



Exhibition organized by students of the Gender Program at the *Facultad Libre de Derecho de Monterrey*. Photo: Pamela Teutli, Fortis Consultores

## ASSESSMENT REPORT

# FEMICIDES - PREVENTION AND RESPONSE ACTIVITIES IN NUEVO LEÓN

JULY 2023

This publication was produced at the request of the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared independently by LINC and SIMO under the Monitoring and Evaluation Support for Adaptation (MESA) Activity. The authors are Brisa Ruiz, Azucena Cháidez, Ely Alcalá, Rich Fromer, Meghan Bolden, and Allie Gamble.



## ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of an assessment of the two USAID/Mexico Human Rights portfolio's Femicide-Prevention and Response (F-PAR) activities in Nuevo León. The assessment seeks to understand the effectiveness of the holistic approach taken toward the goal of preventing and sanctioning gender-based violence (GBV) against women. The conclusions and recommendations from this assessment will serve to inform future programming at the Mission, particularly for Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) 2020-2025 Development Objective (DO) 1: Impunity and Violence Reduced in Target Regions. Additionally, to the extent possible in their remaining period of performance, the results of the assessment will support the USAID/Mexico Human Rights team and the F-PAR activities' Implementing Partners (IPs) to adapt and improve their coordination, results, and sustainability.

The assessment answers three key questions primarily through analysis of primary qualitative data collection, including interviews and focus groups, along with a review of relevant documents. The assessment concluded that while each activity individually made progress in preventing and responding to GBV against women, a comprehensive vision or holistic strategy that linked and harmonized their efforts was not fully implemented, representing a missed opportunity to improve results through collaboration and synergy. The assessment identified a number of factors that promoted collaboration, including direct intervention by USAID/Mexico and previous collaborative experience among the implementers, and a number of factors hindering collaboration, including the timing and messaging in the solicitations, and resources allocated to collaboration. Lastly, the assessment concluded that working as a consortium has had mixed effects on the partners' knowledge and practice. Partners reported lessons learned, in particular through using tools and processes that were previously unknown to them, however, differences in vision and approach among partners hindered their ability to actively learn from one another.

The report includes concrete recommendations that aim to improve the design, solicitation, start up, and implementation of activities using collaborative, holistic approaches.

*Key Words:* Femicide, collaboration, holistic approach, consortium relationships, human rights, victims, gender-based violence, Nuevo León, assessment, co-creation

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## ACRONYMS

ALPAZ	Alternativas Pacíficas
AMELP	Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CEJUM	Centro de Justicia para las Mujeres
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DO	Development Objective
DOPAVIDET	Dirección de Orientación, Protección y Apoyo a Víctimas de Delitos y Testigos
F-PAR	Femicides - Prevention and Response
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HUNEF	Hacia un Nuevo Entendimiento de Femicidio en Nuevo León
IP	Implementing Partner
IR	Intermediate Result
JAVA	Access to Justice for Victims and Defendants
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MESA	Monitoring and Evaluation Support for Adaptation
NOFO	Notice of Funding Opportunity
NUFM	Ni Un Femicidio Más
OAA	Office of Acquisition and Assistance
PMP	Performance Management Plan
SOW	Statement of Work
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Background.** USAID/Mexico is supporting two Femicide-Prevention and Response (F-PAR) activities, *Ni Un Femicidio Más (No More Femicides - NUFM)* and *Hacia un Nuevo Entendimiento del Femicidio en Nuevo León (Towards a New Understanding of Femicides in Nuevo León - HUNEF)*. NUFM supports government institutions to improve prevention of and state response to femicides. HUNEF works with civil society organizations (CSOs) to support prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) against women, improve litigation and advocacy to the justice sector, and monitor state performance in femicide cases. As this approach represents a new experience for USAID/Mexico, the Mission commissioned this assessment on the effectiveness of a holistic approach to the F-PAR activities.

**Assessment Purpose.** The purpose of the assessment was to understand the effectiveness of the holistic activity approach undertaken by the Human Rights portfolio to strengthen the results and sustainability of the indirect prevention of and sanction of gender-based violence in the state of Nuevo León. The conclusions and recommendations from this assessment will serve to inform future programming at the Mission. Additionally, to the extent possible in their remaining period of performance, the results of the assessment will support the USAID/Mexico Human Rights team and the F-PAR activities' Implementing Partners (IPs) to adapt and improve their coordination, results, and sustainability.

**Questions and Methods.** The assessment answers three questions:

1. To what extent, if at all, was implementing a **holistic strategy** focused on interventions with Civil Society Organizations and public institutions effective in preventing and sanctioning gender-based violence?
2. What factors (direct and indirect, expected and unexpected) hindered and/or promoted the **effective and organic coordination between two USAID/Mexico funded activities?**
3. What effect, if any, did **working as a consortium have in improving IPs** knowledge and practice, including external performance?

The assessment questions were answered through collection and analysis of primary qualitative data, along with review of documents provided by USAID/Mexico and the activities on their approach and results. The team conducted 24 interviews and one focus group discussion with staff of the IPs, governmental institutions, artists, and CSOs. The assessment team used content analysis of primary data and triangulated with secondary data. The team was not able to interview all government institutions and CSOs involved, and noted that a large majority of key informants were women, both of which limited the ability to make inferences from all perspectives. These limitations were due to availability during field implementation, not design of the study.

### Key Findings and Conclusions.

#### *Holistic strategic approach*

The assessment concluded that while each activity individually made progress in preventing and responding to GBV against women, a comprehensive vision or holistic strategy that linked and harmonized their efforts was not fully implemented, representing a missed opportunity to improve results through collaboration and synergy.

**Holistic strategy implementation:** While both of the USAID funded activities achieved results and involved various stakeholders, there was a lack of coordination and the holistic strategy was not fully implemented. Despite this, there were positive outcomes, such as improved inter-institutional communication channels and the implementation of new approaches and tools in government institutions through NUFM. HUNEF strengthened CSOs' data analysis capabilities and created community spaces for dialogue and awareness-raising.

Additionally, limited examples of collaboration and coordination across the two activities show the potential for increasing impact and sustainability. For example, HUNEF's reporting and artistic activities helped simplify the understanding of femicide and its causes, leading to increased awareness among strategic actors, particularly police corporations. This supported the NUFM Activity's efforts to sensitize these institutions and address the challenges of gender-based violence (GBV).

**Challenges encountered:** Although both activities had at least one local partner, the general perception of local government institutions was that they were organizations far from the implementation contexts and that not being in the state of Nuevo León limited the interactions and supervision of the work they carried out. A series of external challenges came from changes in the implementation context or situations the implementation team had not prepared for, including changes in the public administration, rotation of public officials, tensions among authorities, or dissolution of specific areas in government institutions.

#### *Factors promoting and hindering coordination*

The assessment identified a number of factors that promoted collaboration, including direct intervention by USAID/Mexico and previous collaborative experience among the implementers, and a number of factors hindering collaboration, including the timing and messaging in the solicitations, and resources allocated to collaboration.

Factors promoting effective and organic coordination between the two activities include:

**USAID/Mexico Human Rights team's role:** The USAID/Mexico Human Rights team played a crucial role in facilitating communication and coordination between the activities, through direct engagement in meetings and communication. Without the presence of USAID, direct communication between the IPs rarely occurred, due to heavy workloads and a perceived lack of will to find areas for collaboration.

