Evidence Gap Map
Practitioner Brief

USAID
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Approaches to advance human rights

through social and behavior change communication

Threats to human rights are escalating worldwide as we contend with some of the most challenging and complex issues of our era, including the COVID-19 pandemic that has intensified a global decline in freedom. In fact, less than 20 per cent of the world's population lives in a "free" country with access to political rights and civil liberties - the smallest proportion since 1995.[1,2]

Various countries and international agencies have invested in interventions that seek to **prevent** human rights violations, **protect** victims and rights defenders and **respond** to abuses. To get an overview of the evidence on Human Rights, experts at the USAID's Center for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) commissioned 3ie to produce an evidence gap map.

Within this map, there was an interest in developing a deeper understanding of the interventions that use social and behavior change communication (SBCC), which can provide systematic insights about why people behave the way they do.[3] This brief highlights the findings and observations from 27 studies of SBCC interventions. It is likely to be useful for practitioners and includes considerations to inform planning and implementation of programming and research. The brief does not synthesize or quantify intervention effect sizes (as in a systematic review), nor does it replace the need for rigorous evaluation of DRG programming.

3ie's Human Rights Evidence Gap Map, examined causal evidence from 423 studies on human rights interventions identified through a systematic search and screening process.[4][1] The 27 studies in this brief were selected from the EGM results based on their examination of one or more SBCC interventions in conjunction with one or more outcomes falling under human rights prevention, protection, and response categories.

Did you know ?

- The UN human rights chief warns that we are facing "the most wide-reaching and severe cascade of human rights setbacks in our lifetimes."[5]
- In the last year, over 156,000 people have died in political violence (including civil war, battles, explosions, and protest events).
- An estimated 1 in 3 women worldwide have been subjected to gender-based violence, often within their own homes.

Key messages

For practitioners

Prevention

- Education to promote rights-affirming behaviors within psychosocial interventions and community mobilization shows promise in preventing violence against women and girls.

Protection

- Large-scale social and behavior change to strengthen protection systems requires adequate resources, planning, and long-term commitment.

Response

- When designing programs involving justice sector actors, practitioners should be mindful that not all program participants experience positive and equal treatment from justice sector actors.

For learning specialists and researchers

- Conduct more impact evaluations of human rights SBCC interventions using experimental, quasi-experimental, and qualitative methods that allow for causal attribution
- Improve the robustness of findings by addressing risk of bias and providing thorough descriptions of evaluation methods and processes.
- Confer with practitioners when designing evaluations (to facilitate the evaluation process).
- Ensure findings are presented in a useful way for program learning. Provide explicit details on interventions and context.

How we conceptualize human rights

We draw on the *human rights-based approach* and key USAID democracy, human rights, and governance documents[6,7,8] to develop a high-level Theory of Change for systems that prevent human rights abuse, protect human rights, and respond to violations (Figure 1). We conceptualized a set of interventions intended to influence a set of intermediate outcomes that target behavior change among a set of three types of interdependent actors (rights holders, duty bearers, and rights defenders).

Rights holders are individuals and groups who are entitled to universal rights.

Duty bearers can be state actors (e.g., public institutions) or non-state actors (e.g., corporations, armed groups) obligated by international and/or domestic laws and norms to uphold the rights of rights holders.[9] They must create and implement laws, policies, institutions, and procedures in order to **prevent** human rights abuses, **to protect** survivors, human rights defenders, and other at-risk populations, and **to respond** to human rights violations. This includes ensuring respect for the right to access justice and due process and the right of no-repetition. Duty-bearers also have an obligation to provide the security required to ensure that rights holders' rights are respected.

Human rights defenders can be any persons or groups working to promote or protect human rights.

The behaviors or actions of these actors are in turn theorized to influence primary outcomes, which in turn contribute to a set of long-term outcomes.

