



Learning Brief – Promoting the Leadership of Women-led Organizations in GBV Coordination

The participation and leadership of women-led organizations (WLOs) in GBV coordination has become a priority for the GBV Area of Response (GBV AoR)¹. As part of the UNFPA-led, ECHO-funded project '*Enhancing GBViE and SRHiE global response capacity through strengthened knowledge and skills to integrate quality, accountable gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health services in humanitarian settings*', the International Rescue Committee (IRC) collaborated with ASDEMIN, a Malian WLO to foster their leadership into a co-coordination role of the national GBV AoR. Through key informant interviews with staff from the IRC, UNFPA and ASDEMIN, this learning brief reflects on the selection process and capacity strengthening efforts, and provides examples of the impact of ASDEMIN's leadership for survivors, the sector and the WLO itself.

Background of ASDEMIN

ASDEMIN (Appui à la Scolarisation et au Développement des Femmes et des Enfants pour une Meilleure Intégration Nationale) is a Women-Led Organization (WLO) deeply rooted in Malian communities, with a predominantly female team drawn from local populations. Operating in some of Mali's most challenging regions for over a decade, ASDEMIN ensures that its interventions are both relevant and sustainable, while advancing the role of women as key actors in community development. The organization's work focuses on the empowerment of women and the promotion of their rights, with a strong emphasis on protection, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention and response, education, and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH).

The process: Fostering meaningful leadership

In Mali's approach to localizing the national GBV working group, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) provided technical support and mentorship throughout both the selection process and ASDEMIN's transition into the co-coordinator role for the GBV AoR.

Selection process

When the opportunity to co-lead the GBV Working Group arose, ASDEMIN was already an active and respected member. For Nasroune Walet Ouefane, ASDEMIN's president, the decision to apply was straightforward, given the organization's commitment to women and children and its strong operational presence in Mali's least accessible locations.

¹ The GBV AoR has developed a [WLO Leadership in GBV Coordination Resource Package](#) based on a participatory action research project in Somalia and South Sudan.

Learning Brief: WLO leadership in GBV Coordination

The selection process was comprehensive, involving 10 external reviewers in the organizational assessment to examine key criteria: expertise in Genders issues, operational presence, commitment to fight against GBV, and active participation in GBV AoR activities. Although ASDEMIN initially found the process overwhelming, they recognized its competitiveness, with several established NGOs also under consideration. While a gap in UNFPA leadership in Mali delayed the start date, ASDEMIN remained committed and confident in their suitability for the role throughout the rigorous selection and assessment process.

ASDEMIN was ultimately chosen as it was the most active WLO in terms of both participation in GBV coordination activities and in the wider humanitarian sector. As the co-president of PONAHA (the platform for national NGOs active in the humanitarian sector), ASDEMIN had leadership experience and access to many other local organizations. In addition, the team's technical background in GBV and experience with capacity strengthening also enabled ASDEMIN to earn the highest score.

For IRC and UNFPA, this was also the first experience of WLO leadership in GBV coordination in Mali. At the onset, there were communication challenges regarding selection criteria, stages of the process, and the tools applied. IRC initially relied on its organizational partnership tools, which were not fully aligned with the GBV AoR Co-Coordination resource package. This experience highlighted the importance of clear communication and collaboration from the outset. Despite this, all parties reported satisfying and meaningful collaboration during mid-project reflections.

Capacity assessment and strengthening

Once ASDEMIN was selected, Nasroune and her team collaborated closely with the IRC to conduct two capacity assessments: one for ASDEMIN as an organization, and one for Nasroune as the future co-coordinator. The capacity assessments helped to identify strategic areas for enhancement to ensure full compliance with international donor standards and expectations. The organizational capacity building activities, which looked at HR, finance and security, supply chain, and governance were provided not only to ASDEMIN but also to the other four finalists of the selection process.

Ongoing collaboration and open exchanges with IRC and UNFPA were critical in clarifying expectations and building capacity for effective leadership. Translating the Terms of Reference (ToR) into daily practice presented initial challenges, as did adjusting to the slower pace of coordination often found within UN agencies and INGOs. Notably, ASDEMIN's prior active participation in the GBV working group proved instrumental in facilitating this transition and bridging cultural divides between international and national humanitarian actors. As a result, the co-coordinator felt confident in her role midway through the process and remained committed to paving the way for more WLOs to assume similar leadership positions in the future.

Additional challenges arose due to the impact of the USG Stop Work Order which resulted in departures of both IRC and UNFPA staff and delays to capacity building activity timelines.



It is a privilege for ASDEMIN to co-coordinate the GBV working group in Mali, but the GBV working group is also lucky to have ASDEMIN as a partner.

— Nasroune Walet Ouefane,
president of ASDEMIN

Learning Brief: WLO leadership in GBV Coordination

Nonetheless, both the individual and organizational co-ordination plans were completed at 100%. Staff also recommended that the individual capacity building be offered not only to Nasroune as the president, but also other technical staff who could benefit from these skills and knowledge.

The impact: long-term changes for survivors, WLOs, ADEMIN and the sector

For GBV survivors and community members:

Advancing health, protection, and rights for women in Mali requires meaningful consultation with women who are directly affected as well as the WLOs that represent their voices and interests. WLOs, such as ASDEMIN, enjoy greater community trust and closer relationships with the populations they serve. ASDEMIN's established presence in conflict-affected areas enables access to locations that remain difficult or impossible for external and international actors to reach.

When a WLO with an inclusive vision plays a key role in the national GBV coordination it generates opportunities for other WLOs and informal women-led civil society groups to strengthen GBV prevention and response. This fosters approaches that are closer to communities and more sustainable for women and girls.