**Overlapping audiences:** The similarity in objectives, approaches, and program counterparts facilitated dialogue and opportunities for collaboration.

**Previous collaboration with one another:** Having previous experience working together and sharing common values and objectives increased the willingness to explore synergies and seek conversation. For example, the relationship between Equis Justicia (a member of the NUFM consortium) and Data Cívica (leading the HUNEF Activity), and the previous collaboration between HUNEF management and Fundación Idea (a member of the NUFM consortium), contributed to easier communication and opportunities for collaboration.

Factors hindering effective and organic coordination between the two activities include:

**Incorporation of collaboration in design:** As the two activities were designed and launched at different times, IPs did not identify a clear and defined mandate for collaboration in the design and solicitation



messaging, which hindered coordination among the activities during implementation. Governmental institutions failed to identify the connection between the activities and perceived contradictory objectives. For example, NUFM aimed to build trust to facilitate collaboration with government institutions, which was contradictory to the HUNEF Activity's stated objective related to audit or oversight of government institutions' work. The IPs emphasized the need for more information from USAID/Mexico on their counterpart activity, initial meetings to communicate a comprehensive vision and establish clear collaboration points, and the time and resources to support collaboration.

**Unexpected challenges:** The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the coordination between activities as limitations imposed by social distancing and the unfamiliarity with virtual formats slowed the identification of synergies and opportunities for effective collaboration. The focus shifted towards maintaining ongoing work and preventing the risk of losing interest from counterparts, which limited the capacity to actively seek collaboration with the other activity. Also, high staff turnover hindered the continuity of plans for coordination and organizational knowledge of the other activity.

### *Consortium Relationships on NUFM*

The assessment concluded that the NUFM consortium faced challenges, such as a lack of alignment in visions and work processes, growing distrust among partners, and insufficient efforts to learn from one another - eventually leading to the departure of one partner.

**Distinct approaches among consortium members:** From the perspective of the IPs, one of the first challenges that was identified and not resolved effectively was the disparity between their ways of working, their theoretical approaches, and their political positions, which would inform the approach to accompanying their government institution counterparts.

**Prior working relationships:** The collaboration between two IPs that had previously worked together was more fluid compared to the relationship with the third member of the consortium. This contributed to reinforcing the trust and further collaboration among the two partners while fomenting mistrust, discomfort, and tension with the third.

**Meeting focus:** The consortium meetings primarily focused on reviewing progress rather than providing opportunities for collaboration, reflection, and strategic planning. This led to a lack of shared vision and objectives among the organizations, causing them to perceive themselves as parallel entities with similar but siloed goals.

**Roles and Responsibilities:** The lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities within the consortium, influenced by the grant structure, led to inequitable dynamics where one organization assumed a dominant position while others were perceived as subordinate.

**Indicators:** The IPs found it challenging to align their results with USAID's predetermined indicators, particularly when qualitative or theoretical approaches revealed significant outcomes that were not captured by the existing indicators.

**Learning and capacity:** This experience working with USAID has helped a consortium member new to USAID strengthen its internal capacity to manage USAID grants. Despite facing challenges with administrative requirements and monitoring indicators, the opportunity helped to increase their confidence in seeking future funding opportunities from USAID and to leverage their skills in promoting justice and women's rights. However, the assessment team noted that in key informant interviews none

of the consortium members mentioned knowledge gained from working with one another nor did they express any interest in learning from the specific expertise, tools, and experience of their partners.

**Feminist organization influence on the Activity:** Feminist organizations possess a deep understanding of gender dynamics and can contribute innovative and effective solutions to address GBV. However, some smaller and more targeted organizations can feel discouraged by grant requirements that they perceive to favor larger, and typically less specialized, organizations with more administrative experience and capacity.

**Recommendations.** The assessment identified several recommendations that aim to enhance the effectiveness of implementing holistic strategies, improve coordination between activities, and promote learning and collaboration among IPs. Key recommendations from the assessment include:

1. **Conduct a co-creation process and/or co-design process before the implementation of future holistic strategies.** This requires involving local implementers in the planning process, ensuring shared understanding, and identifying common ground and strengths of each organization.
2. **Create Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs) for activities that reflect the desired holistic strategies.** NOFOs should include aligned objectives, expectations of collaboration, considerations for budget and staff, and requirements for past collaboration examples and openness to future collaboration.
3. **Encourage the IPs implementing the current F-PAR activities to create opportunities to share learning, experiences, and results.** Create spaces for workshops and periodic meetings where IPs can share best practices, challenges, and lessons learned. Disseminate achievements and lessons learned at local, regional, and national levels.
4. **Generate self-capacity for collaboration between IPs.** Establish an inter-organizational coordination committee, hold regular gatherings, build relationships based on trust and respect, allocate a specific budget for capacity building, and include indicators for measuring collaboration.
5. **Incorporate an "inception phase" at the beginning of new activities to further integrate the holistic strategy through learning and adapting to the complete Human Rights environment.** This phase allows for understanding the context, common objectives, strategies, potential partners, and alignment of lessons learned.
6. **Promote conversations between USAID technical teams to ensure sharing of experiences and improve alignment across interventions operating in the same geographic area.** To incorporate collaboration in activity design, facilitate structured conversations among teams with shared objectives and stakeholders.
7. **In the case of an unforeseen challenge that affects multiple activities, use it as an opportunity to increase collaboration; develop a flexible risk and contingency plan to deal with unforeseen situations during project implementation.** IPs should document and address unforeseen situations, and USAID can provide a space for coordination, collaboration, and decision-making.
8. **Create spaces for dialogue between IPs to get to know each other and share work methods and dynamics before collaborating on joint projects.**
9. **Encourage meetings for reflection and co-creation rather than meetings to review progress.** Emphasize the importance of improving approaches, expertise, and skills for sustainable impact.
10. **Define roles and responsibilities of the people involved in activity implementation and review compliance with roles regularly.** Establish a democratic decision-making process, promote transparency and open communication, and establish accountability and follow-up mechanisms.

11. **Generate strategies to develop institutional memory and strengthen relationships between an activity and its counterparts.** Maintain detailed documentation, facilitate knowledge transfer, and ensure continuity of knowledge and practices in future projects or when staff turn over.
12. **Improve NOFO design and selection process to encourage involvement of innovative approaches.** Selection processes for activities working in sensitive and challenging subject matter like GBV must value and prioritize the inclusion of transformative approaches that aim to change the way cultural norms are perceived.

## INTRODUCTION

This final report presents the results of an assessment of the two USAID/Mexico Human Rights portfolio's Femicide-Prevention and Response (F-PAR) activities in Nuevo León. USAID/Mexico commissioned the Monitoring and Evaluation Support for Adaptation (MESA) Activity to conduct this assessment to understand the effectiveness of the holistic approach taken toward the goal of preventing and sanctioning gender-based violence (GBV) against women. The conclusions and recommendations from this assessment will serve to inform future programming at the Mission, particularly for Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) 2020-2025 Development Objective (DO) 1: Impunity and Violence Reduced in Target Regions. Additionally, to the extent possible in their remaining period of performance, the results of the assessment will support the USAID/Mexico Human Rights team and the F-PAR activities' Implementing Partners (IPs) to adapt and improve their coordination, results, and sustainability.

