

### SAUTI/VOICE Project: First UNHCR-Population Council Regional Workshop

#### Background

In 2014, the UNHCR East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes (EHAGL) Africa Bureau in Nairobi, and the Nairobi office of the Population Council established a technical cooperation for *Improving Evidence-based Programming for Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) in Refugee Operations in the East and Horn of Africa*. Under this joint framework, the Africa Bureau works closely with the



Population Council's technical team to identify common areas of interest for improving field capacities to initiate appropriate interventions for the prevention of, and response to, SGBV in refugee operations.

The Population Council's technical team for this initiative is represented by the Council-led *Africa Regional SGBV Network*, a regional network of partners in East and Southern Africa who have spent over a decade designing, implementing, and evaluating various multi-sectoral SGBV responses in low resource settings (both humanitarian and non-humanitarian). The Network also provides technical support to governments, development partners, and others, for the introduction and scale up of these tested models in a range of low resource contexts.

The technical cooperation between the Africa Bureau and the Council has resulted in a new initiative: *VOICE—Violence Prevention and Response Through Information, Communication, and Evidence*.

The project involves an exclusive focus by the Network on refugee operations under the Africa Bureau from 2018 to 2020. Selected SGBV response models developed and tested previously under the *Africa Regional SGBV Network* are being adapted for implementation in selected refugee settings in the EHAGL region in collaboration with the Africa Bureau, UNHCR country offices, and UNCHR implementing partners. The Network provides technical and financial support for this process.

The project's specific objectives are to:

1. Foster a regional response to SGBV in refugee settings by harnessing the resources of the Africa Regional SGBV Network
2. Amplify the voices of both UNHCR implementing partners and Network partners by showcasing their evidence-based approaches, and
3. Inform SGBV programming and policy in refugee settings.

## Regional Workshop

The first initiative under the project involved a regional workshop in Nairobi with eight UNHCR country offices that had expressed interest in participating in the VOICE initiative (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia); UNHCR implementing partners responsible for ensuring the implementation of selected interventions in each country; and Network partners involved in building capacity for implementing the selected interventions. Each country operation could nominate up to six delegates for participation in the workshop: three from the UNHCR country office concerned and three UNHCR implementing partner representatives whose mandate is to address SGBV.



The five day regional workshop, in March 2019, convened nearly 60 participants (n=56). The first day of the meeting provided an overview of the Africa Bureau-Population Council collaboration, the VOICE project, available interventions, and proposed future steps for the project. The remaining four days of the workshop focused on separate, parallel Training of Trainer sessions conducted by *Africa Regional SGBV Network* partners around the six existing

interventions:

- The Zero Tolerance Village Alliance (ZTVA), a community-based SGBV prevention intervention
- SGBV screening in health facilities, a screening tool-based intervention for proactively identifying survivors and linking them to comprehensive care
- Child sexual abuse (CSA) screening in schools or health facilities, a screening tool-based intervention for proactively identifying child survivors and linking them to comprehensive care
- Psycho-social support (PSS) for survivors using the 'Tree of Life' counseling approach
- Improving the collection, documentation, and utilization of forensic evidence through the use of a sexual assault kit and multi-sectoral provider training, and
- A case management model for child survivors in health facilities to increase SGBV service uptake.

## Country Operation Needs

All available intervention trainings were well-utilized by participants, although demand was greatest for interventions developed to proactively identify survivors (i.e. screening interventions for adult women and for children), followed by SGBV prevention interventions ('ZTVA'). This preference aligns with discussions with UNHCR implementing partners that suggest SGBV survivor under-reporting is a challenge partners have been working to overcome. In addition, preventing SGBV is a high priority on the agenda of UNHCR implementing partners.

A 2017 African Bureau-Population Council regional convening of UNHCR implementing partners highlighted psycho-social support (PSS) as an area requiring strengthening in refugee operations. This finding was supported by the demand for the psycho-social response intervention (the ‘Tree of Life’ counseling approach) at the meeting, which half of the countries in attendance selected. The Tree of Life training session was facilitated by the Regional Psycho-social Support Initiative (REPSSI), a friend of the *Africa Regional SGBV Network*, which has supported the Network with psycho-social support training in refugee settings since 2017.



There was also considerable interest in health facility-based response models for helping survivors more efficiently and comprehensively access SGBV services. Two available models responded to this interest: the case management intervention for child survivors, and a model designed to enhance access to justice by helping providers improve how forensic evidence is collected, documented, and used. Half of the countries present chose training in each of these interventions.

The table below summarizes the interventions selected by each country.

Interventions Selected by UNHCR Country Operations						
	SGBV Screening	ZTVA	PSS	CSA Screening	Forensic Evidence	Case Management
Djibouti						
Ethiopia						
Rwanda						
South Sudan						
Sudan						
Tanzania						
Uganda						
Zambia						

## Next Steps

This regional meeting is being succeeded by a series of technical assistance visits by Network partners to the participating countries to ensure their interventions are implemented according to established protocols. In addition, where needed, UNHCR implementing partners are receiving seed funding from the *Africa Regional SGBV Network* to support these interventions in their entirety, or for critical components.



The UNHCR EHAGL Africa Bureau is providing technical oversight for the overall process, while also playing a critical supportive and catalytic role.

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Since 2006, the Population Council-led *Africa Regional SGBV Network* has worked to build effective responses to SGBV in low-resource settings, focusing on those who have experienced violence, as well as on violence prevention. From 2018-2020, the network is collaborating with the UNHCR EHAGL Africa Bureau in Nairobi, Kenya, to address the needs of survivors in refugee settings in the East, Horn, and Great Lakes Regions of Africa through the **Vi**OLence Response and Prevention through Information, **C**ommunication, and **E**ducation (VOICE) project. 'Voice' is translated as 'Sauti' in Kiswahili, and represents the project's emphasis on amplifying the voices of SGBV survivors and the efforts of those that work with them (UNHCR implementing partners and the network's civil society organizations), to broaden the reach of effective SGBV responses across the region.

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