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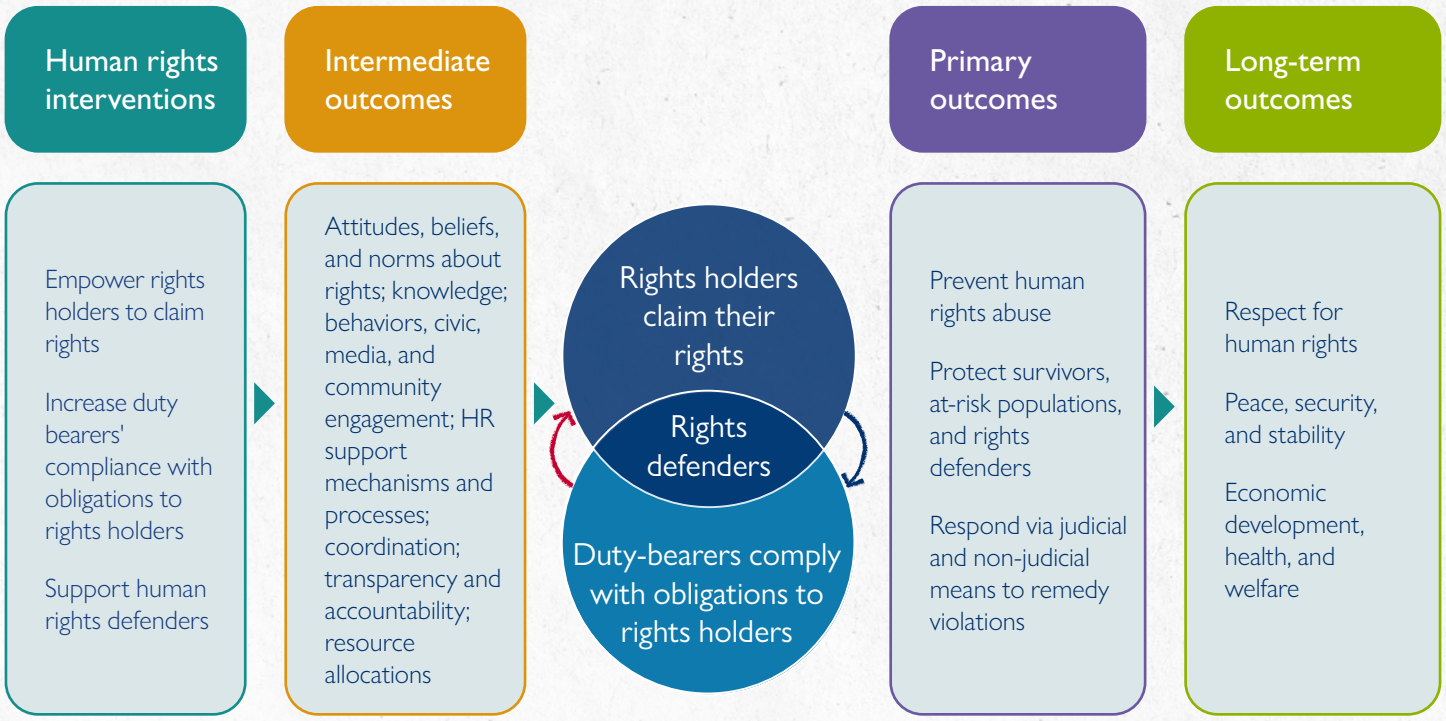
Figure 1: Conceptualizing systems that protect human rights



Source: 3ie, adapted from: USAID 2013; 2016; 2019 and UNFPA 2014.