This report is structured to align with the overall objective, specific goals, and research questions for the assessment. The first section provides background information on the two F-PAR activities. The second section outlines the purpose, objectives, and guiding questions for the assessment. The third section specifies the assessment methodology, including data collection methods, types of analysis employed, sample distribution, and identified limitations.

The remaining three sections provide the analysis and results of the assessment. The Findings section presents analysis and findings organized by the three assessment questions: **Question 1:** To what extent, if at all, was implementing a holistic strategy focused on interventions with Civil Society Organizations and public institutions effective in preventing and sanctioning gender-based violence?; **Question 2:** What factors (direct and indirect, expected and unexpected) hindered and/or promoted the effective and organic coordination between two USAID/Mexico funded activities?; and **Question 3:** What effect, if any, did working as a consortium have in improving IPs knowledge and practice, including external performance?

The Conclusions section addresses each of the three assessment questions in turn, and the Recommendations' section provides concrete suggestions for next steps based on the assessment findings and conclusions.

## BACKGROUND

In 2018, USAID/Mexico issued the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) "Femicides-Prevention and Response Activity," subsequently named "No More Femicides", to implement an activity with the purpose of helping government institutions improve prevention of and state response to femicides. Through the competitive selection process, USAID/Mexico awarded a cooperative agreement to Fundación Idea, in partnership with Equis Justicia and Fortis Consulting, for an original period of performance of four years (August 2018- August 2022), later extended by the Mission until August 2023.

In 2019, USAID/Mexico issued the NOFO "Femicides-Prevention and Response Activity - Civil Society Component" later named "Towards a New Understanding of Femicides in Nuevo León" with the purpose of increasing civil society organization (CSO) participation to: support prevention activities of gender-based violence against women, strengthen CSO skills in litigation and advocacy to justice sector institutions, and monitor justice sector performance in the prevention and response to femicide cases. The F-PAR Civil Society component was designed to complement the F-PAR I (No More Femicides)

activity awarded in 2018. USAID/Mexico awarded the activity to Data Cívica, in partnership with Alternativas Pacíficas (ALPAZ) with a four-year implementation period (August 2019-August 2023).

The two activities collaborate with state and municipal institutions in the state of Nuevo León, particularly in the municipalities of Monterrey, Guadalupe, and Escobedo. The geographic scope of the activities was determined considering the data on violence against women, the political will of government institutions, the presence of strong CSOs, and the previous successful implementation of USAID activities in the state.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE USAID/MEXICO ACTIVITIES**

### **Ni Un Femicidio Más (No More Femicides - NUFM)**

This Activity aims to address the specific challenges that the state of Nuevo León and, particularly, the municipalities of Monterrey, Guadalupe, and Escobedo, face in the prevention, care provision, investigation, and prosecution of femicide. This is carried out through designing and assisting in the implementation of tailored strategies alongside public, private, and civil society organizations (CSOs). Specifically, the project pursues two objectives:

1. Improve the state's capabilities **to prevent** the commission of femicides.
2. Improve the state's capacity to **respond to, investigate, and prosecute** cases of femicide.

NUFM was awarded to a consortium of three organizations, with the following responsibilities:

- Fundación Idea (Prime awardee) is responsible for coordinating interventions with state and municipal police corporations and efforts with health institutions, as well as for most project management and administrative responsibilities across all phases of the project.
- Fortis Consultoría (Sub-awardee) works with the Public Prosecutor's Offices, including assisting in the development of Working Groups (Task Forces) related to protection measures.
- Equis Justicia (Sub-awardee) para las Mujeres led the intervention with the Judiciary and the Centro de Justicia para las Mujeres (CEJUM) (having previously worked with the Dirección de Orientación, Protección y Apoyo a Víctimas de Delitos y Testigos, DOPAVIDET). Note that Equis Justicia left the consortium in 2022 but was still part of this assessment.

### **Hacia Un Nuevo Entendimiento del Femicidio en Nuevo León (Towards a New Understanding of Femicides in Nuevo León - HUNEF)**

This Activity aims to improve prevention of and state response to femicides, through greater empowerment of victims of gender-based violence (GBV) against women and CSOs to monitor state institutions and advocate for litigation of femicide cases. Specifically, the project pursues three objectives:

1. Empowerment of victims and prevention of GBV against women.
2. Enhanced accountability of Justice Sector Institutions.
3. Strategic communications and public outreach to increase citizens' understanding of GBV.

HUNEF is being implemented by Data Cívica in partnership with local organization Alternativas Pacíficas (ALPAZ):

- Data Cívica (Prime awardee) used a rigorous quantitative and qualitative methodology to generate raw data to identify predictors of violence and to identify what other types of GBV against women or violence in general are related to high rates of femicide in Nuevo León. With that information, Data Cívica is developing a more precise way to measure femicide and the variables that correlate with it.
- Alternativas Pacíficas, through their *Puertas Violetas* program provides accompaniment<sup>1</sup> to women (including youth and minors) some of whom have initiated proceedings for the crime of domestic violence, as well for crimes that violate their sexuality or free development, or against anyone intending to damage their physical or psychological integrity. Through analysis of systematized data, ALPAZ locates those stages of the judicial process in which victims of GBV are most vulnerable. With this data, ALPAZ can provide civil society with relevant information to improve their ability to litigate such cases. Further, ALPAZ gets an overview of where judicial proceedings fail and where it is important to work with authorities to prevent GBV against women.

#### ACTIVITY THEORIES OF CHANGE

NO MORE FEMICIDES	TOWARDS A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF FEMICIDES IN NUEVO LEÓN
<p><b>IF</b> Mexican government institutions are able to more effectively implement existing legal protections for women affected by violence and femicide</p> <p><b>AND</b> independent civil society organizations are able to improve monitoring and advocating for protection of their rights,</p> <p><b>THEN</b> the Nuevo León state government will prosecute more cases related to femicides.</p>	<p><b>IF</b> Civil society engages in prevention activities for GBV against women, improves advocacy for the protection of women’s rights, and increases monitoring of state institutions</p> <p><b>THEN</b> more women will seek and receive assistance and protection and state institutions will improve prevention and response to femicide rates. Thus, decreasing the number of femicides.</p>

#### ASSESSMENT PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the assessment was to understand the effectiveness of the holistic activity approach undertaken by the Human Rights portfolio to strengthen the results and sustainability of the indirect prevention and sanction of gender-based violence in Nuevo León.

#### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Specifically, the assessment team agreed with USAID/Mexico the following objectives with adapted wording from the Statement of Work (SOW) to be measurable in the assessment framework:

1. Assess whether the holistic approach to addressing and preventing gender-based violence works to meet the objectives of the activities carried out.

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<sup>1</sup> Accompaniment support for victims refers to the provision of emotional or practical support to those who have experienced abuse, trauma or other victimization. This support can simply involve being present, listening and validating a victim, or can be more active like in safety planning, advocacy or referrals.

