of their Complaint Feedback Response Mechanism ensures the high reach to all segments of the population, men, women, boys, and girls.

➡️ **PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: PSHEA**
CARE Türkiye-Northwest Syria developed a specific protocol between CARE and implementing partner to define roles and responsibilities of handling and investigating SEA cases, because in Northwest Syria partners are independent entities and with their own PSHEA systems in place. The protocol is important for clarifying roles and responsibilities if/when a case is received in CARE funded projects/premises to ensure compliance to PSHEA commitments.

Inclusion

All diverse women and girls are respected and welcomed in a safe space. Staff and volunteers are trained extensively on the principles of inclusion and non-discrimination. Diverse women and girls are:

- **Included** in the WGSS design and provided opportunities as staff or volunteers.
- **Supported** to lead and participate in the range of services and activities delivered in the WGSS.
- **Engaged** actively through tailored outreach strategies to mitigate identified access barriers that hinder their equal participation.

➡️ **PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: STAFF TRAINING**
CARE's **Reflections on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (REDI)** training is an entry point for staff to reflect on their own power and privilege as they consult women and girls, and provide services. Being self-aware of this is important to ensure that the services provided are co-designed by women and girls, and not WGSS staff placing undue influence on communities to pick activities that they prefer. They also need to be aware of the **intersectionality** of the users to increase access and safety in ways that take vulnerabilities and societal heritages into consideration.

➡️ **PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: CONSULTING WOMEN ON LOCATION**
CARE Nigeria started with a consultation with women from displaced and host communities on location preferences, focusing on accessibility and perceptions of safety and privacy while accessing or while inside. Only once they had agreed a location were local authorities approached for existing structures which could be renovated into a WGSS. If none were available, authorities or community leaders would propose potential spaces which would be reviewed by women and girls for whether they were considered safe and accessible.

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➡ **PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: ENSURING INCLUSION OF DIFFERENT GROUPS IN ACTIVITIES**
CARE Egypt was faced with tensions between women and girls from different nationalities within the migrant and refugee communities that access the WGSS. They used the Together (Ma'aan) approach, which uses cultural and historical exchanges, to ease tensions and encourage appreciation of diversity. Activities included group breakfasts to learn more about the customs and traditions of other different nationalities.
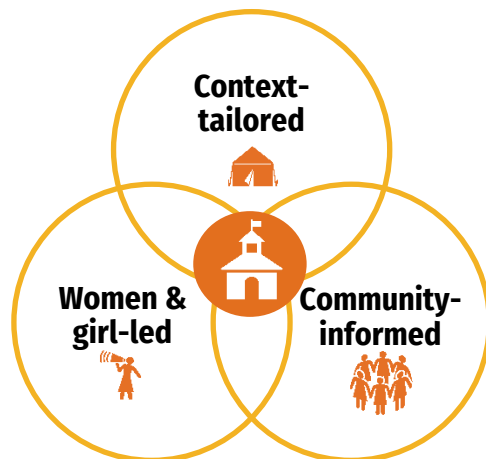
Partnerships

The WGSS should serve to link women and girls to services through strong referral networks. Partnerships with local civil society, particularly women's civil society organizations and/or networks, are central to the WGSS approach and strategic for its sustainability. Partnership with local entities should be considered from the assessment phase and implemented while establishing the WGSS.

➡ **PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: PARTNERING TO PROVIDE SERVICES**
In Egypt, the Agami WGSS maintains a range of partnerships to provide other services within the safe space. These include partnerships with government health agencies and NGOs to provide health awareness and vaccination services, with organizations providing protection and prevention services, and with private companies to provide training.

➡ **PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: RUNNING WGSS THROUGH LOCAL PARTNERS**
In Lebanon, the majority of WGSS are led by the partners. Some Country Programs, such CARE Türkiye-Northwest Syria, are contextually obliged to implement activities through local partners/NGOs. CARE staff report that WGSS being led or co-led by partners is a more sustainable and efficient approach than being exclusively led by CARE. However, investment is required in strengthening capacity of partners. This may take different forms: where implementing partners are predominantly led my men, investment is needed in understanding the benefits of gender equality approaches and implementing these effectively; for women's right and women-led organizations, support may focus on effective and sustainable operational systems.

➡ **PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: PARTNERSHIP WITH GOVERNMENT**
CARE South Sudan, CARE Lebanon and CARE Egypt have examples of successful partnership when collaborating with governmental authorities. In South Sudan, a signed MoU with the Ministry of Gender ensures sustainability of the CARE WGSS work and contributes to building the capacity of the ministry. Lebanon has signed agreements with the Ministry of Social Affairs and supported rehabilitation of Social Development Centers. Egypt has recently signed a cooperation protocol with the Ministry of Youth, which would expand and institutionalize the CARE WGSS model nationwide by creating safe spaces for diverse women and girls inside the premises of youth centers.

