SWEDD

AUTONOMISATION DES FEMMES ET DIVIDENDE DÉMOGRAPHIQUE AU SAHEL   SAHEL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

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SWEDD SERIES: BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

THE ROLE OF GROUP LEADERS IN SAFE SPACES AND CLUBS FOR HUSBANDS/ FUTURE HUSBANDS

The research informing this Guide was led by the Population Council and Equimundo and is based on the SWEDD project. The information will guide the implementation of SWEDD+

Mauritania

Mali

Niger

Senegal

Gambia

Guinea

Burkina Faso

Chad

Cote d'Ivoire

Togo   Benin

Cameroon

The project covers several countries in West and Central Africa

- SWEDD (2015–2024)
- SWEDD+ (2024–2028)
- SWEDD & SWEDD+

This Guide aims to offer lessons learned and best practices, and to present the challenges that emerged when involving mentors in Safe Spaces (SS) for adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) and facilitators in Husbands' Clubs (known as CdM for the French name Clubs de Maris) and Future Husbands' Clubs (known as CdFM for Clubs de Futurs Maris) during the SWEDD project. The implementation experiences described in this Guide will be used to inform the development of strategies to improve the role of mentors in Safe Spaces on the one hand, and that of facilitators in CdMs and CdFMs on the other.

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These lessons and experiences are relevant to SWEDD+ and other AGYW empowerment programmes. In this Guide, mentors and facilitators are collectively referred to as **Group Leaders.** The Safe Spaces and CdM/CdfM design and roll-out processes, and a more detailed description of the role and importance of mentors and facilitators for the success of community interventions, are more generally described in the Best Practice Guides #4 on Safe Spaces for girls and in Guide #5 on working with men and boys, and will not be repeated in this Guide, which focuses specifically on Group Leaders.

Sample: *Safe spaces:* Experts from 3 SWEDD countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania and Niger. *Clubs for husbands and future husbands:* Experts from 4 SWEDD countries: Burkina Faso, Mali Mauritania and Niger

Main data sources: *Safe spaces:* conversations with key informants in the 3 countries and consultation of an evaluation summary report. *Clubs for husbands and future husbands:* conversations with experts in the 4 countries covered by the study, and consultation of the husbands and clubs for future husbands manuals.

Methodology for data collection: Qualitative, with a conversation guide.

Analysis methodology: *Safe Spaces:* audio recordings, notes and transcripts analysed manually by the Population Council. *Clubs for husbands and future husbands:* audio recordings, notes and transcriptions analysed manually by Equimundo.

Dates: January - June 2023

See the annexes for more details on methodology and sampling.

1 THE ROLE ENVISAGED FOR GROUP LEADERS: PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE AND PROFILES

The role of group leaders and their perceived importance

Group leaders are the main link between the programme's objectives and the participants, their families and the community. In the case of the interventions included in this Guide, the leaders played a multi-faceted role which included building trust with the participants, ensuring that the themes covered in the Safe Spaces and CdM/ CdFM sessions were well understood, modelling example of success and support for the programme participants and acting as local resources for these community initiatives. Their role was also to respond to the critical social support needs of the participants through their skills and dedication. They were, therefore, an integral component of the strategy of the Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) promoted through SWEDD. Their facilitation skills, their techniques and their expertise in the various themes were a major factor in motivating the participants to attend the sessions regularly.

Their roles and responsibilities were as follows:

- Create an open, healthy and respectful environment in which participants can feel comfortable sharing and learning from each other.
- Hold and lead sessions on the themes developed in the programme, and encourage everyone to take part.
- Facilitate the development of skills and the behaviour change process.
- Monitor members' attendance at sessions, find out about absences and notify the authorities (community leaders).
- Complete the data collection tools and monitor observable changes in participants.
- Organise home visits to hold discussions with participants and their families on their engagement and possible changes in attitudes and behaviour, but also in the event of problems (especially for CdFM members).

> " ....
> *The choice of these people was not random. Furthermore, they were selected in consultation with the community and regional leaders. They are more or less young leaders. These are people who have the ability to mobilise young people and convince them to continue their participation.*
>
> **PROGRAMME MANAGER, MAURITANIA**
> .... "

The profile and criteria for group leaders

The criteria used to select group leaders were similar in some of the countries included in this analysis, but there were also specific features linked to certain countries in particular. The following criteria appeared in all countries:

- Literacy (ability to use work tools in the language(s) relevant to their country of work);
- Have the required diploma (BEPC level for Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger);
- Be a resident of the participating community (for sustainability);
- Full fluency in the local language;
- Being accepted by the community;

- Commitment to improving the lives of adolescent girls and young women (for mentors);
- Availability for participants outside meeting times;
- Ability to communicate with the public and respect people;
- Basic knowledge of sexual and reproductive health;
- Male[1] (CdM/CdFM) and female (Safe Spaces).