2. Examine the efficacy of promoting interdisciplinary work amongst USAID/Mexico’s Implementing Partners (IPs), both by implementing activities as a consortium and by intertwining two activities with similar goals.
3. Examine what challenges and best practices were generated in the implementation of interlinked activities that operated simultaneously.
4. Identify what factors (direct and indirect, expected and unexpected) hindered and/or promoted effective and organic coordination between two USAID/Mexico funded activities.

#### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Questions	Considerations
<p><b>Question 1:</b> To what extent, if at all, was implementing a <b>holistic strategy</b> focused on interventions with Civil Society Organizations and public institutions effective in preventing and sanctioning gender-based violence?</p>	<p>The development of two parallel and interconnected activities was an innovative approach that required intentional efforts from USAID/Mexico's Human Rights team and IPs. The underlying assumption was that more sustainable results would be achieved by addressing prevention and sanction through the differentiated collaboration with government institutions and CSOs. This assessment tests this assumption.</p>
<p><b>Question 2:</b> What factors (direct and indirect, expected and unexpected) hindered and/or promoted the <b>effective and organic coordination between two USAID/Mexico funded activities?</b></p>	<p>This interconnected nature of the activities required close interdisciplinary collaboration from the IPs and their counterparts. During the first three years of the activities, efforts focused on harmonizing and building the foundations for effective collaboration, connections and partnership between the activities and the different counterparts, were apparent by the fourth year. These intentional efforts were time-consuming, and USAID/Mexico is interested in understanding the perception of the IPs and key stakeholders on this process and the factors where greater focus should be placed in future activities that aim to create this coordination.</p>
<p><b>Question 3:</b> What effect, if any, did <b>working as a consortium have in improving IPs knowledge and practice, including external performance?</b></p>	<p>An additional layer of cooperation was present in the No More Femicides Activity, as the original award from 2018-2022 was implemented by three partners (one prime and two sub awardees). In practice, they operated as a consortium, each of them with a different technical experience and the underlying assumption was that they would implement a more holistic, effective and successful Activity by working together. USAID/Mexico would like to understand if the assumption was appropriate and the effects this close collaboration had on the partner's knowledge,</p>

skills and processes beyond the implementation of the Activity.

## ASSESSMENT METHODS

As the focus of the assessment was to investigate the effectiveness of the program's holistic approach, a methodology was used that could be adapted to complex situations and identify evidence of cause-effect relationships that emerged during implementation. To follow the methodological approach, the assessment was conducted through four phases:

PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	PHASE 4
<b>FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS</b>	<b>DOCUMENT REVIEW</b>	<b>KEY INFORMANTS DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
Method: Documentary data review	Method: Qualitative data collection and analysis.	Method: Qualitative data collection and analysis.	Method: Analysis of data reviewed and generated in phases 2 and 3.

The objective of **phase 1** was to evaluate the feasibility of the methodological proposal presented to the Mexico Mission, while **phase 2** allowed for an in-depth understanding of the results generated by the activities under analysis, in order to develop the research instruments and apply a participatory workshop with the IPs. During this workshop, a results matrix was reviewed with the IPs, based on the reports generated by them and they were asked for the names and contacts of the universe of potential key informants for phase 3.

During **phase 3**, a total of 24 in-depth interviews and a focus group including three civil society organizations were conducted between February 16 through April 11, 2023. Most of the information was gathered virtually at the request of the interviewees and a visit was made to Monterrey, Nuevo León to conduct the focus group and one of the in-depth interviews. The distribution of interviews is described below. For more details, see Annex 1 "Field Visit Report".

ACTIVITY	PROFILE
<b>Ni un feminicidio más</b>	2 initial workshops with consortium members
	3 interviews with executive directors <sup>2</sup> of the Activity
	3 interviews with operational managers of the Activity
	10 interviews with governmental institutions

<sup>2</sup>During the selection of the sample, the main consideration was to include interviews with executive and operational directors involved in the Activity to have different approaches according to roles and responsibilities performed during the implementation. **Executive Director** refers to someone responsible for designing and supervising the implementation. **Operational Director** refers to someone responsible for the implementation of the work plan.



ACTIVITY	PROFILE
<b>Hacia un nuevo entendimiento del feminicidio</b>	1 initial workshop with consortium members
	2 interviews with executive directors of the Activity
	2 interviews with artists and artistic collectives
	3 interviews with civil society organizations
	1 focus group comprised of 3 civil society organizations

USAID	PROFILE
<b>USAID/Mexico Human Rights Team</b>	Group interview with the Human Rights Team Lead and the Human Rights Specialist who is the Agreement Officer Representative for the two activities.

As part of **phase 3**, the assessment team conducted a content analysis from the primary data collected in the interviews and focus group. The content analysis involved using a matrix to organize primary and secondary data reviewed in phase 2 into findings according to topics related with each of the assessment questions. The assessment team reviewed the data matrix to identify patterns and trends and then applied a triangulation strategy to validate the internal consistency and interpretation of the data collected.

After reviewing the analysis and interpreting the implications of the findings, the assessment team developed conclusions and recommendations in an interactive manner in **phase 4**.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE ASSESSMENT**

The methodology implemented has several strengths. First, having a retrospective approach to implementation, through the review of results reports generated by the IPs themselves, made it possible to understand what have been the most significant results aligned with the scope that USAID wants to achieve with the implementation of this type of activities. Complementing this understanding with the application of qualitative interviews allowed the assessment team to identify in greater depth the lessons learned, challenges, and obstacles that have influenced the effectiveness of the holistic vision from the subjective experience of each member of the teams involved. In addition, being able to talk with the IPs in two moments (in group and individual format) mitigated the social desirability of opinions expressed and achieved a deep understanding of their perceptions and opinions during implementation. Including the partners in the data collection sample allowed an external view of the implementation of the activities, as well as mapping and contrasting the most significant results from their personal and work experience.

However, three limitations were identified that were not related to the methodological design but were a consequence of the field implementation, related to the data collection with partners. First, during the assessment design, the team had considered interviewing all the government institutions with which the

*Ni un Femicidio Más* Activity had worked (police, women's justice centers, prosecutor's office and the judiciary), however, due to the departure of one of the IPs from the consortium, it was impossible to contact public officials from the judiciary who participated in the Activity. During the fieldwork, attempts were made to reach these actors through various channels, but no response was obtained. This limitation resulted in the analysis and findings for these actors relying primarily on perceptions of the IPs rather than triangulation from a wider range of viewpoints.

The second limitation is similar to the above, but in the context of the Towards a New Understanding of Femicide in Nuevo León Activity. It was also difficult to contact all the CSOs that participated in the implementation. The universe identified by the IPs was ten civil society organizations; the assessment team considered that this was a limited and important number to keep within the sample, however the assessment team perceived that most of the CSOs did not see the value of participating in the assessment and for this reason it was difficult to make appointments to interview them. In the end, only five of the ten CSOs were interviewed, although the number of participants interviewed does not jeopardize any of the findings identified in the assessment report. Rather, this limitation means that the assessment team relied more heavily on perceptions of the IPs, without sufficient data to triangulate from a wider set of viewpoints.

The third limitation identified, as can be seen in Annex 1 "Field Visit Report", is that the final sample of informants was composed mostly of women (90% women-10% men), therefore, the distribution of the sample did not allow us to identify differentiated experiences between men and women.

