Gender-specific or transformative interventions increase several dimensions of women’s empowerment and gender equality.

Interventions supporting women’s empowerment and gender equality in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS) produced, on average, positive effects on the intended outcomes. There are no significant negative effects. Interventions do not achieve positive and significant effects for downstream behavioural outcomes, such as intimate partner violence (IPV).

What is this review about?
Despite gains recently made towards inclusion and empowerment, significant challenges still remain for women, particularly in FCAS. We review evidence on the effectiveness of interventions targeting women’s empowerment in FCAS to better understand which interventions are effective at increasing empowerment related outcomes in complex contexts.

What studies are included?
Our review includes 104 studies published between 2009 and 2021, covering 55 programmes in 29 countries, 32 linked impact evaluations papers, and 90 linked qualitative and process evaluations.

Nearly half of the quasi-experimental studies were assessed as having a high risk of bias, while around one-third of experimental studies were assessed as having a high risk of bias. We observe gaps of evidence related to gender-specific and transformative interventions focusing on recovery and relief, or on the active role of women in peacebuilding. There are also gaps in evidence from the Arabian Peninsula.

We used the Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluations (GRADE) methodology to summarise and rate certainty of bodies of evidence. Of the 190 included bodies of evidence, the majority is of very low (57%) and low (27%) confidence, while 14% are of moderate and 2% are of high confidence.

Interventions explicitly addressing gender norms are well-positioned to strengthen women’s empowerment in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
What are the main findings of this review?

Do gender-specific or transformative interventions increase women’s empowerment and gender equality?

Most interventions have significant positive effects on the intended empowerment and gender equality outcomes: asset and cash transfers increase access to credit and income, capacity building increases skills, etc. There are no significant negative effects of any included interventions.

What are the potential barriers and facilitating factors for the effectiveness of those interventions?

There is little evidence of trickle-down effects to behavioural outcomes: few interventions led to positive effects on the attitudes of men towards women, prevalence of IPV, or women’s participation in decision-making processes. This is partly due to gender and social norms acting as significant barriers to programme uptake.

What do the findings of this review mean?

Policymakers must ensure they recognise embedded power dynamics and explicitly address patriarchal norms to lead to structural and behavioural change.

Interventions explicitly addressing gender norms are well-positioned to strengthen women’s empowerment in FCAS. Targeting the right beneficiaries, designing interventions to be gender-transformative, and implementing with the context in mind are key drivers of success.

How up-to-date is this Campbell review?
The review authors searched for relevant studies in December 2020.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?
Campbell is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

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