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[1] NB: This condition must be contextualised. In Burkina Faso, there have been both male and female facilitators.

Other, non-mandatory criteria were adopted in only a few countries. These include:

- Experience in community outreach;
- Belong to a specific age group (25 to 40 in Mauritania and Mali for the CdFMs and 25 to 50 for the CdMs, 20-35 for the Safe Spaces in certain countries);
- Dedication to gender issues;
- Ability to mobilise young people and leadership skills;
- Experience in training and leading groups;
- Economically active (CdM and CdFM in Mali).

Global evidence on group leaders: practical advice

Recruiting mentors for Safe Spaces for adolescent girls and young women: The group leaders should be mainly from the same community and slightly older than the programme participants, so that the participants can identify with them more easily. Recruiting mentors locally is an investment in female leadership, enabling local older girls and young women with leadership potential to acquire and exercise skills that would otherwise be overlooked.

Initial training: The appropriate length of initial training should be determined by the amount and type of teaching material that group leaders are expected to master, and by their level of familiarity with the content and approaches used. The mentors were able to familiarise themselves with the themes covered during the sessions in the *Safe Spaces Curriculum* and to practise passing them on in a practical way. *The Mentor's Guide* provides an in-depth explanation of the role of the mentor, what is expected of her, and offers teaching techniques and practical advice on how to carry out the activities in each session. Training courses should include opportunities for active learning, such as role-playing.

Support for group leaders: It is important to establish a referral system so that group leaders know when to ask for help from a supervisor or contact other services available in the community (apart from the programme) for participants or for themselves. If budgets do not stretch to regular project supervision, programmes can compensate by creating opportunities for group leaders to learn from each other.

Involvement of participants' parents: To encourage buy-in among parents, leaders can invite them to attend certain sessions for an overview of the programme's content and objectives; they can also discuss parents' expectations of the programme, and give them the opportunity to share their concerns and fears about reproductive health issues, or other sensitive subjects related to the programme, such as child marriage, female genital mutilation and gender-based violence.

Group leader performance evaluation: The performance of group leaders should be evaluated in unannounced drop-in visits. It is important that they are given no advance notice of the arrival of the programme staff who are to assess them, otherwise they may prepare themselves more than usual, so as not to reflect how they really hold the sessions and the facilitation techniques they use.

Motivating group leaders: The "*motivation*" approach needs to be contextualised, but it also needs to encourage community involvement and ownership of the programme by group leaders. The motivations chosen may include salary and/or non-salary benefits, depending on the context.

Sources and further information: Temin, Miriam and Eva Roca, 2019; Promundo-US and Plan International Canada, 2020.

The experience of individual countries suggests that the criteria are not applicable with the same rigour everywhere. For example, in some countries it was often a major challenge to find group leaders who had the required level of education and who lived in the locality where the intervention took place. This was the case in Burkina Faso, which, due to a lack of men with the necessary qualifications as facilitators for the CdMs/CdFMs, needed to call on additional women to lead the sessions.

Key lessons learned about the intended role, perceived importance and profile of group leaders

Lesson 1: Choose group leaders who are natives of and live in the locality they will be serving.

Choosing group leaders from the local area is considered to be a best practice, supported by evidence from around the world[2] which demonstrates that this makes the working environment friendlier and more accessible. The interviewees were of the same opinion, and even considered it to be a necessity: "*Mentors must be local.*" (Expert, Cote d'Ivoire). SWEDD's experience also demonstrates that having facilitators and mentors who belong to the community where the community interventions take place creates more confidence among the parents and guardians of potential young group members, and encourages them to allow these young people to participate. Furthermore, participants had easy access to the group leaders if they needed it, even outside the usual meeting times.

Lesson 2: Be flexible about the selection criteria for group leaders.

It is not always possible to recruit group leaders from communities that meet the required criteria. In this case, flexibility is required, to take account of the realities on the ground. Mauritania and Niger had to recruit mentors for the Safe Spaces from surrounding villages, as it was difficult to find young women with the required criteria from the communities hosting the programme. The recruitment of CdM/CdFM facilitators in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger prioritised the origin of the candidates, rather than their level of education.