Mapping the availability of evidence

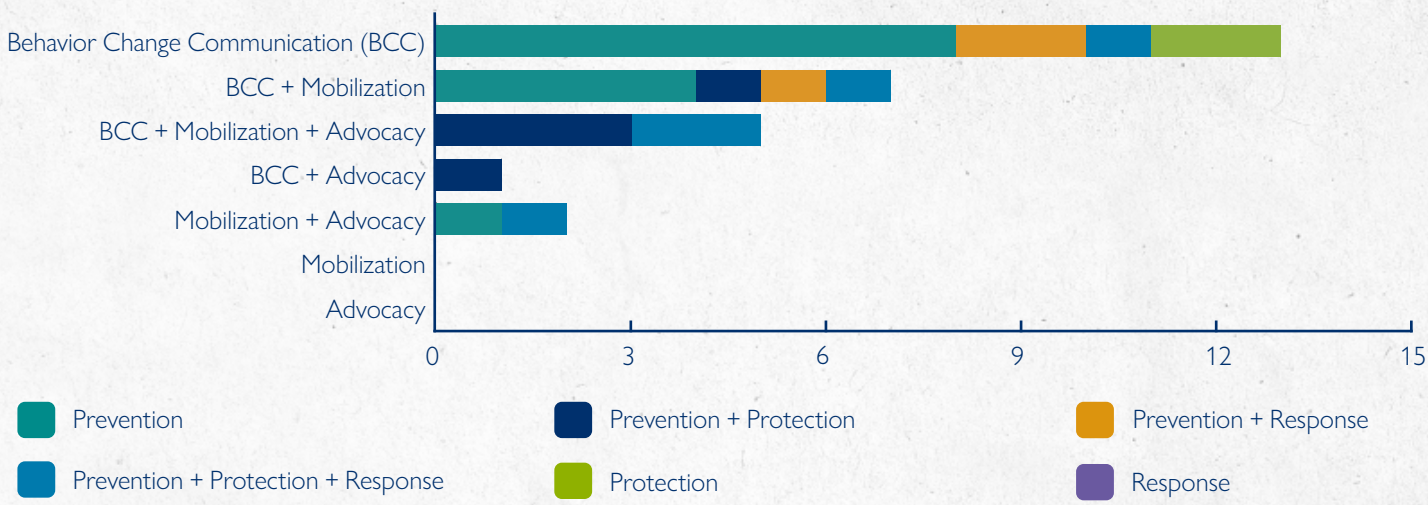
To achieve the full and equal realization of human rights, there is a pressing need to compile evidence on the effects of strategies for promoting them legally and practically. This requires evidence that can quantify changes attributable to a program, after accounting for other factors.

USAID commissioned 3ie to develop an Evidence Gap Map (EGM) about human rights interventions and outcomes. An EGM is a visual representation of completed and ongoing studies that provide this type of evidence on effects, structured around a framework of interventions and outcomes.

Because human rights broadly include political, civil, social, cultural, economic and environmental rights, nearly any development program can be considered to be directly or indirectly targeting human rights. We elected to include all civil political rights and economic, social, environmental and cultural rights, the latter four through their intersection with discrimination, in order to delineate explicitly human rights focused programming from broader development programming that could have an implicit human rights focus (e.g. many interventions in education, health etc.). To present a large evidence base in a useful way, we developed categories of rights and mapped relevant interventions to these rights. In many cases, interventions were designed to address multiple human rights violations.

Within this large evidence base of human rights studies, we have focused on 27 studies of SBCC interventions that aim to prevent abuses, protect people, and respond to violations (Figure 2). Behavior change communication is the most common SBCC intervention approach, and prevention is the largest outcome category. There are relatively few studies targeting response and protection outcomes, which highlights a gap in the evidence. The evidence on interventions that use advocacy or mobilization approaches is also limited.

Figure 2: Studies included in brief by SBCC intervention approach and prevention, protection, response objective



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SBCC approaches included in the EGM

Approach	Definition	Intervention example
Behavior change communication	Behavior change communication using mass and social media, community-level activities, and interpersonal communication to bring about changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and practices among specific audiences	■ Education on human rights ■ Using popular media, such as entertainment TV, to explore rights ■ Training for healthcare workers ■ Religious sensitization campaigns
Social mobilization	Social mobilization for wider participation, coalition building, and ownership, including community mobilization	■ Community meetings and events to raise awareness on human rights issues ■ Empowering people to become agents of change
Advocacy	Advocacy to raise resources as well as political and social leadership commitment to promoting and protecting human rights	■ Lobbying officials to implement rights-friendly laws ■ Petitions and demonstrations to raise awareness of rights violations

Source: 3ie. Definitions from USAID 2013, p. 29.