Three key strategies for Women and Girls' Safe Spaces

The design and implementation of a WGSS should be guided by three key strategies to ensure that they are safe, accessible, and responsive to a range of women's and adolescent girls' needs.

These key strategies, outlined in the IMC and IRC's 2019 Women and Girls' Safe Spaces Toolkit, are **context-tailored**, **women and girl-led** and **community-informed**.

Women and girl-led

Ensuring WGSS are led by women and girls is imperative from a Do No Harm perspective and a survivor-centered approach. It also provides opportunities for women and girls to develop their own leadership skills in a safe and supportive environment.

Women and girls informing development and leading management of WGSS: Women and adolescent girls from the community where the WGSS is to be located must be consulted, and their input included from the outset in decisions related to the design, implementation, and monitoring of the WGSS. Such consultations ensure women's and girl's sense of ownership and influence while the WGSS programming is being introduced to the community. Women and girls' involvement in management of the space helps build their sense of agency and contributes to empowerment.

*In **Egypt**, the Agami WGSS introduced concept of a "Board of facilitators". This plays a role in managing the WGSS with CARE Egypt Foundation and guarantees sustainability and meaningful leadership of women. This intervention is one of many used by the Agami WGSS in Egypt to engage diverse women and girls in decision-making throughout the entire process of WGSS establishment and management.*

*In **Cox's Bazar**, the provision of a safe place to gather, talk and support each other helped women speak up about their needs. This, combined with leadership capacity building exercises, enabled women to become part of decision-making processes within the WGSS and out in the community.*

Women and girls' engagement providing leadership opportunities: Engaging women and girls to inform where a WGSS will be located, how it will be structured and what it will focus on builds their leadership skills. At the early stages of engagement and in some contexts, diverse women and girls might not be comfortable in expressing their opinions or providing inputs to decisions. However, engaging them from the beginning is essential, as this preliminary step serves as a catalyst not only to support them through a process of empowerment, but also to ensure that WGSS are always responsive and accountable to the needs of its members.

Context-tailored

WGSS will each be unique to the specific context. There are a number of ways to ensure the format and services of a WGSS are appropriate for the context.

Understanding the context: Design of WGSS should be centered in an understanding of the specific situation faced by the women and girls in the context. Data may be pulled from Rapid Gender Analyses or similar gender and protection assessments, with further consultation with women and girls in the community to build on this information and fill any gaps. Further tailored assessment tools such as safety audits can help ensure WGSS are located in safe, appropriate locations and address the specific needs of the women and girls they serve. In particular, women and girls must be consulted on specific details for how the safe space will be run, including the name, staffing needs, hours and activities to activities to be provided.

CARE South Sudan is using RGAs as a key entry point to understand the specific safety, security and protection concerns within the community before introducing any GBVIE programming including WGSS.

In Cox's Bazar CARE teams use safety audits in addition to baseline studies and RGAs.

In Cox's Bazar, cultural stigma around menstruation led to WGSS offering dedicated spaces for women to wash the menstruation materials hygienically.

In North-West Syria, CARE's Tipping Point curriculum for reducing child, early and forced marriage has been adapted to be relevant to the emergency context.

Contextualized activities & curricula: The information, skills-development and livelihoods activities provided through the WGSS must be appropriate for the context and intended audience. In-house Gender Specialists or Regional Protection and Gender Advisors should support adaptation and localization of curriculums and approaches to ensure these are appropriate. Activities and initiatives should respond to the specific contextual and cultural challenges faced by women and girls.

Naming WGSS: In some contexts where publicizing safe spaces for women and girls may raise questions or criticisms from within communities or government, teams may decide it is more appropriate to give these spaces an alternative name—even when they are following the same objectives. This helps to reduce curiosity, and in some cases help justify the focus on "diverse women and girls only" as a space where men are not allowed can raise questions.

In Cox's Bazar, community women are more comfortable using the name the "Women Peace Center" or House of Peace". In Yemen, they are called "Women Capacity building Centers", a name which is more accepted by both government and community.

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Community-informed

It is important to engage key stakeholders in the community, particularly community leaders and male community members, from the outset of WGSS planning. This helps secure support for the WGSS and improve women and girls' ability to access the services provided.