## FINDINGS

### **QUESTION I: TO WHAT EXTENT, IF AT ALL, WAS IMPLEMENTING A HOLISTIC STRATEGY FOCUSED ON INTERVENTIONS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS EFFECTIVE IN PREVENTING AND SANCTIONING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?**

*From the analysis of the IP progress reports and the data collected from key informants, it is clear that the application of a holistic strategy was effective in achieving results to prevent and respond to<sup>3</sup> violence against women, however, the holistic approach lacked intentional coordination and the upfront co-design of joint actions to enhance and achieve more sustainable results over time.*

**FINDING 1. TWO PARALLEL ACTIVITIES WORKING SIMULTANEOUSLY HELPED ACHIEVE A GREATER SCOPE OF RESULTS WITH VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS, BOTH OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL. HOWEVER, THE IPs AND OTHER COUNTERPARTS CONSIDER THAT THE ACTIVITIES WERE NOT BASED ON PREVIOUS COORDINATION OR A STRATEGIC DESIGN THAT THEY CONSIDERED A "HOLISTIC" STRATEGY.**

According to the information gathered in the field and the analysis of the progress reports generated by the IPs, it is clear that the implementation of two parallel activities made it possible to work on two relevant fronts (though separately) for the prevention and response to violence against women in the state of Nuevo León, in addition to being able to include more actors in the activities. The *Ni Un Femicidio Más* (NUFM) Activity was able to accompany and strengthen the capacities of various governmental institutions in the state of Nuevo León, while the *Hacia un Nuevo Entendimiento del*

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<sup>3</sup>During data collection with government institutions, no results emerged connected with the sanction of violence against women.

*Feminicidio* (HUNEF) Activity generated spaces for reflection and awareness-raising on the prevention of violence against women, mainly in community settings.

In addition, both activities were able to build common ground - albeit limited - where they were able to generate spaces for conversation, reflection, and new understandings of the problem with official actors. An example of this occurred specifically when Fundación Idea invited Data Cívica to share their report “My experience can help others not be afraid: signs and strategies to prevent femicide”<sup>4</sup> with police departments. The goal of that collaboration served to raise awareness with police of the context and situation of victims and the ways that women experience violence (see Finding 2 for more information).

However, the IP's agree that the time lag between the start of one activity and start of the other impeded their ability to develop a comprehensive vision that would allow them to plan aligned and complementary activities. Though some spaces for co-creation were fostered between activities, the IP's reported that they found it difficult to establish points of intersection to build on the effects, while also implementing their own activities.

*"(...) none of the three organizations could have done it alone, due to lack of experience with the counterparts and lack of thematic experience, I believe that this type of project requires a combination of expertise and skills that cannot be found in a single organization." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"It is not the same to work with authorities as with civil society, because attributions are different from what civil society can do, and it requires different approaches (...) We have been in many meetings together and we have tried to show that we are different projects but that we are seeking to reduce violence against women and femicides." Implementing Partner, HUNEF.*

*"What Data Cívica did helped us to explain to the police the context of the victims of violence and why it is not easy to get out of that context. We were struggling to explain this logic to the police and the materials prepared by Data Cívica were extremely useful for that." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

Despite the fact that the two activities did not intentionally coordinate with one another, each activity achieved individual results and learning. When the two activities implemented interventions with strategic actors from the state of Nuevo León, they managed to complement one another to increase the prevention of and response to violence against women. The primary results of each activity individually include:

#### **a. Significant results from NUFM Activity**

This Activity aims to address the specific challenges faced by the state of Nuevo León in the prevention, attention, investigation, and prosecution of femicide. This is being done by designing and assisting in the implementation of customized strategies to, firstly, improve the capacities of the State to prevent femicides and secondly, improve the capacity of the State to respond to, investigate, and prosecute cases of femicide.

From the perception of IPs and government institutions, the following results have been identified as key elements in achieving the aforementioned objectives<sup>5</sup>:

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<sup>4</sup> The report name in Spanish is “Mis experiencia puede servir para que otras no tengan miedo: Señales y estrategias para prevenir la violencia feminicida.”

<sup>5</sup> The results appear in order of impact, beginning with the most impactful.

- **Inter-institutional communication channels were improved, enhancing the connections between government entities that used to have slower response times or limited communication.** Another of the most relevant results for both IPs and government institutions was that, as a result of the work carried out with the different institutions involved in the prevention and sanctioning of femicide, channels of communication were built or strengthened between institutions where they previously did not exist or were slow to respond. This result is one of the most valued by government institutions, since they consider that it has facilitated their work and strengthened inter-institutional communication channels.

The strengthening of these relationships occurred as an indirect result of the training sessions where different governmental institutions came together (e.g., Prosecution, Legal Department within Public Security, Precautionary Measures). After meeting and sharing common experiences and the objectives of their work, the participants from these institutions would exchange contact details (telephone numbers or instant messaging such as Whatsapp), as they understood that this way they could expedite their work and eliminate bureaucratic obstacles, while strengthening the networks amongst the institutions.

*"Tools that were strengthened, direct contacts with the areas that were collaborating, so today if there is a situation that arises, we have more direct contact, unlike in previous times when we had to make these contacts via official letters or direct calls to the offices to find the extensions and communication was a little slower, nowadays with all these tools we have more agile communication." Government institution, NUFM.*

*"Networks were created with the Prosecutor's Office, Public Security Legal Department, Precautionary Measures; before communication was slower because we had to make official letters. Now it is done via whatsapp with the groups that were made during the piloting stage are still active, but are not used, but if required the direct person is sought." Government institution, NUFM.*

*"Yes, we had meetings, working tables with Escobedo, Monterrey, looking for collaboration and improvement of collaboration between institutions that strengthened communications a lot and even so we are still always left with the doubt of what to share. But we always lack coordination because it is often complex, but there it goes, it improved a lot." Government institution, NUFM.*

- **New approaches to understanding the prevention and investigation of violence against women were implemented in the institutions with which the NUFM Activity worked, both at the conceptual level and in the development and implementation of new institutional tools.**

As one of their most significant results, the NUFM IPs highlighted the use of new theoretical approaches to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. For example, the Activity held a series of discussions and promoted awareness within institutions such as the judiciary and the police. The objective of these actions was to put at the center the preventive obligations the institutions have to address intermediate violence before it ends in femicide. At the same time, the intersectional approach and its practical use in various contexts and with the diversity of women cared for in the Justice Center for Women, was part of the reflections and discussions. As a result, specific tools were developed such as the Victim Risk Identification tool in collaboration with the Justice Center for Women, the Victims' Risk Assessment tool with the Prosecutor Specialized in Femicides, and the High Risk Identification tool for victims with protection measures together with police corporations.

Interviews with the government institution counterparts made clear that these tools have generated an improvement in understanding the problem and strengthening the work with the victims, especially within the police corporations at an operational level.

