



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



Wilton Park



Report

CRSV Survivor Retreat

Monday 6 – Wednesday 8 March 2023 | WP3205



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Executive summary

The FCDO hosted a conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) survivor retreat at Wilton Park 6-8 March 2023. The event was co-created by the FCDO and the PSVI Survivor Champions, with important input from the PSVI Survivor Advisory Group. It brought together survivors and other experts to consider how to support survivor networks and strengthen the voices of survivors and children born of CRSV in national and international policy-making.

The obstacles to effective survivor engagement identified included: insufficient political will; bureaucratic processes; poorly designed engagements; a lack of holistic survivor support and security; lack of long term, flexible funding; and challenges around representation and inclusivity.

Key recommendations to address these challenges included going beyond survivor consultation to promoting survivor leadership, whereby survivors are empowered to set the agenda and advocate for their priorities. The need for flexible, long term funding for survivor networks, and the NGOs supporting them, was another key theme, along with the need to design engagements that include and accommodate the diverse experiences and background of survivors.

The CRSV Survivor Retreat also considered the future of the PSVI Survivor Advisory Group (SAG), and survivor engagement in the PSVI International Alliance. Key recommendations here were to continue and formalise the role of the SAG and ensure it takes an outcome-focused approach that genuinely influences FCDO policy. In addition to the UK, other governments should also consider establishing advisory groups. Survivors should be supported to shape the work of the International Alliance and be able to use it as a platform to advocate for their priorities.

Background

Taking a survivor-centred approach is a key principle of the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) Strategy. As part of this, the FCDO hosted a CRSV survivor retreat at Wilton Park 6-8 March 2023. The event was co-created by the FCDO and the PSVI Survivor Champions, with important input from the PSVI Survivor Advisory Group. The event brought together survivors, experts, civil society representatives and governments to consider how to

address CRSV effectively through supporting survivor networks and strengthening the voices of survivors in national and international policy making.

This retreat followed the PSVI Conference held on the 28-29 November 2022, attended by over 1000 delegates, including representatives from 57 countries, survivors, civil society and experts. Survivors played key roles in preparations for and delivery of the event. 53 countries signed a Political Declaration launched at the Conference that included a commitment to drive change in a survivor-centred way that amplifies survivor voices.

The retreat also built on the 2017 'Principles for Global Action – Preventing and Addressing Stigma Associated with Conflict-Related Sexual Violence'. This document aims to encourage increased will, resources and action from policy-makers in ending CRSV-associated stigma. It includes ten recommendations, including recommendation 3 to 'Support local, national, regional and global victim/survivor networks that provide a safe space to have a voice and be empowered, including establishing and sustaining an international platform for survivors/victims and peer support through local/national networks.'

Terminology and Scope

This report uses the general term 'survivor' to describe a person who has suffered from CRSV, while acknowledging and respecting each individual's right to choose the most appropriate language to express their experience.

The report is not UK government policy nor does it seek to reflect the individual experiences or opinions of event participants, including survivors, but rather it is a summary of the main discussion points and outcomes from the dialogue.

Obstacles to strengthening survivor voices in national and international policy-making

Political will and organisational processes

1. Strengthening survivor voices requires genuine political will to do things differently and open up decision making processes. While it is not just governments that need to focus on strengthening survivor voices, but also NGOs, multilateral organisations and others, there were particular challenges for governments. Some governments may be concerned about creating an opposition if they supported survivor advocacy networks. Another challenge is that political leaders can often change quickly, which may mean efforts to engage survivors are not sustained. It is therefore important to establish survivor engagement as a norm that is accepted by successive governments.
2. There are a range of other influences on policy-making that may reduce the impact of survivor voices, including spending rules and bureaucratic processes, such as internal deadlines restricting the opportunity for consultation. This can make it difficult for those outside the system to understand how to engage, leading to large knowledge and power imbalances. In this context, it's important for governments to be honest with survivors about what can and cannot be done, and to manage expectations.
3. Further challenges are that decision-makers are often remote from survivors (e.g. in capital cities or in donor countries), and survivors may not have the right contacts at embassies. Another is managing the relationship between domestic policies and international principles and best practice.

Recommendations

- Influence senior officials who tend to be in post longer than political leaders and can become advocates within their systems.
- Influence decision-makers in the UN system, for example the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has committed to speak to survivors on every field mission.
- Training for survivor advocates on influencing policy at national level.
- Decision-makers to visit grassroots organisations when possible, for example by leaving capital cities during visits and travelling to rural areas.
- Government policy teams in capitals should facilitate introductions between their embassies and survivor groups in country. Embassies can then play a role in convening survivor advocates at national level.