The gender of leaders is another area of flexibility. The experience of Burkina Faso suggests that the choice of a man as facilitator for the CdM/CdFM should not be automatic, and that having a woman as facilitator can have advantages. "*It shows the Group that men and women can work together respectfully. However, often this is not possible. For example, men may find it challenging to open up in the presence of a female facilitator and vice versa. In both cases, it is important to have a facilitator who will listen and model gender-equitable behaviour and attitudes that can motivate the group and encourage self-reflection whether the facilitator is male or female*" (future Husbands Club Facilitator's Manual, page 16). On certain topics, the sessions were well led and presented by the women. However, when it came to topics around sexual and reproductive health, the male participants found it challenging to engage with a female facilitator.

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[2] For example, Equimundo delivered Programme H and Programme P interventions targeting adolescent boys and men with the aim of developing attitudes and practices that reflect the concept of being a boy or man within a positive masculinity framework of respect for women and girls. For such a programme to be successful, the facilitators must be familiar with the communities in which they work and with the day-to-day realities experienced by the participants. (Promundo-US and Plan International Canada, 2020)

2 RECRUITMENT, MOTIVATION AND TRAINING OF GROUP LEADERS

Recruiting group leaders

The process of identifying potential group leaders differed in each country, but there were some similarities between the identification of CdM/CdFM facilitators and that of Safe Spaces mentors.

In Mali, the leaders and other members of the community chose the facilitators for their CdM/CdFM, thus giving these facilitators the advantage of benefiting from their support in the event of problems. Identification involved village meetings attended by community leaders (religious and traditional), where the facilitator's role was explained and the selection criteria adopted. More generally, community leaders and other members of the community were also involved in mentor recruitment and, together with the AGYW, even supported the final stage of validating potential candidates. This strategy of involving the main participants and giving them the final say was well received across the countries, reinforcing this important method of including AGYW in decision-making on Safe Spaces.

The implementation agencies[3] were responsible for organising and ensuring the smooth running of the preliminary stages leading to the recruitment of mentors. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the Ministry for Women and other organisations involved in the project and responsible for recruiting mentors chose to propose mentors with whom they were already in contact through similar programmes, and whom they often called upon, as potential candidates.

Once they had been identified the recruitment of group leaders in most countries went through a first stage of examining the candidates' applications, followed by in-depth evaluation through interviews. As mentioned above, in some countries these interviews were held with the participants. The selected candidates then underwent training, during which the best were selected as group leaders.

Most countries achieved their recruitment targets in terms of the number of leaders sought, but had to cope with departures. This shortfall was offset by calling on available alternates previously employed by SWEDD. As a programme Officer in Mauritania explains: "*We tried to create a small pool of trainers who are more or less familiar with the [programme] manual.*" This is a global recommendation aimed at encouraging actors to recruit and train a large number of group leaders, thus filling any potential absences or departures through substitutes without having to interrupt the programme.

Motivating the recruited group leaders

Group leaders are not volunteers and their work must be appropriately remunerated. Motivating group leaders is crucial to ensure that they invest all their efforts in doing their job well, and above all to minimise the risk of them abandoning their position. Our research demonstrated that the amount of remuneration varied from country to country.

In the CdMs and CdFMs, facilitators were paid around $120 a month in Mauritania, $132 in Burkina Faso and $100 in Niger. Mali chose voluntarily to pay its facilitators $24 per month, instead encouraging the deliberate community involvement of these leaders.

In the Niger Safe Spaces, the mentors received a monthly salary of $97, which was quite similar to the salary received by facilitators for CdM/CdFM activities in the same country. However, there were some notable resignations, as the Illimin programme managed by UNFPA - which also established Safe Spaces for adolescent girls and young women - paid its mentors $145. This posed a challenge for the rest of the programme and its success in retaining leaders.

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[3] In most countries, NGOs were responsible for identifying, recruiting, training, supervising and evaluating group leaders.

Given the crucial role of group leaders in supporting members of CdM/CdFMs and Safe Spaces, and in the long process of behaviour change, it is important to put in place mechanisms to support group leaders that are realistic, sustainable and long-lasting. These mechanisms encourage communities and governments to take ownership of the programme once it has been completed. The specific mechanisms are mostly contextual, and may include salary or non-salary incentives. For example, Mali followed the "motivation" approach for facilitators/mentors as opposed to the "salary" approach. It is also important to bear in mind that, in the case of club facilitators, this is a voluntary commitment rather than a full-time job, usually taking place at weekends or in other spare time.

In the clubs and Safe Spaces, the group leaders derived moral satisfaction regardless of the financial issue. For example, the facilitators said that it was because they were chosen by the community that they were so dedicated and committed. In return, the community granted them privileges. This is the case in Mali, where *"in the event of illness of a facilitator or a member of his family, the consultation was free and half of the prescription costs were paid"* (NGO manager, Mali).