The next sections use study findings to identify illustrative drivers and barriers to the effects of SBCC interventions, as well as implications for further research. The studies are categorized according to their main objective in using SBCC interventions:

1. **Prevention** of human rights abuses
2. **Protection** of victims of violations, human rights defenders and/or other at-risk populations
3. **Response** to violations via judicial and/or non-judicial **remedies**

Intervention and outcome details for each study can be found in Online appendix A.

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Considerations for programming and implementation

SBCC interventions for prevention

Key messages

- Education to promote rights affirming behaviors, within psychosocial interventions and community mobilization show promise in preventing violence against women and girls.
- Violence prevention SBCC interventions should be context specific, culturally appropriate, and should use effective targeting.

The prevention evidence examined in this study focuses on behavior change communication and community mobilization interventions that aim to prevent different forms of violence. We summarize findings from 15 quantitative and five qualitative studies and seven systematic reviews (SR). The SRs assessed a variety of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls, including female genital mutilation/cutting. The other studies covered the prevention of: state-sponsored violence via social media; Islamic radicalization, violent extremism via mass communication campaigns, conflict and violence against children through school peace education, as well as several mechanisms to address child marriage and to promote women's empowerment.

Education to promote rights affirming behaviors, within psychosocial interventions and community mobilization show promise in preventing violence, especially violence against women and girls. Information, education and communication approaches and psychosocial interventions such as psychological and/or counselling-based interventions, discussion groups, sexual health education, and mobilization of community members demonstrated desirable effects on rights affirming norms[10], behaviors[11,12] and preventing IPV.[13,14,15,16]

In two reviews based on studies of weak methodological quality, education of the public, outreach, advocacy and multimedia communication may have positively affected attitudes and knowledge of female genital mutilation/cutting,[17] as well as fewer women recommending it to their daughters and reducing its incidence.[18] In one evaluation from rural Bangladesh, lessons on gender norms promoting awareness of gender rights, diversity, and tolerance were found to reduce the risk of child marriage by 28%.[19] Two studies evaluated campaigns to prevent radicalization and violent extremism in Sub-Saharan Africa. Religious sensitization led to less support for Islamic autocracy in Mozambique.[20] An edutainment radio drama in Burkina Faso reduced justification for violence, increased awareness of violent extremism, the willingness to collaborate with security personnel and perceived self-capacity and collective action.[21]

Advocacy interventions on gender and women's rights using religious institutions, media, government and non-governmental organizations or other social movements were considered key to creating an enabling environment for the prevention of IPV.[22,23] The Rights in Crisis campaign in Afghanistan, for example, found that women's rights advocacy targeting Afghan officials contributed substantially to official support for women's political participation and implementation of violence prevention laws.[24]

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For practitioners

Violence prevention SBCC interventions should be context-specific and culturally appropriate and should use effective targeting. Human rights SBCC interventions often aim to transform deeply ingrained beliefs and practices to prevent future violations, which make effective implementation challenging. Many of the reviews highlighted the importance of contextual and cultural appropriateness.[25,26,27,28,29] When aiming to change norms, it is important that interventions operate with gender, cultural, and political sensitivity to ensure that they are accepted by the community.[30,31] Moreover, service providers should be trained to provide non-judgmental and empathetic support. Acceptability of interventions and the ability to trust providers is key for successful delivery, especially when addressing sensitive topics.[32,33]

Implementers should also consider that SBCC interventions can conflict with state narratives. For example, in a social media experiment aiming to reduce support for and contest government narratives about state-sponsored rights violations in Egypt, it was important to consider the realities of an authoritarian military regime when designing an intervention that protected the identity of participants.[34] The repressive nature of the regime hampered the implementation of the intervention, as well as the ability to target a wide range of participants.[35]