*"The generation of guidance documents or documented protocols and the training on them. It has been the most relevant to strengthen our work." Woman, governmental institution, executive management, NUFM.*

*"Main achievements, definitely all the work that had to do with the protection measures<sup>6</sup> is something that although we are not going to see the benefits and the great results at this moment [increased institutional awareness on prioritizing prevention actions instead of punitive approaches], it seems to me that it put on the table of the prosecutor's office an issue that was practically forgotten." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"The attention provided is more personalized with the women protected due to the fact that we realize that most of the time they do not know that they have a protection measure, they do not know what it is, they do not know how it works, they do not know how to apply it, and that they feel totally helpless. Once the type of institution facilitates their access to new programs and projects to improve their quality of life, you are left with this satisfaction of doing your bit or putting something of your own to improve the lifestyle of women so that they know they are not alone and that living in a situation of violence is not normal." Government institution, NUFM.*

- **Diverse diagnostic studies were carried out to examine the operations of targeted governmental institutions in Nuevo León, marking the first step in establishing a functional relationship between the Implementing Partners (IPs) and these institutions.** Both the institutions and the IPs acknowledged the importance of understanding and evaluating institutional responsibilities, particularly in preventing and addressing femicides. The IPs demonstrated adaptability and a willingness to understand the operational needs of the institutions, adjusting their actions as necessary.

This combination of a detailed diagnostic approach and flexibility from the IPs contributed to a strong working partnership between the entities. The success of the programmatic activities was a clear indication of this effective collaboration, highlighting the potential of a research-driven diagnostic approach in building reliable relationships. Further, this flexible approach allowed the activities to adapt and respond to emergent needs which government institutions felt contributed to success.

*"(...)because [government institutions] were saying that the issue of femicide is very clear. Ah, yes, that is very clear, but how do the police corporations, the Prosecutor's Office, etc., etc., deal with it right now? The problem is not at all clear, so we have to understand how they are dealing with it and how they should stop it in order to understand the gaps." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"We understand that [government institutions'] work is difficult, starting from the idea of empathy, how do we make them improve the service, and the prosecutor always reminded us that she really liked the work we did, that there was an understanding of how complicated the work was and that we did not arrive with magic recipes and recommendations made at the desk, but rather we tried to understand what could be done considering the circumstances in which they work in a prosecutor's office." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

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<sup>6</sup> Protective measures include the adoption of urgent security matters in favor of women who have experienced violence to guarantee their security and those around them. The goal of these measures is for women who have access to this resource to regain a sense of safety in the face of possible threats or retribution from those who have harmed them.

*"Not limiting the projects, being able to open up to the needs of the institution. I really liked that they adapted and were focusing on the phenomenon. A new project should compile the projects to improve them and adapt them to each of the realities of the country." Government institution, HUNEF.*

#### **b. Significant results of HUNEF Activity**

The HUNEF Activity aims to improve the prevention and state response to femicides, through the fulfillment of three objectives: empowerment of victims and prevention of GBV against women, improving the accountability of justice sector institutions, and the generation of strategic communications and public dissemination to increase GBV awareness. From the perception of IPs, CSOs, and other counterparts, the following results have been identified to achieve the aforementioned objectives:

- **Strengthening the internal capacities of CSOs to analyze and process data to monitor cases of femicide and violence against women.** The CSOs interviewed agree that one of the most significant results for their work after participating in the course given by HUNEF was the development of capacities to systematize and process data for the monitoring and follow-up of femicides occurring in the state. Many of the interviewees consider that these skills have allowed them to develop more robust reports and prepare databases to monitor cases in a more precise and effective manner. This follow-up to cases includes the legal support provided during the criminal phase of the case among other services.

*"It was very useful for us to systematize the information because this way we already work in alliance with the municipality of San Pedro, this information as we present it to them is what they process." CSO, HUNEF.*

*"They shared a template that we are adapting, that was super useful (...) to link other case actions and outcomes [systematically] to the convictions we have" CSO, HUNEF.*

*"Of the most important things was data management and being able to analyze in a better way everything that entails causes and consequences, and to be able to implement our Activity in a specific and efficient way because we know that it is strong data and to be able to analyze (the data) in a correct way and to be able to transmit it in a correct way." CSO, HUNEF.*

However, while CSOs agreed on the value of HUNEF capacity strengthening support, some of the civil society organizations interviewed also reported that so far they have not been able to connect with other CSOs to share the case monitoring tools they learned about in the course or to apply the new knowledge. According to those CSOs, this was largely because what they learned focused primarily on monitoring cases rather than their particular areas of focus, providing accompaniment support to women including throughout the judicial process. Instead, they had expected to increase or strengthen their knowledge of litigation, legal advisory, and other judicial processes - services that had usually been performed by a hired third party.

*"I would ask for a practical course, with better tools, I did not learn anything new, it fell short" CSO, HUNEF.*

*"I liked the statistics [contents] a lot, but we haven't been able to apply them, perhaps because we have more urgent needs like learning judicial processes" CSO, HUNEF.*

- **Creation of community areas for dialogue and sensitization between local organizations and collectives/artists to generate awareness-raising strategies for the prevention of violence against women at the community level.** Another relevant result of the Activity was the creation

of networks of local organizations and artistic collectives to generate community spaces for reflection and awareness on the issue through the development of artistic pieces<sup>7</sup>, for example, CSOs currently working with men who had perpetrated violence against women were able to share their experiences to nurture the creative process of the artistic groups.

This Activity also managed to open spaces with governmental institutions where, in the same way, spaces for reflection and new understandings of the topic were generated, since most of the governmental institutions are not usually receptive to these kinds of activities—of an artistic or playful approach. However, according to the perception of the public officials interviewed, this approach helped them to better understand those experiencing gender-based violence, by enabling a deeper and clearer understanding of the impacts of gender-based violence and the cycle of violence. This perception is confirmed from the view of Implementing Partners and artists, as according to the testimonials collected, the artistic interventions worked in a more effective way than traditional campaigns to deliver messages to the targeted audience (victims of GBV). The reaction of spectators was very positive, coming forward to ask how to get more information or how to help women experiencing gender-based violence.

In particular, the artistic collectives interviewed highlighted that in addition to increasing information and changing their perception of violence against women, participation in the Activity has led them to replicate what they have learned in other professional spaces, provided that the knowledge acquired through the creative process of the artistic piece helped and motivated the development of workshops and conversations to sensitize and inform about the prevention of gender-based violence, mainly with young people in educational spaces.

*"This type of project in spaces such as the municipal public administration are not very popular so having the Municipal Women's Institute of Nuevo León welcome it was an achievement, and as evidence that many forms of advocacy can be proposed and make the gender perspective present, they are tools whose importance in the administration are still not fully understood." Government institution, HUNEF.*

*"I think that the audience's response was the most important thing (...) that they stayed to see the play when maybe they have many other activities going on, and you might not have it as a priority in your life to go. In all the performances we had high attendance and after the performances people who had been victims of violence, who had had family circumstances, femicide violence, approached us. All of this we saw empirically after and during the performances with the interactions with the public." Artist, HUNEF.*

*"The experience we had had was in working with male aggressors and young men and we found it interesting because we put on the table the need to work with aggressors (...) I found the project very interesting and therefore we generated simultaneous lines of work to contribute to the initiative they already had." CSO, HUNEF.*

## **FINDING 2. BOTH ACTIVITIES WERE ABLE TO IDENTIFY AND STRENGTHEN AREAS OF UNDERSTANDING TO OPEN SPACES FOR CONVERSATION, REFLECTION, AND NEW UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE PROBLEM WITH OFFICIAL ACTORS.**

An important result of the meeting of both activities was that the HUNEF Activity managed - through the report presented by the organization and the artistic activities they developed - to simplify the understanding of femicide and its causes in order to inform and sensitize strategic actors, particularly police corporations; this approach helped to strengthen the support, guidance, and awareness raising

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<sup>7</sup>A variety of artistic outlets have been used. During the assessment, testimonials were collected from artists involved in the creation of the piece "mujer, voz y quiebre" and the shadow puppet play "A Fuego Lento".

work that the NUFM Activity was carrying out with the same institutions. For the Fundación Idea team, it had been complicated to sensitize police corporations to understand the gender-based violence phenomena, especially the causes and factors contributing to the fact that women often do not file a legal complaint.