Both IRC and UNFPA emphasize the critical importance of connecting the humanitarian sector more directly with affected communities. ASDEMIN's direct access to women, children, and other WLOs is fundamental to the success of GBV prevention and response efforts in Mali. Furthermore,

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I am not just co-coordinator of the GBV working group by title - I am there to be useful to women and children in Mali. As humanitarians we should never stay in our comfort zone. Our motivation and empathy comes from meeting people in the most difficult of situations.

— Nasroune Walet Ouefane, president of ASDEMIN

ASDEMIN's established reputation as a trusted national partner in rights-based programming creates benefits that extend across the entire sector.

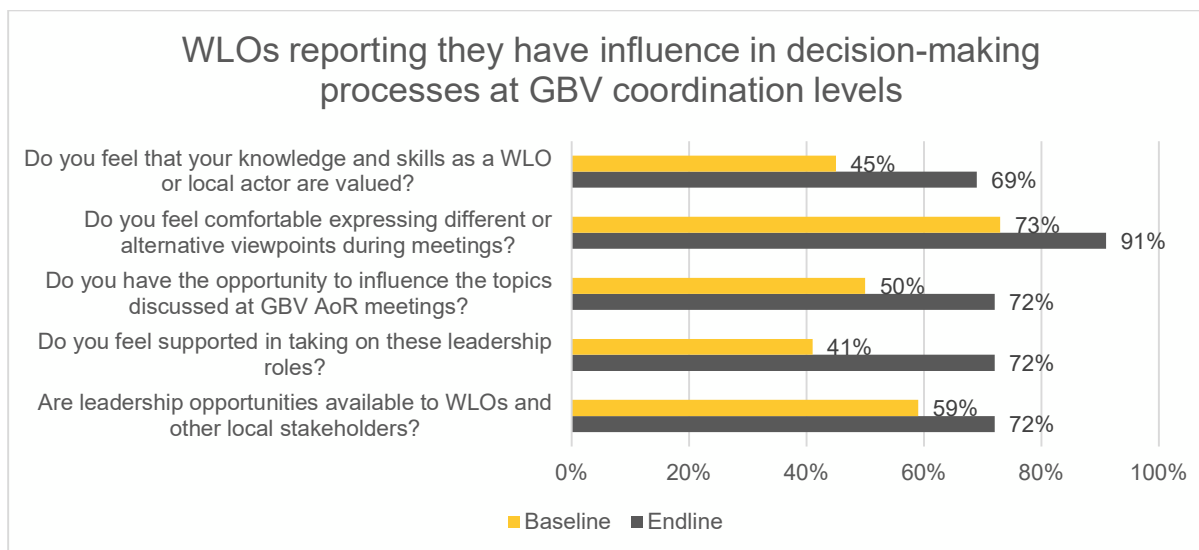
For the GBV sector

With the humanitarian reset of 2025, the humanitarian sector is facing significant changes with resistance to gender transformative programming and reduced funding for women- and girl-focused initiatives, resulting in the merging of the GBV AoR into the Protection Cluster. This has downstream effects on WLOs in humanitarian contexts, who often rely on UN agencies and INGOs for financial support. There is a risk that such developments could undermine hard-won gains for women, girls and WLOs that are intrinsically linked to effective GBV prevention and response. Ensuring that WLOs like ASDEMIN have the power and capacity to navigate the competitive international donor environment is critical to the future of GBV programming.

ASDEMIN's leadership also serves as a catalyst, inspiring other WLOs to engage actively in the GBV working group and pursue national leadership opportunities at the national level. A questionnaire on localization within the GBV AoR conducted with WLO members demonstrated a significant improvement in WLOs reporting they have influence in decision-making processes at the GBV coordination level, from 54% up to 75%. In particular, 91% of WLO respondents indicated they

Learning Brief: WLO leadership in GBV Coordination

were comfortable expressing different or alternative points of view during meetings at endline, while 72% felt leadership opportunities were accessible to WLOs and other local actors.



By engaging and mobilizing WLOs to support the working group's objectives, ASDEMIN is demonstrating what is possible, inspiring others to follow. This positive momentum has generated increased interest from other WLOs in joining the GBV working group, which IRC and UNFPA see as a positive trend. It signals the potential for more inclusive, locally led humanitarian action when guided by national actors as it should be.

Beyond GBV, ASDEMIN has also contributed to the SRH working group, inviting them to use ASDEMIN's office space and facilitated working sessions with the working group in Bamako. Nasroune has gained a reputation as an advocate not only for GBV but also for other clusters, strengthening the links and integration between sectors.

For ASDEMIN

Consistent with the experiences of other WLOs co-coordinating GBV working groups in Somalia and South Sudan, ASDEMIN has benefitted from the increased visibility and credibility through its leadership role. The position has enabled ASDEMIN to inspire and mentor other national and local WLOs by scaling up trainings and peer support initiatives such as workshops on safety audits and access to safe abortion care in humanitarian settings.

Since moving into the co-coordination role, ASDEMIN has participated and led numerous cluster meetings, co-developed the GBV AoR localization strategy and prepared monthly reports. In November 2025, ASDEMIN was invited to present on its role as co-coordinator to a donor audience at the West African regional level, enabling Nasroune to share her leadership experience and connect with potential donors. Most recently, ASDEMIN once again went through a rigorous selection process and was chosen as the new co-coordinator for women-led/women-rights organizations within the Protection Cluster. In this role, ASDEMIN will continue to advocate for the GBV perspective, and to champion other WLOs from across the regions of Mali.

Nasroune is confident that ASDEMIN will continue to serve not only as a feminist organization but also as a role model for national actors in the GBV sector. The organization aims to strengthen women's rights advocacy and build a wider, stronger network of national actors. Many WLOs require support to develop a clear vision and internal leadership, and ASDEMIN intends to provide this support through a strong GBV community of practice.