By altering the status quo, SBCC interventions may address sensitive and potentially conflict-causing topics. The Community Empowerment Program in Liberia noted, for example, that promoting rights for women and minorities can be perceived as threatening to men and majority groups, thereby heightening the risk for short-term conflict. This requires skilled facilitators to sensitively navigate such situations.[36]

The program also found that some communities are overserved by conflict-prevention interventions. Since generalized, intensive engagement is resource-consuming, it is important to target underserved communities, or individuals with the most potential to benefit.[37] However, accessing these populations is not always straightforward, due to issues including inaccessible location, poor infrastructure, political opposition, reluctance to seek help, and violence.[38,39,40,41,42]

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For practitioners

SBCC interventions for protection

Key messages

- Large-scale social and behavioral change to ensure protection of rights requires adequate resources, planning, and long-term commitment.
- Developing relationships with key decision makers and facilitating community buy-in are key facilitators.

The protection interventions utilize behavior change communication, community mobilization, and advocacy approaches, and cover a range of topics. We summarize findings from five quantitative and three qualitative studies and two SRs. The studies looked at: training for health workers regarding their attitudes towards caring for patients with HIV/AIDS; holistic women's empowerment programs; education for health providers to address IPV, public awareness-raising measures that aim to ensure children's rights and protect them from violations; broad rights campaigns; and inclusive education that aims to advance the rights of children with disabilities.

Large-scale social and behavioral change to ensure protection of rights requires adequate resources, planning, and long-term commitment. Six studies raise resources and planning as key considerations for SBCC program success. The Colombia Human Rights Activity evaluation cited budgetary resource allocation as one of the key factors for program sustainability. The authors noted that Human Rights Activity grants only cover a period of up to 12 months. This short amount of time limits the ability to affect social and behavioral change around human rights, or to create and ensure implementation of rights related policies. It also creates expectations for beneficiaries that cannot be met and undermines sustainability.[43]

The evaluation assessing implementation of UNCRC Article 19 on the protection of children noted that "all countries reported insufficient funds to establish successful child protection measures."[44] Two studies suggested that interventions may not have worked optimally due to a lack of time spent on training, and poor organization.[45,46] The IPV screening study took place in a context with a pre-existing infrastructure for protecting IPV survivors, and included knowledgeable service providers and a highly educated participant group. The authors acknowledge that implementation in a different context would be more resource-intensive.[47]

A project to increase women's awareness of, and engagement in, their political and socio-economic rights showed slight improvement in women's empowerment overall; however, no effect was found for measures of legislative protection for women's rights or social norms.[48] The authors suggest this is because environmental-level social changes require long-term interventions to successfully shift social norms, beliefs, and attitudes.[49]

Developing relationships with key decision makers and facilitating community buy-in are key facilitators in protection studies. Engagement of stakeholders at all levels of society is needed to mobilize resources and design community-mobilization and advocacy interventions that can effectively enact social and behavioral change.[50] If key groups and stakeholders are not involved, overcoming barriers such as inequitable gender norms can prove a more persistent barrier to success.

The Rights in Crisis campaign in Afghanistan, for instance, found that lack of "awareness and acceptance at community and government levels" inhibited successful advocacy and campaigning to protect women's rights.[51] The authors recommended investing more time in identifying and developing relationships with key Afghan decision makers.[52] The Human Rights Activity evaluation found that training for officials improved their knowledge of rights violations and competencies with protection mechanisms.[53] The study on inclusive education found that "equitable involvement of actors based within contexts and with experiences of the identities (e.g., disability) under study" was a crucial part of the intervention's successful implementation and evaluation.[54]

For practitioners

SBCC interventions for response

Key messages

- Combined, multilevel interventions are promising means of responding to the crosscutting issues within human rights.
- Consider participants' perceptions and experiences of justice systems.
- SBCC interventions require more monitoring at the outcome level, and critical consideration of how behavior change is measured.