Community leading development and direction of WGSS: Community engagement is important for all aspects of establishing and running a WGSS, including gaining community buy-in, ensuring accessibility for all women and girls, and connecting with the broader community on advocacy in support of women and girls' needs.

*In **Egypt**, the Agami WGSS created a "community committee" which includes both men and women and different nationalities – not only the host community. These leaders ensured access and expanded the outreach to targeted women.*

*CARE **South Sudan**, introduced a unique example where WGSS play a role in advocacy, through engaging with women led organizations on the national level. One issue that they have been advocating relates to Land Ownership of the WGSS by women. Such a change would guarantee the sustainability of the WGSS and create more sense of ownership amongst the women.*

Community engagement to address challenges: Outreach from the WGSS to surrounding communities is crucial for mitigating backlash against women-only spaces and ensuring women and girls do not face barriers to attending the WGSS or accessing service. In many locations this involves engaging men and boys in dialogue on gender and power—an approach which can support GBV prevention interventions. Community engagement also provides opportunities for women and girls to further their leadership skills through connections with other organizations and movements for advocacy.

ALIGNMENT WITH CARE'S PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Partnership is a core part of implementing WGSS. The **key strategies** of community-informed and context-tailored require extensive engagement with partners and it is one of the five **best practice principles** for WGSS.

Choosing partners for CARE's GBViE work requires, as a baseline, a commitment to **upholding gender equality**, following a **human rights-based approach** and upholding **feminist values**. CARE's Partnership Approach highlights that Country Programs are responsible for working with implementing partners on assessing their capacity gaps, developing capacity building plans, providing technical advice and accompaniment to the field.

Read more in CARE's Equitable Humanitarian Partnership Toolkit >

STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE: PROMISING ACTIVITIES

The *Community Committee* created by the Agami WGSS in Alexandria in **Egypt** provides a good example of engagement which is **context-tailored**, **women-led** *and* **community-informed**.

The committee is inclusive and diversified, including both men and women, and from different nationalities—not just the host community. The members of the committee represent the diversity of the community—it includes a woman nursery manager, a male Sudanese NGO director, and a women representative of the Syrian community in Alexandria. The choice of participating women reflects an understanding of natural leadership within a diverse community.

The WGSS director shared that "these leaders ensured access and expanded the outreach to targeted women." They also contributed to addressing rumors and misconceptions around the WGSS amongst the wider community.

Potential activities

WGSS activities revolve around four general categories of activities.

Service delivery, including referrals

GBV-related support is a core objective of a WGSS. All safe spaces should connect survivors to information about their rights, options to report GBV, and access to care in a safe and confidential manner. WGSS can also provide discrete access to services specifically for diverse women and girls, including case management and sexual and reproductive health care, if available on site and delivered through trained staff.

➡ **ACTIVITIES IN PRACTICE: ACCESS TO SERVICES**
In Egypt, the Agami WGSS is working with partners on a Refugee service guide App, covering all refugee services in Alexandria. This App enables women to easily locate where and how to find the support they need. It can be uploaded on both mobiles and PCs at the WGSS to address potential digital gaps in the ability of diverse women and girls to access phones, pay for internet data and navigate a system which may be unfamiliar.

➡ **ACTIVITIES IN PRACTICE: MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT**
In Cox's Bazar, WGSS provide a menstrual hygiene management center which is safe, accessible and comfortable for women in a context where stigma, negative stereotypes, norms, and beliefs about menstruation still exist. This helps address the significant challenges women and girls experience in accessing safe toilets and bathing facilities, especially during the night.

Psychosocial support and recreational activities

Support group sessions consist of recreational activities such as informal and formal life skills. Recreational activities support development of adaptive and positive behaviors that support women and adolescent girls in dealing with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Certain core psychosocial empowerment activities may require leadership by trained psychosocial staff, whereas recreational activities may be led directly by diverse women and girls from the community.

All WGSS psychosocial support and recreational activities should be based on women and girls' priorities and customized according to their specific needs to ensure they are age-appropriate and relevant to the context.

➡ **ACTIVITIES IN PRACTICE: BUILDING STRONG SUPPORT NETWORKS**
The Shanti Ghor space in Cox's Bazar is reported to be very popular among refuges from Myanmar because of its recreation activities, which include carom boards, henna, traditional song practice, crafts such as beading, and dress making. Participation provides women and girls opportunities to support each other in crisis situations and rebuild social structures together.

➡ **ACTIVITIES IN PRACTICE: PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT**
In Nigeria, staff provide individual counselling for the GBV survivors who have expressed a need for this, while psychosocial support activities include group therapy which provides opportunities for women and girls to share and learn from their unique or collective experiences and develop coping mechanisms. In Cox's Bazar, support group activities include relaxation techniques for managing anxiety and panic attacks, and reinforcement of positive coping strategies.