Both police corporations and IPs agree that the use of artistic and playful approaches (such as those used by HUNEF) have been essential to understanding the impacts that women face in gender based violence situations in a simpler and deeper way. This alternative approach has proven to be an effective strategy to convey the size of the gender-based violence problem in Nuevo León, given that the presented data go beyond statistics and reports, allowing public officials to connect in a more personal and emotional way to the experiences of women who have experienced violence situations.

The evidence backs the importance of continuing the use of innovative and creative approaches to address gender-based violence, with the objective of building a society that is more emphatic and committed to eradicating gender-based violence.

*"The study they did helped us a lot, the whole diagnosis was relevant to contextualize what the victims were seeing today about the violence they are currently living (...) With that information, we transmit it better to the authorities because you change their logic and show them --look here, so many victims were interviewed, and this is the evidence--. This study helped me to give another understanding of violence." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"Data Cívica helped us to explain with the police the context of the victims, because it is not easy as one thinks to get out of that context. We were struggling to explain this logic to the police and the materials that Data Cívica prepared were very useful for that." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"I think that one of the positive things was also being able to communicate with the actors with whom they are working (...) in the end trying not to duplicate things that were already happening, but rather to add to what I am already developing." Implementing Partner, HUNEF.*

### **FINDING 3. CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED, BOTH INTERNALLY AMONG THE IPs AND EXTERNALLY, INFLUENCED THE ABILITY TO MAXIMIZE AND ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE RESULTS OVER TIME.**

#### **a. Perception of local officials that IPs not based in Nuevo León were far away or lacked time**

Government institutions identified that it is challenging to find civil society organizations to provide assistance and support in addressing femicides and gender based violence that are physically located in the state of Nuevo León and have in-depth knowledge of its context. Although both activities had at least one local partner, the general perception was that they were organizations far from the implementation contexts and that not being in the state of Nuevo León limited the interactions and supervision of the work they carried out.

Another relevant issue is the perception that Implementing Partners not based in Nuevo León have limited time during their visits, since the majority of visits are planned over a short period of time or in very specific timeframes. This situation increased the authorities' perception that the Implementing Partners did not have the same knowledge or understanding of the local context as the local organizations and would not be able to provide the close support, guidance and advocacy in the processes being implemented. Even if this was not a determining factor during the implementation of the project, some authorities agreed that in the beginning of the collaboration, they had the belief that the proposed activities would not be sustainable over time, given that it was important for them to feel



closely supported during the learning processes before implementing new tools or approaches in their work.

*"The people in charge of the project do not live in Nuevo León and were always in a hurry. Although they are always attentive to our calls. But it is better to see the issues face to face to clarify doubts. To even have the possibility to collaborate in the field, not only during training, but also get involved a little more in direct cases, a tour, participating in a visit so that they can identify them. This would greatly strengthen the information they acquire...." Government institution, NUFM.*

*"Authorities here like to know that you are present. If you are going to start me on a change in doing things, if we work on a project together, don't come and give me two hours of your attention and then you leave for a month and then come back. They want to know that you are there. I think that in any case that is what could have influenced this type of project. And particularly in Nuevo León they are not going to say yes to everything but once they give you an entrance it is important that they feel the presence and the permanent contact, that was also difficult because of the pandemic." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

#### **b. Changes in the implementation context or situations the implementation team had not prepared for**

A series of external challenges identified specifically for the NUFM Activity came from changes in the implementation context or situations the implementation team had not prepared for. These challenges included changes in the public administration, rotation of public officials, tensions among authorities, or dissolution of specific areas in government institutions.

For example, it was identified that during the implementation of activities some decisions were made by authorities that caused interruptions in the flow of communication between the Implementing Partners and the institutions. There were also tensions observed in the coordination and responsibilities between the institutions during the implementation of the inter-institutional model of protection measures.

Moreover, IPs identified challenges related to the use of human resources and the infrastructure of the institutions. One of the recurring challenges was the high rotation of personnel. The assessment found that the interviewees perceived that most of the people who had participated in the activities implemented by NUFM had been relocated to different areas. In addition, the intense 12-hour by 24-hour workdays of first responders<sup>8</sup> also had an impact on the learning processes of the staff, as well as the availability of technological resources for the implementation of activities.

*"We probably did not see it coming that with the project, we could cause tension between the authorities. There was an issue of coordination between [municipal and State institutions], so there was a time when it became clear that everyone could stay comfortable in the way they were working, so they were throwing the ball back and forth." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"Unfortunately, the staff who were participating in the piloting, I think 70%, are no longer with us(...)The officers work 12 by 24 shifts and keeping the attention of the officers is difficult because they come tired and you make them come at a time that is not working hours for them. The human resource capacity of the institution, the permanence of the personnel, and the technological or office resources we have are very limited." Government institution, NUFM.*

#### **c. Internal Activity implementation challenges that were not adapted to the context and needs of the counterparts.**

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<sup>8</sup> In Mexico, police institutions typically work in shifts of 12 hours with 24 hours of rest between shifts.

In the case of the HUNEF Activity, the main challenges tend to be internal to the design and implementation of the Activity. Key testimonials collected from the artistic collectives highlighted that the implementation timeframe was insufficient to achieve more significant impacts or to generate strategies for attention and follow-up with the community that attended the interventions. Example strategies cited include having different schedules so that more people could attend and sharing information on where to go in case of violence or who to approach for advice.

The civil society organizations (CSOs) that participated in the course emphasized the lack of a prior participatory diagnostic (with organizations and victims) in which specific needs could be identified. Such a diagnostic would have been used to inform content that could strengthen the tools and capacities used by the CSOs in the communities where they work, especially with regards to litigation techniques, legal advice, and the intersectional approach.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, it was found that training schedules were not adapted to the technical needs and work schedules of the participating CSOs. This lack of synchronization hindered full participation and absorption of the knowledge imparted, which limited the practical applicability of the trainings in the real operational context where the CSOs work.