Nine studies examine outcomes in response to human rights violations, comprising three quantitative and three qualitative studies, and two SRs.[55,56,57,58,59,60,61,62] The majority of these studies rely on a combination of SBCC approaches, while two studies examine the effects of behavior change communication programming alone.[63,64] All report human rights response findings in conjunction with prevention and/or protection; none focus solely on response. Notably, all these studies report mixed results. We explore some of the key enabling and impeding factors gleaned from their observations.

Combined interventions that target multiple levels of society or integrate activities and services are promising means of responding to the crosscutting issues within human rights. Authors of five studies emphasize the importance of community-level SBCC approaches as key to changing entrenched social norms and attitudes that condone and perpetuate human rights abuses, discrimination, and violence.[65,66,67,68,69] Although identifying the optimal targeting balance between individuals, communities, and institutions can be difficult and will vary by context, improvements are often required at each level to achieve lasting progress in advancing human rights. Practitioners should also consider integrating activities and services where appropriate. For instance, combining a "women's access to justice" initiative within a broader women's rights promotional campaign could compound program effects.[70] Health sector programs have also emerged as an important arena for violence surveillance and response.[71]

When engaging the justice sector in response to human rights violations, **practitioners should be mindful that not all program participants experience positive and equal treatment from justice sector actors.** Program participants from Colombia, Kenya, and Lebanon voiced distrust in police and justice officials; and women and minority groups were especially likely to have been denied service or experienced abuse of power, corruption, or lack of confidentiality.[72,73,74] Consequently, many participants viewed referral services to justice officials as inappropriate, ineffective, and even dangerous, and were hesitant to engage with them.[75,76] This indicates that more work needs to be done in building the trustworthiness of, and trust in, these institutions.

Finally, **SBCC interventions require greater attention to monitoring at the outcome level, and critical consideration of how behavior change is measured.** Authors of five studies note that SBCC interventions were hindered by insufficient monitoring at the outcome level.[77,78,79,80,81] Without this, "the outcomes that are being pursued are still minimally supervised and, in many cases, activities stop or are poorly executed. This inhibits the ability to learn what programs are effective and whether certain outcomes can be attributed to…programming."[82]

Four studies also identified gaps in the program logic, such as unconsidered intermediate outcomes, that led to program failure or unintended negative consequences.[83,84,85,86] Fully articulating each step in the causal chain – from SBCC activity to outcome, beginning at the intervention design phase – can help in avoiding these problems.

Practitioners must also critically consider how to measure behavior change. Ruane-McAteer and colleagues (2019) caution that many studies, "relied on outcomes based on self-reported attitudinal and norm changes and were measured over a limited period (i.e., under one-year duration), which do not necessarily correlate or translate into behavior change outcomes."[87] Consider supplementing self-reported outcome data with validating external data, such as local incidence of violence alongside self-reported perpetration of violence.

For learning specialists and researchers

Key messages

- Conduct more impact evaluations (IE).
- Improve the robustness of findings.
- Confer with practitioners to increase the utility of research for program learning.

SR authors note the difficulty of conducting evidence synthesis on human rights interventions due to the lack of IEs in the field and the low quality of much existing research.[88,89,90,91,92,93] **Researchers can help to fill this evidence gap – first, by conducting more rigorous IEs using methods that allow for causal attribution.** While randomized controlled trials are not always feasible, there are many quasi-experimental IE methods well-suited to assess the effects of human rights programming. Gathering baseline data and participant characteristics in addition to outcome monitoring is often key to establishing a counterfactual comparison group through methods such as difference-in-difference, and statistical matching.

Understanding variation in policy or program rollout and implementation can also help researchers to identify IE opportunities; for instance, a program implemented using a pipeline approach, in which activities expand to more locations over time, provides many options for IE, provided that baseline data is collected. The specific qualitative evaluation methods included in the Human Rights EGM[94] can also establish causal links between interventions and outcomes.

Second, researchers should seek to improve the quality of IEs by providing thorough description of evaluation methods and processes, and addressing assumptions, limitations, and risk of bias. This is an important area for improvement, as only five of the 27 SBCC studies included in this brief were assessed to have low risk of bias. Where constraints on article length are a concern, it is very helpful if this information can be supplied in an appendix or other supplementary materials. This detailed level of analysis enhances transparency and replicability and increases confidence in the validity of results.