In Côte d'Ivoire, in addition to their salary, some group leaders asked for non-financial incentives such as badges, t-shirts, literacy opportunities and income-generating activities that really confirmed their status as group leaders and brought them respect in the community.

Initial training and refresher courses

Training and capacity-building for group leaders is essential to ensure that they have all the tools, knowledge, confidence, good relationships with other members of staff and assets they need. The courses were very often run in groups, giving those with low literacy levels the opportunity to learn from others. In all cases, the initial training took place before the CdM/CdFM and Safe Spaces sessions started. It involved training group leaders on the themes that would be developed during the meetings with the participants, and to ensure that they acquired the necessary techniques to enable them to carry out their tasks and run the sessions appropriately. For example, group leaders were taught how to carry out monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) of the clubs/spaces so that they could complete the monitoring forms, produce the required reports (e.g. monthly reports), and be able to describe difficulties encountered during the programme. Most of the people we spoke to described them as *"key resources in monitoring changes,"* but they could benefit from more training in MEL techniques, given the importance of this aspect of the programme.

It should be noted that it is very difficult to determine the "ideal" length of initial training for group leaders, in view not only of training expectations but also of the implementation realities in each country. The initial training must be long enough to cover all the prerequisites needed to play the role of group leader effectively. However, it must not be too long so as not to lose the interest of the participants and to enable them to go about their respective occupations.

Our interviews demonstrated that there were some variations between the initial training procedures for Safe Spaces and those for CdMs/CdFMs, but also from one country to another. According to the CdM/CdFM standards, a complete initial training course for facilitators lasts ten to 15 days, depending on whether both manuals are used (the CdM manual and the CdFM manual) or only one manual (CdM or CdFM). However, during the project, initial training lasted only six days in Mauritania, and went up to 15 days in Burkina and Mali, and

20 days in Niger. This depended on the content of the training, the modules involved, and other considerations specific to national contexts.

The length of initial training for mentors also varied from one country to another. In Niger, for example, the duration was deemed insufficient to cover all the teaching materials, the acquisition of the necessary techniques by the mentors, and the mastery of the programme and the tools used. An expert from Niger shared his point of view, stressing that: "*Mentor training is short, just 15 days, but it should be extended to 25 days or even a month*." The same was true of Mauritania, with an initial training course lasting six days. In Côte d'Ivoire, on the other hand, it was difficult to retain mentors beyond the eight days of initial training. The bodies responsible then sought the support of the village monitoring committees in lobbying the mentors' spouses to authorise them to take part in the training in facilitation techniques.

The refresher courses aimed to consolidate the knowledge already acquired by the group leaders during the initial training, sometimes with an emphasis on reinforcing a particular technique. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the aim was to build the capacity of the Safe Spaces mentors in leadership and communication techniques through coaching sessions and individual advice. The length of refresher courses also varied, ranging from five days in the Safe Spaces in Niger to ten days in Burkina Faso. In the case of the CdM/CdFM, the length of refresher training was deemed insufficient (for example, seven days in Mali) according to some informants. Others feel that "*facilitators need to be supported through training or refresher courses every month or every three (03) months*" (CdFM coordinator, Niger).

Educational documents

Training for group leaders must be based on the training documents developed by the SWEDD project, such as the regional Safe Spaces curriculum and its contextualised versions. Each country adapts (and translates) the initial manual to better reflect its socio-cultural realities, making it more comprehensible to group leaders and participants with content better adapted to their living environment, taking account of the requirements of religious leaders, but also standards and laws[4]. In Mali, "*there are translations in local languages to enable those with a low level to use the documents*" (Project manager, Mali). In Mauritania, the curriculums, accompanied by an audio recording, were translated into Arabic, simplified, adapted to the environment and illustrated with examples and verses from the Koran. This facilitated the work of the group leaders and gave them the opportunity to listen to the sessions later for better familiarisation and preparation.

Key lessons learned in recruiting, motivating and training group leaders

Lesson 3: Recruit an appropriate number of group leaders based on the demographic structure of the target community, and train a large number of them so that alternates are available.

The number of group leaders to be recruited depends on the size of the community hosting the programme. A sufficient number of group leaders are needed to run the sessions, and also to ensure some availability for participants outside the sessions. Also, by training a large number of group leaders, it is possible to retain some as substitutes in the event of the initial leaders dropping out.