Poorly designed survivor engagement

4. Where policy-makers do engage survivors, there are often a range of factors restricting the effectiveness of this. For example, policy-makers will often consult in a one-off fashion when they want to, which doesn't allow survivors the opportunity to set the agenda or take a leadership role. There is often a lack of understanding from policy-makers of how to strengthen survivor voices, combined with a belief that survivors are too vulnerable to engage. There is also not enough appreciation of the logistical requirements to bring survivors together, including on translation, travel costs and visas.
5. Survivor empowerment should go beyond 'just' engagement and consultation. It should promote survivor leadership, whereby survivors control the agenda and are supported (e.g. through funding and capacity-building) to take on activist leadership roles.

Recommendations

- Training for policy teams in capitals and embassies on how to engage survivors effectively.
- Engagement should happen where survivors are based. Policy-makers should consider carefully if it's necessary for survivors to travel.
- Governments could pilot national level engagement with survivor networks, evaluating throughout to capture and apply lessons.
- Donors should fund capacity-building and mentoring to help survivors take leadership roles.
- Decision-makers need to think about how they can cede power to allow survivors to set the agenda.

Holistic support and security

6. Survivors need holistic support to be activists. Medical, psychosocial, financial and other support is necessary as a baseline requirement before survivors can be expected to work on influencing policy. It is particularly important to address the trauma that many survivors face to help to promote safe engagement. Donors may be more likely to fund advocacy work than holistic care, the latter being more expensive and long term. Given the expense of holistic care, it would be economical for governments to put more money into CRSV prevention.
7. The security of survivors is also critical. Those who speak out may face backlash. It's important that survivors are well informed of the risks of speaking out and the support that is or isn't available. This is particularly true where survivors are sharing a platform with governments that are culpable for CRSV.

Recommendations

- Fund holistic care to support survivor recovery, helping survivors get to a place where they are ready to be activists and leaders.
- Follow do no harm principles. Survivors should be made aware of any risks to speaking out (if not already) and of what support governments can provide.
- Organisations providing a platform should be transparent with survivors about which governments will be sharing that platform and why.

Funding

8. Survivor networks are often unable to access funding due to donor requirements for proposals, reporting, and due diligence. Survivor networks may be unable to compete with larger NGOs in bidding for funding as the latter will often have more capacity and experience in securing funding. While this issue could be partially addressed by ensuring strong survivor engagement in proposal development, funding application windows are often too short to allow for meaningful consultation.
9. The funding that is provided is frequently short term and attached to particular activities, rather than the core funding that survivor networks and NGOs need. This is partly because donor funding rules generally preclude flexible, long term funding.
10. However, building a movement requires a staged, multi-pronged approach. What this looks like will vary from country to country, but it will almost always require long term funding. There is a need to consider funding opportunities at national, regional and global levels, and how these levels interlink.

Recommendations

- Provide the long term, sustainable, flexible funding needed to build movements. This should include funding the professionals and NGOs that support survivors. Given funding rule restrictions, this may be a long term goal for many donors.
- Invest in grassroots survivor networks, including in peer support and the capacity building to help survivors become leaders.
- Flexibility in funding could include being adaptive by not requiring detailed delivery plans at the proposal stage, but rather allowing these to be created during delivery.
- Funding should encourage survivor networks and the NGOs supporting them to co-create activities and jointly monitor outcomes.
- Set aside dedicated funding for survivor networks so that they are not competing with NGOs.
- Map global and domestic funding opportunities.
- Give survivors a role in deciding funding allocations.
- Allow enough time in funding windows for consultation and for organisations to collaborate.

Representation and inclusivity

11. Survivors are not a homogenous group, and so policies and programmes must be designed inclusively. It is important not to assume that a particular survivor is representative of other survivors that share their demographic or nationality. Approaches to survivor engagement that are not carefully thought through and adequately funded are likely to exclude certain survivor groups and demographics. For example, child survivors are often left out of discussions, yet they could be engaged (particularly older children) if this is done in a professional, nurturing way. A range of organisations (e.g. World Vision) have expertise in this area.

12. Another group that are often excluded are survivors living in countries where being an activist is dangerous, such as Iran or Afghanistan. There can also be tensions between and within survivor networks that should be taken into account to ensure an inclusive approach to engagement.