Finally, researchers should confer with program implementers to design evaluations and present findings in a manner that facilitates program learning, adaptation, replication, and scaling. This entails providing detailed descriptions of intervention activities and participant selection, in addition to evaluation methods. While IEs are often not designed to consider questions of external validity, some discussion of the generalizability of results and recommendations for replicating similar programs in other contexts would be welcome.

A helpful way to identify the factors that contribute to intervention successes and challenges is to use mixed methods: combining qualitative insights from participants and other stakeholders with rigorous quantitative methods. As less than one third of studies included in the Human Rights EGM use mixed methods, this represents a promising direction for future research in the often complex, cross-cutting arena of human rights interventions.

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How studies were selected for this brief

This brief includes findings from seven SRs and 15 quantitative IEs of SBCC interventions along with five studies using qualitative evaluation methods that seek to establish causal inference. They were selected based on a secondary screening of Human Rights EGM results to identify studies of interventions using SBCC approaches. The studies were selected from the following Human Rights EGM intervention categories:

- Human rights education and promotion of rights for the public
- Implementation of legislation reforms
- Institutional strengthening of justice and security sectors
- Institutional strengthening of non-justice and non-security service providers
- Support for human rights defenders
- Protection of groups historically at risk of discrimination or violence
- Multicomponent interventions

Studies were assessed as to whether they evaluate an SBCC intervention of practical relevance to USAID missions. Only medium and high-confidence SRs reviewing SBCC interventions were included.

Figure 5: What types of evidence are included in this brief?

Evidence type	M&E indicators and project reports	Performance and process evaluations	Impact Evaluations (IEs)	Systematic Review (SRs)
Key question	WHAT was done?	HOW was it done?	Did it have an EFFECT?	Were the effects CONTEXT dependent?
Use(s) of findings	Assist in guiding program implementation and course-correction, and demonstrate accountability	Multiple purposes (e.g., program adherence to the plan, implementer performance, achievement of planned outputs and immediate outcomes, stakeholder/ partner/ client feedback)	Measure intervention effectiveness, after accounting for other factors; published IEs provide examples of interventions that have or have not had an impact on a targeted outcome.	Synthesize findings from multiple IEs (often through quantitative meta-analysis) on a particular issue, increasing confidence and generalizability.
Included in EGM	No	No	Yes	Yes

In effectiveness evidence from IEs and SRs, **negative findings are just as important** as positive findings, because they help to refine our understanding about what works (or not, and why or why not). In addition, the **absence of effectiveness evidence does not mean an intervention should be avoided**, but rather highlights the potential benefit of an IE, particularly if the intervention:

- is innovative,
- may be scaled up, or
- is being considered as a potential model for replication elsewhere.