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[4] For more details on the regional Safe Spaces curriculum, see Best Practice Guide 3 on Curriculum Development

Lesson 4: Offer reasonable salaries (and non-salary incentives) to group leaders based on the national context and align payments with those of other similar programmes in the area.

Offering reasonable salaries to group leaders helps to ensure quality commitment to the programme. Remunerating group leaders increases the likelihood that they will really dedicate themselves to the programme and do quality work. Reasonable salaries also indicate that the work they do is valued and encouraged. At the same time, it is important to align this remuneration with what is charged in the community for similar work, thereby respecting the costs of the local economy. This would also prevent group leaders from leaving for other programmes offering higher remuneration. In addition to this financial incentive, there may be other types of non-salary incentive, such as the award of certificates on completion of training, payment of transport costs, mobile phone call credits, the distribution of identifiers (badges, T-shirts, vests), and free access to primary healthcare for group leaders and their families. Each programme is responsible for deciding what will be useful, feasible and sustainable in the specific context.

Lesson 5: Plan initial and refresher training of a duration sufficient to cover all sessions.

It is recommended that initial training courses should not be too short, bearing in mind that the available resources (human and financial) will influence the duration of these courses. At the same time, it is important to recognise that holding a training course for too long could result in some trainees losing interest and leaving. It is therefore important to decide on the duration of training courses, by taking account of the context, the trainees, the content and the budget.

Lesson 6: Refresher training helps to overcome potential challenges in implementing the programme.

Refresher training must take account of the realities of the programme. For example, if a programme loses group leaders during its implementation, it is advisable to recruit new ones and organise a refresher course that would be both a review for the existing leaders and initial training for the new recruits.

3 SAFE SPACES AND CDM/CDFM ROLL-OUT

Following the recommendations made during the various training sessions, group leaders must ensure that they run the meetings effectively in the different areas. In the programme manuals (Safe Spaces, CdM and CdFM), the instructions are well defined and it is up to the group leader, as guarantor of the interests of the beneficiaries, to ensure that they are respected and to promote the inclusion of all.

Number of participants

Group leaders are tasked with forming groups of participants with similarities in terms of age and living conditions, and delivering relevant, engaging and interactive lessons (Temin & Roca, 2019). It is their responsibility to ensure a certain homogeneity in the composition of the groups of participants, recognising the differences that may exist between them.

As part of the project, the number of participants varied between the CdM/CdFM and the Safe Spaces. The literature on boys' and young men's clubs - CdMs or CdFMs - recommends five to 15 participants per group. Meanwhile, the SWEDD Safe Spaces programme welcomed an average of 25 AGYW, because they combined two different age groups at the same time (one group of AGYW aged 10 to 14, and one group of AGYW aged 15 to 19) (Population Council, 2021; page 4). It would be useful to rigorously evaluate: (a) the reasons for and effectiveness of this disparity between the number of participants in boys' and men's clubs and that of girls and young women; and (b) the effectiveness of the new Safe Spaces method of dividing participants by age.

Number of group leaders responsible for holding sessions

There were differences in the standards for the number of leaders responsible for running the Safe Spaces and the CdM/CdFM. There were disparities between the number of facilitators selected for the clubs of husbands/future husbands and the number of mentors selected for the Safe Spaces, although it was not clear exactly how many leaders were needed. Nor do the shared experiences of other similar programmes aimed at transforming masculinities specify the ideal number of facilitators to select in CdMs/CdFMs to achieve sustainable transformation (Promundo-US and Plan International Canada, 2020). However, in the case of the CdMs/CdFMs in the SWEDD countries, two facilitators - one facilitator and one assistant facilitator - were recruited for each club to run the sessions together. Each prepares as if he or she were the only facilitator, and during the session, the two share the tasks.

The Safe Spaces sessions were generally led by a single mentor, whose role included passing on knowledge to the participants and ensuring that the information shared with and by AGYW was fully understood. This was observed in all the SWEDD countries selected for this activity, which confirmed that only one mentor per group was used in the Safe Spaces.

It clear that two facilitators/mentors is better than one, at least to ensure that at least one leader is always present at meetings, but also for the mutual support that leaders can give each other. Nevertheless, it is still possible for a project or a country not to have enough financial or human resources to recruit the ideal number of group leaders. To facilitate ownership of the SWEDD project by the beneficiary countries, each country decided on the number of mentors and facilitators to be allocated to their groups of AGYW and husbands/future husbands. Experience suggests that where there is only one group leader (as in most Safe Spaces), it is important to provide for alternates (see lesson 3 above) and to have a system where the mentor or facilitator is able to rely on the other group leaders through ongoing communication, meetings and frequent exchanges, and to have regular and supportive supervision.

