

# Supporting displaced communities to address gender-based violence

by Beth Vann, Meriwether Beatty and Lisa Ehrlich

*Gender-based violence remains one of the most challenging issues in refugee/IDP settings.*

**W**hen displaced women are abused it is usually women themselves who are the first to organise help. But because women's groups are usually among the least empowered in their community, they need support and assistance from humanitarian aid organisations. However, NGO managers and staff often lack understanding, knowledge and expertise to develop accessible, effective and compassionate programmes to address gender-based violence (GBV).

## **GBV Global Technical Support Project**

Responding to requests from the field for assistance to address violence against women and children, JSI Research and Training Institute (JSI) initiated the GBV Global Technical Support Project on behalf of the RHRC Consortium in 2001. In close collaboration with UNHCR, UNICEF and others, the project provides a range of technical assistance to

refugee/IDP communities, UN agencies, international and national NGOs and host governments working with populations affected by armed conflict. Technical assistance includes on- and off-site training, consulting, advising, workshops, seminars, information dissemination and resource material distribution and training. On-site assistance incorporates both pre-planning and post-visit follow-up to ensure maximum involvement, commitment and follow-through by the key stakeholders and actors.

Prevention of and response to GBV in many of the sites involved with the

GBV Global Technical Support Project have improved. Interagency referral and coordination mechanisms have been streamlined and there is an increased number of staff on the ground who are knowledgeable about gender issues, GBV, assisting survivors and developing prevention strategies.

### Addressing GBV in Thai refugee camps

In January 2002, the Global GBV Technical Advisor visited Thailand in response to a request for assistance from the Committee for

Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT). During visits to five refugee camps and five towns, the Global GBV Technical Advisor met representatives of UNHCR, NGOs and Burmese women's organisations. The Advisor provided training, recommendations and written resource materials to promote increased leadership and action in prevention of and response to GBV.

The training and technical assistance focused on building capacity among the interagency team (including refugees) to establish a coordinated system for assisting survivors and for developing an action plan to prevent GBV in the long term. This interagency prevention and response action required four efforts: 1) integrating issues of gender, including GBV prevention and response into the activities of all organisations working with refugees; 2) fostering an understanding that addressing GBV is part of the humanitarian responsibility of all staff concerned with health, psychosocial well-being, security and legal justice; 3) training and supervising staff and 4) formalising and increasing support to refugee women's organisations to build their capacity to take the lead in GBV interventions.



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Noticeboard in  
Zambia

Following this initial visit, refugee women's groups in Thailand developed a GBV response protocol called the Automatic Response Mechanism (ARM). ARM is a step-by-step guide for assisting survivors which sets out required actions – including emotional support, health care, counselling, advocacy and case management – from first report through conclusion of legal proceedings if the survivor chooses the legal route. Each step in the ARM protocol describes appropriate standards of care and includes a list of possible actions to consider if those standards are not met or if services are not locally available. This framework emphasises interagency involvement and cooperation, raising awareness both in specific sectors and the community at large and the need to refer to existing laws and guidelines. Refugee women's groups in Thailand are currently working with UNHCR and NGOs to actively engage them in ARM implementation.

### Pool of resource persons

GBV prevention and response may be moving forward in Thailand but elsewhere humanitarian staff lack access to GBV training programmes. For many, GBV remains an unknown, intimidating subject. The GBV Global Technical Support Project now has an

added focus: to build a larger pool of knowledgeable humanitarian aid staff who can serve as local resource persons for their peers and colleagues. The number of intermediate and advanced training workshops is to be increased.

In keeping with the philosophy that refugee communities themselves should be the leaders in prevention of and response to GBV, the project will continue to assist and support displaced women to take the lead in addressing this terrible problem.

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See also: 'Gender-Based Violence: Emerging Issues in Programs Serving Displaced Populations' at [www.rhrc.org/pdf/gbv\\_vann.pdf](http://www.rhrc.org/pdf/gbv_vann.pdf)