➡ **ACTIVITIES IN PRACTICE: RECREATION ACTIVITIES**
In Nigeria, recreational activities include: crafts and visual arts activities for self and group expression; drama activities to create space for women and girls to express themselves through role-play and acting; games aiming to present women and girls with a challenge or exercise to work through; music activities which allow for the expression of emotions through creation of music or songs; relaxation activities to promote calm through the use of breathing, physical stretches, and guided meditation; and group sports such as handball and volleyball to encourage physical activity.

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🏦 Skills development and livelihood activities

Skills-based classes, formal vocational trainings, and individual or communal income generation activities facilitate women's meaningful participation in public life, including through job training that will support women to access the labor market. Informal skills-based classes can be implemented directly to support women to generate assets safely—both tangible assets such as money or phones and more intangible skills linked to self-efficacy and social capital. Livelihood interventions comprising formal vocational trainings and income generation schemes require specialized technical expertise and coordination with livelihood actors.

➡️ **ACTIVITIES IN PRACTICE: LITERACY**
CARE Yemen's WGSS offer literacy programs which are very popular. They report there is a high demand for literacy classes not only among elder women but also younger girls who dropped out of schools.

➡️ **ACTIVITIES IN PRACTICE: LIVELIHOODS**
WGSS in Cox's Bazar offer life skills training for women and girls to learn sewing skills and provide a sewing machine within the WGSS for women and girls to use. Those who completed the three-month sewing course use these to produce masks, clothes and sanitary pads, earning income from selling these to others in the community.

📖 Information and awareness-raising

The WGSS can be a forum to enhance women's access to information and resources. For example, other sectors are frequently invited to provide information on a range of issues, including water and sanitation or nutrition (provided the integrity of the center as a space designed specifically for women and girls is not compromised).

➡️ **ACTIVITIES IN PRACTICE: WOMEN-LED PODCASTS**
In Egypt, skills training from the WGSS supports women to be "digital content creators", enabling women to develop podcasts where they voice their concerns and learn new skills to join the digital market. They share information they have learned from the WGSS and other sources and raise awareness through podcasts—reaching the wider community and beyond. The WGSS director reports the Agami digital space is totally managed by the women, making it a success story of both women's empowerment and innovation. The "Lametna" podcast can be accessed here.

ALIGNMENT WITH CARE MODELS

A number of CARE models and approaches align with key strategies and principles for Women and Girls' Safe Spaces. These may support WGSS across the whole project cycle. Each should be considered alongside comprehensive assessment of the context.

Women Lead in Emergencies (WLiE): A core pillar of CARE's approach to Gender in Emergencies, the Women Lead in Emergencies model may be integrated into WGSS activities.

Village Saving and Loan Associations in Emergencies (VSLAiE): CARE's VSLA model, adapted for emergency contexts, may be appropriate to support and complement economic empowerment activities.

GBV Risk Mitigation in Emergencies: CARE's new online training equips staff with the knowledge and skills to identify GBV risks within sector-specific programming, and to take action to mitigate those risks.

Cash & Voucher Assistance (CVA): Cash and voucher assistance may be appropriate to complement economic empowerment activities or to integrate into GBV response activities.

Social Analysis & Action (SAA): SAA is a community led social change process which supports shifting harmful social norms. It may be a relevant activity to consider for within WGSS and for community outreach.

Engaging Men & Boys: CARE aims to engage men and boys as supporters and champions of gender equality. This is an important approach to consider as part of community outreach.

Community Scorecard: This governance tool supports accountability and could be relevant for ensuring accountability of WGSS to the women and girls they serve.

Reflections on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI): REDI training enables staff to reflect on their own biases and how this may impact their work.

About this Promising Practices Guide

This guide brings together key global resources on Women and Girls' Safe Spaces and GBV in Emergencies with insight into how CARE is putting these into practice in its programming.

Key Informant Interviews were conducted with CARE staff implementing WGSS in eight countries—Egypt, South Sudan, Uganda, Nigeria, Türkiye-Northwest Syria (Cross border), Yemen, Lebanon, and Bangladesh.

Key resources consulted include: the Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies; the 2019 Women And Girls' Safe Spaces Toolkit from International Medical Corps & International Rescue Committee; UNFPA's Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Guidance Note based on lessons learned from the Syrian crisis; and UNICEF's Gender Based Violence in Emergencies: Program Resource Pack, Building Girls' and Women's Safety and Resilience.

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