Running the sessions

The quality of the delivery of the sessions contributes to the interest and active involvement of the participants and to regular attendance at the Safe Spaces and CdM/CdFM. Effective organisation of these sessions is therefore very important to the success of the programme. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, according to an expert from the project management unit, the Safe Spaces sessions were organised around very engaging and dynamic sessions, enlivened by songs, games, knitting and tom-tom sounds. The same expert also recommends, as an example of a facilitation technique, the inclusion of sessions of skits that the AGYW could present to other members of the community, during which they would demonstrate the knowledge acquired in the Safe Spaces.

Key lessons learned about running group sessions

Lesson 7: Group leaders must use participatory, engaging and varied methods to retain participants in the programme.

To generate interest and active participation from members, sessions need to be both interesting and enjoyable. Group leaders can use a variety of participatory learning methods such as group discussions, brainstorming sessions, demonstration and guided practice, role plays, small group exchanges, educational games and simulations, case studies, storytelling, and debates (Temin & Roca, 2019).

Lesson 8: Group leaders need to work with parents and guardians to get them on board.

The support of the participants' parents is essential to the success of both the Safe Spaces and the CdFM, to guarantee the participation of the young people in the sessions and the active involvement of the community. In addition to other methods of engagement, community dialogues and home visits help to establish links between group leaders and members of participants' families, in order to gain their support for the programme: "*The community dialogues and home visits also helped to create a favourable environment for achieving results related to the training themes and sub-project objectives*" (PRAF/DD project completion report, December 2020; p51). The visits provided an opportunity to discuss the changes observed in the attitudes and behaviour of the club members and to establish a climate of trust. In the Safe Spaces in Côte d'Ivoire, the mentors held regular meetings with the parents of the adolescent girls and young women to understand the difficulties some of them were experiencing, and to discuss possible solutions.

4 SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT FOR GROUP LEADERS

Given the essential role of group leaders in SWEDD, they need adequate and constant support on which they can rely. Supervisory visits established by the implementing NGOs were an important component of SWEDD activities.[5] The supervisors, trained in monitoring, supervision, evaluation and group facilitation, were able to check on the progress of activities in the clubs and in the Safe Spaces, and to encourage the group leaders in their work. The field supervisors were responsible for regular visits to the group leaders. In the case of the Safe Spaces, the mentors were observed in real-life facilitation situations wherever possible. This provided an opportunity to identify any shortcomings among certain mentors and to provide them with custom-tailored support and advice. In some cases, there were also regional/central supervisors, appointed by the technical ministries but who did not make frequent visits. On average, they made one field trip a month.

The Safe Spaces Guide[6] recommends one supervisor for every five Safe Spaces. In practice, however, achieving this ratio was a challenge and several supervisors found themselves responsible for a large number of Safe Spaces simultaneously. According to informants in Niger, budget constraints during the SWEDD project meant that it was not possible to provide local, high-quality support for the mentor. In some cases, there was only one supervisor for ten Safe Spaces.

Communication between group leaders and their supervisors

In some SWEDD countries, group leaders frequently communicated via telephone and WhatsApp groups. Supervision in Niger, for example, was facilitated by setting up WhatsApp groups between group leaders and trainers. In Mali, it was easy to monitor the performance of the group leaders, collect activity data and monitor electronically. In Mauritania, the group leaders used WhatsApp groups to maintain communication between the project management unit, the group leaders and the monitoring officers during implementation.

These WhatsApp groups have enabled group leaders to share the difficulties they encountered and to learn from the experiences of others. Setting up a communication platform of this kind, and digitising the monitoring tools, are best practices that have also helped to establish a continuous learning dynamic based on exchanges of experience between group leaders, and alternatives for monitoring and supervision in the event of travel difficulties.

Some group leaders, on their own initiative, successfully sought the support of external experts on specific issues, such as the head of the community health centre.

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[5] Supervisors may be staff recruited by implementing NGOs, ministry officials, or simply trainers of group leaders.
[6] See SWEDD series: Best Practice Guide No. 4: Safe Spaces

Key lessons learned in supervising group leaders

Lesson 9: Provide sufficient human resources for high-quality, local monitoring.

For high-quality, local monitoring, sufficient human resources must be provided, such as establishing a sufficiently large team of supervisors who are well trained to support the group leaders, within the limits of budget and field constraints. In addition, it is important for group leaders to be visited by the same supervisors throughout the project so that they can build up a certain amount of confidence and feel comfortable presenting difficulties and challenges. Global experience (Bruce et al, 2016) suggests (where programme circumstances allow) at least one predictable and reliable supervision visit per month.