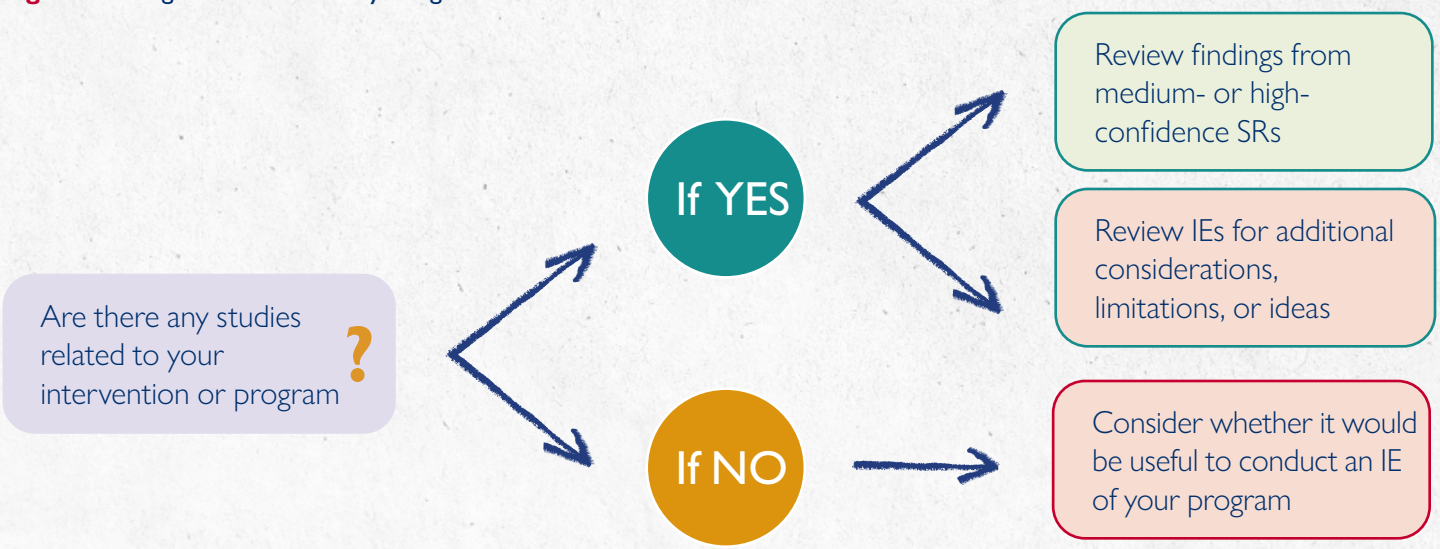
Why is this important?

This brief (along with the associated EGM matrix and report) is designed to inform USAID practitioners' investments in SBCC interventions at multiple phases of the program cycle, including: strategic planning; project design and implementation; activity design and implementation; monitoring; and evaluation.

- Results will feed into the **technical evidence** base in the **learning** phase of USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) Framework.
- IE findings provide USAID practitioners with ideas about which interventions they may want to consider when developing a **program design**.
- Like IEs, SRs may include an explanation of relevant theories of change, which can be useful during the **project and activity design** stage.
- In SRs, the more consistent the findings are across contexts, the higher the likelihood that the approach may work in a new context.

We encourage practitioners to take a closer look at the online Evidence Gap Map[95] to engage with the available evidence. When considering if and how the programs on which you work fit into the framework, we suggest asking the following questions:

Figure 6: Using evidence in activity design



You can always reach out to the SBC Advisor, Levi Adelman, within the DRG Center in USAID/Washington if you have any questions, ideas, or suggestions related to evidence that may help inform the design of your project(s) and/or activity(ies).

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About the brief

This brief highlights research findings and observations from seven medium-confidence SRs, 15 quantitative IEs and five qualitative studies on SBCC interventions to prevent, protect, and respond to human rights violations in low- and middle-income countries. Reported findings and implementation considerations are illustrative and not based on systematic synthesis.

The studies on which this brief is based were identified through the Human Rights Evidence Gap Map, by Tomasz Kozakiewicz and colleagues (*2021b*). The authors systematically searched for published and unpublished IEs and SRs through May 2021, and then identified, mapped, and described the evidence base of interventions that aim to strengthen human rights.

The map contains 46 SRs and 377 IEs. The characteristics of the evidence are described and mapped according to a framework of 23 interventions (supplemented by several of the most common multiple-component combinations) and 28 outcomes. The EGM can be viewed at https://developmentevidence.3ieimpact.org/egm/human-rights.

This brief was authored by Amber Franich, Heather van Buskirk, Tomasz Kozakiewicz, Jane Hammaker, Sridevi Prasad and Douglas Glandon. They are solely responsible for all content, errors, and omissions. It was designed and produced by Akarsh Gupta and Tanvi Lal.

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[94] These include realist evaluation, process tracing, contribution analysis, contribution tracing, the qualitative impact assessment protocol, general elimination methodology, qualitative comparative analysis, and outcome harvesting.

[95] The map is available at: https://developmentevidence.3ieimpact.org/egm/human-rights

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