Recommendations

- Design inclusive engagements that incorporate views from a wide range of survivors, including men and boys, LGBT+ survivors, child survivors, and children born of CRSV.
- Consider specific, targeted consultation that recognises particular experiences, such as the stigma faced by male survivors.
- Ensure that the costs of inclusive engagement are factored in at an early stage of planning.

Recommendation for the Survivor Advisory Group and the International Alliance

Background

13. The Survivor Advisory Group (SAG) is a group of survivors convened by FCDO to shape the design of the PSVI Conference. Following the conference, the CRSV Survivor Retreat considered whether the SAG should continue, and if so how it could be strengthened.
14. The International Alliance on PSVI was announced at the PSVI Conference. It is a group of states, multilateral agencies, civil society and survivors that will work together to strengthen the global response to CRSV. The CRSV Survivor Retreat considered options for ensuring that survivors had a key role in the work of the Alliance.

Survivor Advisory Group recommendations

- Continue the SAG as a positive vehicle for survivors to influence FCDO policy.
- Make sure the SAG includes diverse survivors from a range of geographies and demographics.
- Consider having individuals on the SAG representing different survivor networks.
- Ensure the SAG is outcomes-focussed.
- Formalise the SAG's role through a terms of reference, including to help protect it from changes in political leadership.
- Consider renaming the SAG, for example the Survivor Expert Group.
- Connect the SAG to the International Alliance, so that (for the UK's year of chairing the Alliance at least) the SAG is the route through which survivors engage with the Alliance.
- Consider whether/how to compensate SAG members for their time. While it would be good to recognise the expertise survivors are providing, it is important to assess the unintended consequences of direct financial compensation and ensure a considered approach.
- Consider giving the money to the organisation/network that the survivor comes from, particularly if they are acting as a representative of that organisation/network on the SAG.
- Other governments beyond the UK should consider having survivor advisory groups.
- Advisory groups should be supported to understand how policy-making works in a particular national context.

International Alliance recommendations

- Use the Alliance to provide a platform for survivors to advocate for their priorities to senior decision-makers, while also inputting across the whole Alliance agenda.
- Important for survivors to agree what issues they want to bring to the Alliance. To facilitate this there could be a survivor pre-meeting to agree on an approach.
- Consider rotation of the survivors that participate to promote a broad range of survivor voices.
- Consider ways to balance power dynamics, for example by having a survivor co-chair meetings or having a veto over certain areas.
- Governments that are members of the Alliance could commit to ensuring survivors are part of events they join, or making sure survivors are involved in ministerial visits.
- High level meetings of the Alliance could be held in CRSV-affected countries to help decision-makers connect with grassroots networks.

Wider approaches for addressing CRSV

Prevention

15. To prevent CRSV happening in the first place, it is important to promote gender equality, particularly in schools and by engaging men to become gender equality champions. Preventing conflict would also be effective at stopping the increased levels of sexual violence that often accompany conflict.

Justice and accountability

16. National governments should ensure that their legal systems reflect the best practice and standards embodied in international treaties. Taking a survivor-centred approach is crucial when survivor experiences are being documented, for example using tools like the Murad Code. As part of a survivor-centred approach, policy-makers could consider removing the time limit on bringing charges for sexual violence, given that many survivors choose not to come forward until years after they were attacked.

Survivor support

17. When supporting survivor recovery, service providers should work closely with survivors to understand what they need. Support services should be holistic and funded sufficiently, including funding for the specialised services survivors often require. Besides providing funding, donors can play a helpful role by coordinating service providers at a national level. There may also be value in developing guidelines on providing safe spaces for survivors in shelters – these could set out what services should be available as a minimum standard. In addition to supporting survivors, help should be provided to the family and wider community, who are likely to be affected by the collective trauma CRSV can create.

Cross-cutting

18. There could be value in a repository or online platform where survivors can share knowledge, lessons and best practice. This could help to share learning with survivors who may not be familiar with PSVI and wider international work in this sector. However, there are a number of platforms that already exist, and it would be important to avoid duplication.
19. It is worth considering mechanisms for survivors to hold decision-makers to account for commitments made, and to engage survivors in monitoring the outcomes of policies and programmes.

Conclusions and next steps

20. For the FCDO, discussions at the CRSV Survivor Retreat will shape next steps on CRSV survivor engagement, including the SAG and International Alliance, with plans in these areas circulated to event attendees for feedback in advance of being finalised. Conclusions and lessons will also be fed into wider cross-FCDO discussions on best practice survivor engagement, including regarding other forms of gender-based violence and modern slavery.

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