Lesson 10: Provide a clear description of the role and tasks of those who will supervise the Safe Spaces and the CdM/CdFM.

In addition to high quality training, supervisors need a clear description of their responsibilities and expectations, and how they are to carry out their roles. Their role is to ensure that the sessions are run effectively by the mentors and facilitators, that the meeting spaces function smoothly and that the participants feel comfortable and included.

5 THE ROLE OF LEADERS IN MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (MEL)

Group leaders play an important role in monitoring the clubs and safe spaces by completing the monitoring forms, producing the required reports (such as monthly reports) and describing any difficulties encountered. The people we spoke to described them as "*key resources in monitoring change.*" A manager from an NGO in Mali noted that "*the facilitators are very important because they are the key actors in monitoring the changes. They know the village and they facilitate. We visit them once a week. They are key people.*"

Several different methods were used. The CdM/CdFM facilitators produced monthly reports which served as a basis for assessing the progress of the activities. They kept the tools for monitoring member participation in sessions up to date, recording observable changes among club members. The Safe Spaces mentors were required to complete the attendance register for each session. In addition, they were asked to write a follow-up report on the Safe space, detailing the number of girls who attended, any absences, any reasons why certain girls left, any difficulties encountered, and the topics and modules covered.

The key informants note that despite the essential role of the group leaders in monitoring the programme, there is no mechanism for participants in the programme to provide feedback on the group leaders and to evaluate them. For example, some of the Côte d'Ivoire experts recognised the importance of gathering the participants' opinions on the mentors, which would make it easier to assess them and ensure that the sessions ran smoothly.

According to these same experts, learning was not integrated into the Safe Spaces project from the outset in the monitoring and evaluation system, so it was not possible to derive learning from any bottlenecks, particularly in terms of what the AGYW learned about the concepts explained during the sessions. This could have been used to improve the content of the modular sessions as the programme was implemented. The experts emphasised that the learning component is important because it can enable adjustments to be made during implementation, thereby preventing potential failures.

Key lessons learned about the role of group leaders in monitoring, evaluation and learning

Lesson 11: Integrate a learning component into the monitoring and evaluation system from the outset.

Learning offers practitioners the opportunity to evolve their programmatic approach, enabling continuous improvement to better meet the needs of the target population. In Niger, as in most countries, the informants regretted the absence of a learning component, which could have positively changed the course of the programme if it had been taken into account from the outset. In addition, mechanisms need to be created to enable all stakeholders to get involved and reflect on the successes and challenges of the programme.

Lesson 12: Involve programme participants and supervisors in evaluating the performance of group leaders.

Feedback on group leaders from participants and supervisors is important to assess their actual involvement in the programme. The programme participants are always present and can offer relevant feedback on the day-to-day performance of the group leaders, providing an essential perspective.

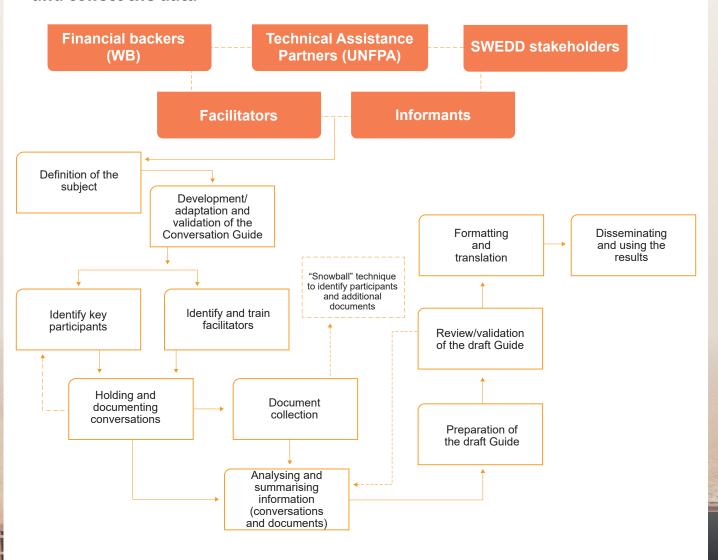**Lesson 13:** Build the capacity of group leaders to collect and use monitoring data.

Group leaders may not have much experience of MEL techniques, which is why it is important to include theoretical and practical sessions on the need for effective monitoring (to see whether a programme was implemented as planned), proper evaluation (to measure whether the desired impact on the target population was achieved), and to include a learning component (to reveal information in real time in order to improve the programme) in the initial training.

