

# HOW TO EFFECTIVELY PARTNER WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS IN GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAMMING

The 2022 Interagency Gender Working Group (IGWG) Plenary, “Promising Practices in Community-Led Gender Transformative Programming,” on May 26, 2022 explored promising practices in community-led gender transformative global health programming, particularly in the contexts of family planning, reproductive health, and gender-based violence prevention (see box).

Many gender transformative programs engage communities, but they vary widely in approach, which can range from working with formal leaders to hosting group education sessions for community volunteers to mobilizing whole communities through peer outreach.<sup>1</sup> Definitions of community mobilization and leadership also vary, as does the intensity of involvement by community members, and the power dynamics between communities and collaborators.<sup>2</sup> Key components of successful community engagement for social and behavior change include communication that is empowering, horizontal (versus top down), and elevates the voices of traditionally excluded and marginalized community members.<sup>3</sup>

This infographic highlights and synthesizes some of the key takeaways from the 2022 IGWG Plenary that suggest promising practices for identifying community leaders and improving partnerships with community leaders and social movements in gender transformative programming.

## WHAT IS GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAMMING?

The IGWG Gender Integration Continuum framework defines gender transformative policies and programs as those that promote gender equality by:

- Fostering critical examination of inequalities and gender roles, norms, and dynamics.
- Recognizing and strengthening positive norms that support equality and an enabling environment.
- Promoting the relative position of women, girls, and marginalized groups.
- Transforming the underlying social structures, policies, and broadly held social norms that perpetuate gender inequalities.

SOURCE: Interagency Gender Working Group, *The Gender Integration Continuum Training Session User's Guide*, 2017.



## HOW TO IDENTIFY EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY LEADERS

IMPLEMENTERS OF GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAMS SHOULD AIM TO COLLABORATE WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS WHO EMBODY THESE QUALITIES:

- Represent formal and traditional leaders** (such as faith leaders, police, health care providers, and teachers), **as well as informal and nontraditional ones** (such as elders, youth, artists, writers, singers, and radio personalities).
- Comprise multiple age groups, sectors, and social categories**, including marginalized groups.
- Possess social and political influence in the community and actively challenge social and gender norms**, demonstrating a commitment to social justice, gender equality, and being agents of change. Partnering with these leaders can help strengthen community groups and promote the sustainability of program outcomes.
- Experience acceptance by a variety of community groups**, particularly in settings where strict social hierarchies (such as caste systems) exist, and thus are potentially able to play influential roles.
- Embody and practice the values they are promoting**, especially those related to gender equality, recognizing that community leaders should lead by example.



## HOW TO CULTIVATE EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DESIGNERS AND IMPLEMENTERS OF GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAMS INCLUDE:

- Discuss the program's vision and philosophy**—including its process for challenging harmful gender and social norms and promoting positive and sustained change—with different social groups, especially the most marginalized or excluded groups, to build trust and mutual learning.
- Examine internalized perspectives of social value** by creating opportunities for marginalized community members to practice and **nurture values related to human rights, gender equity, and social justice**. These efforts can happen through peer consciousness-building discussions, and/or through analyzing structural oppression through community leaders' own research.
- Share new research, resources, and information with community leaders** to foster joint ownership of program topics and goals.
- Facilitate collective understanding among community leaders about their political rights and entitlements** (for example, government programs for which they may be eligible) and policies that directly impact them.
- For leaders of peer discussions, **focus on facilitation skills for discussions** around sensitive and/or taboo topics. For leaders taking on leadership roles in program planning or implementation, **focus on negotiation, problem-solving, and teamwork skills, encouraging solidarity with other social groups, and locating community resources** that can help further leaders' goals and capacity to support other community members.
- Practice active listening skills** to ensure implementers are informed on community issues, concerns, and priorities.
- Create opportunities for formal and informal community leaders to meaningfully participate in program design, implementation, measurement, and decision-making**, for example developing learning and evaluation questions.
- Facilitate opportunities for community leaders to influence duty bearers** (in other words, groups with responsibility to the community, such as governments). Community leaders are subject matter experts and can play an important role in shaping policy and holding duty bearers accountable.



## HOW TO IMPROVE COLLABORATION WITH EXISTING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND ACTORS

- Invite diverse social movement actors to develop a common understanding of issues and injustices** to build trust, promote equitable partnerships, design common strategies, and co-create a platform for collective action. To ensure an inclusive process, **apply an equity, diversity, and inclusion lens to program goals** to identify community leaders, such as human rights defenders, working with marginalized communities.
- Partner with regional and local movements and networks with similar political and social goals**—for example, local feminist movements—and create opportunities for marginalized communities to establish new relationships with other social actors that have shared objectives.

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