SUMMARY OF KEY LESSONS

Phase	#	Lesson
Phase 1: The role of leaders	1	Choose group leaders who are natives of and live in the locality they will be serving.
	2	Be flexible about the selection criteria for group leaders.
Phase 2: Recruitment, motivation and training	3	Recruit an appropriate number of group leaders based on the demographic structure of the target community, and train a large number of them so that alternates are available.
	4	Offer reasonable salaries (and non-salary incentives) to group leaders based on the national context and align payments with those of other similar programmes in the area.
	5	Plan initial and refresher training of a sufficient duration to cover all sessions.
	6	Refresher training helps to overcome potential challenges in implementing the programme.
Phase 3: Safe Spaces and CdM/CdFM roll-out	7	Group leaders must use participatory, engaging and varied methods to retain participants in the programme.
	8	Group leaders must work with parents and guardians to get them on board.
Phase 4: Supervision and support	9	Provide sufficient human resources for high-quality, local monitoring.
	10	Provide a clear description of the role and tasks of those who will supervise the Safe Spaces and the CdM/CdFM.
Phase 5: The role of leaders in monitoring, evaluation and learning	11	Integrate a learning component into the monitoring and evaluation system from the outset.
	12	Involve programme participants and supervisors in evaluating the performance of group leaders.
	13	Build the capacity of group leaders to collect and use monitoring data.

ANNEX 1: Methodology and sampling

I. The process followed to carry out the documentation exercise and collect the data

Financial backers (WB) — Technical Assistance Partners (UNFPA) — SWEDD stakeholders

Facilitators — Informants

- Definition of the subject
- Development/adaptation and validation of the Conversation Guide
- Identify key participants
- Identify and train facilitators
- Holding and documenting conversations
- Document collection
- Analysing and summarising information (conversations and documents)
- "Snowball" technique to identify participants and additional documents
- Preparation of the draft Guide
- Review/validation of the draft Guide
- Formatting and translation
- Disseminating and using the results

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II. Data collection methodology

The data presented in this guide were collected during interviews organised by Equimundo and the Population Council with respondents selected as part of the retrospective documentation produced by these two NGOs on their community activities. All countries with Safe Spaces and/or CdM/CdFM were invited to participate in this documentation. Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania and Niger chose to take part in the interviews on the Safe Spaces themes, while Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger took part in the CdM/CdFM interviews. The respondents selected for each country were proposed by the country Project Management Unit (PMU) coordinators on the basis of their participation in safe space and CDM/CDFM activities. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or virtually in cases where it was not possible to meet in person. The facilitators, using a conversation guide developed by the technical partner, addressed questions relating to the planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning procedures of the Safe Spaces and CdM/CdFM with which the respondent was familiar. Information relating to group leaders comes from information recorded during these conversations. During the conversations, the facilitators, equipped with personal recording devices (phones, tablets, etc.), recorded the conversations and then decoded them later before consolidating them into a summary.

III. Data sources

The information was gathered through key informant interviews on the Safe Spaces of three SWEDD countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania, and Niger) and on the CdMs and CdFMs in 4 countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger): these informants do not represent a systematic sample, but are a "useful cross-section of more accessible experiences across these three countries" that make it possible to leverage existing SWEDD capacity. The country informants are listed in Annex 2.

Some of the data comes from the CdM and CdFM manuals that were developed and validated at a SWEDD workshop held in Côte d'Ivoire in 2018, and the CdM and CdFM minimum standards guide produced in 2021. Other data are taken from "The Guide to minimum standards for safe spaces: design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning." New York: Population Council (2021).

ANNEX 2: Table of people consulted

Informants interviewed	Country
Clubs for Husbands and Future Husbands 4 individuals: 1 NGO expert, 1 PMU expert and 2 members of the technical support ministries	**Burkina Faso**
Safe spaces 3 individuals: 2 PMU experts and 1 NGO expert	**Cote d'Ivoire**
Clubs for Husbands and Future Husbands 4 individuals: 2 PMU experts and 2 NGO experts	**Mali**
Clubs for Future Husbands 2 individuals: 1 PMU expert and 1 expert from a technical ministry **Safe spaces** 3 individuals: 1 expert from a technical ministry and 2 PMU experts	**Mauritania**
Clubs for Future Husbands 5 individuals: 1 PMU expert, 1 expert from a technical ministry, 2 NGO experts and 1 CdFM coordinator **Safe spaces** 3 individuals: 2 NGO experts and 1 PMU expert	**Niger**

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