*"I think that there was a lack of follow-up, especially to get more out of the intervention. A little more time to spend with the public, to be able to retake the testimonials, to retake that talk in a more specialized way. To provide informative material to disseminate and that those people who would like to get in touch with us would know where to do so." Art collective, HUNEF.*

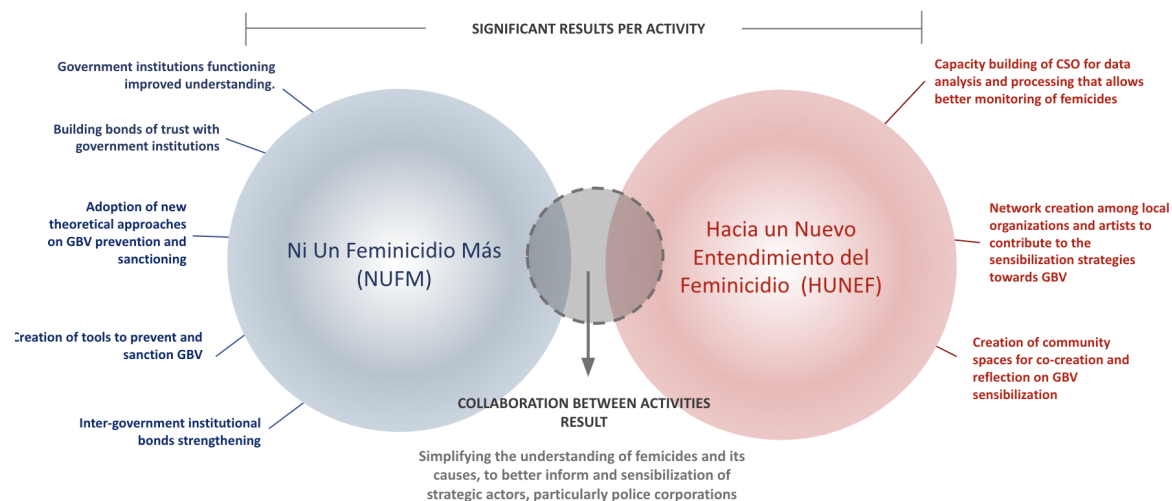
*"I think that a practical course on the needs that we as local organizations have would help a lot. I was very motivated to attend a course on litigation and it fell short. I would improve on litigation issues. A course on the subject of expert evidence that you have to demand, these practical and operative topics." CSO, HUNEF.*

*"The issue was a lack of more grounded and fine-tuned content towards what we see in the field ... [there should be..] a gathering knowledge from what happens in the communities, learning from the communities...discussion of how to address the different cases of youth, children, indigenous communities, and a focus on specific populations." CSO, HUNEF.*

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<sup>9</sup>An intersectional approach recognizes that those who experience victimization may be even more negatively affected by various intersecting identities and social structures such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability, and immigration status. This means that a woman who belongs to a marginalized community may experience different types and degrees of victimization than those who do not, and may warrant using an approach that recognizes it.

**FIGURE 1: SIGNIFICANT RESULTS OF EACH ACTIVITY**



Source: MESA Assessment Team

**QUESTION 2: WHAT FACTORS (DIRECT AND INDIRECT, EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED) HINDERED AND/OR PROMOTED THE EFFECTIVE AND ORGANIC COORDINATION BETWEEN TWO USAID/MEXICO FUNDED ACTIVITIES?**

The information gathered in the field, both with IPs, as well as with other stakeholders involved and the USAID Human Rights team, shows that the coordination between both activities was weak<sup>10</sup> or practically null. In light of this finding, the factors that hindered and promoted coordination between the two activities are elaborated below.

**Factors that promoted effective and organic coordination between the two activities**

**FINDING 4. THE ROLE OF THE USAID/MEXICO HUMAN RIGHTS TEAM WAS KEY TO FACILITATE COMMUNICATION AND THE SEARCH FOR COORDINATION BETWEEN ACTIVITIES.**

The IPs agree that the USAID/Mexico Human Rights team was a direct and key factor in finding spaces for collaboration, since the Human Rights team generated quarterly meetings to promote agreements and finding areas of interaction and collaboration among activities. While USAID’s role was expected to facilitate the contact and coming together of the IPs in both activities, when USAID was not there, the communication between just the IPs rarely, if ever, occurred, due mainly to each of the activities’ workloads, and, according to their perceptions, due to a possible lack of will to find collaboration areas.

*"At the beginning, the work of the Human Rights team had a lot to do with it. They were proposing many joint meetings, so we were working together when Alternativas Pacificas (ALPAZ) came and we had meetings with them. And when the pandemic came, we started to have virtual meetings. But undoubtedly the creation of these spaces was thanks to the Human Rights team, so we could begin to see the possibilities of collaboration between the two projects." Implementing Partner, HUNEF.*

<sup>10</sup>For examples of the limited instances in which coordination did occur, see Finding 2 “Both activities were able to identify and strengthen areas of understanding to open spaces for conversation, reflection, and new understandings of the problem with official actors”

*"USAID encouraged those spaces, perhaps as consortia we lacked the will to communicate directly, and they asked us to add in our work plan interactions with the other project, but it was difficult because of the projects' workloads" Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

**FINDING 5. THE SIMILARITY OF THE OBJECTIVES AND ADVOCACY MODELS OF THE IPs OPENED SPACES FOR DIALOGUE AND FACILITATED COLLABORATION.**

According to the perceptions of the Implementing Partners involved in both activities, it was found that an unexpected factor that increased the willingness to seek spaces for conversation and explore possible synergies, was having previous experiences of working together with some of the IPs involved in the other activity, as well as sharing common values and objectives in terms of advocacy. This prior understanding generated a sense of trust and mutual knowledge that facilitated the search for spaces for conversation and the exploration of possible collaborations, even if the results were not significant in the end.

An outstanding example was the relationship between Equis Justicia and Data Cívica, who mentioned that it was easier to establish contact and collaborate because they already knew each other from their previous work. Similarly, within the HUNEF management, some individuals had previous experience collaborating with Fundación Idea, which led to an openness to dialogue and the potential for joint collaboration.

*"I didn't know Fortis, but I did know Fundación Idea and Equis. I knew Equis Justicia's work through social networks and other projects in which I had already had the opportunity to work with them, and I have known Fundación Idea for a long time, I worked with them a lot, so it was easier to establish communication." Implementing Partner, HUNEF.*

*"We had already known them for a long time and we respected their work, but Equis also participated in our process (...) there was always that viability, and also some of the tools that Fortis developed as part of their project or their responsibility in the project we had the opportunity to talk about them and give them our opinions." Implementing Partner, HUNEF.*

*"(...)especially with Data Cívica we do share values, feminist perspectives, so there was a good synergy, I could say the same with ALPAZ with whom we have always had a relationship of activism and joint struggle." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

A collaboration that the NUFM IPs evaluate as successful and valuable— and repeatedly mentioned as an example to be followed for future collaboration— was the one they built with the USAID Access to Justice for Victims and Defendants (JAVA) program, as opposed to with HUNEF. In the case of JAVA, NUFM IPs identify that this linkage was achieved thanks to two key factors: Fortis Consultancy implemented JAVA and therefore had first-hand information on the objectives and scope of the program, and the USAID/Mexico team also helped find clear lines of collaboration between activities. This experience can serve as an example to encourage future collaboration.

*"We also saw the importance of adding some of the activities of the Women's Justice Center that JAVA was working on (...) so we not only had the opportunity to approach more institutions as a consortium but also the other project in another USAID portfolio and that was great because many times between projects we make very valuable efforts but they remain isolated so being able to connect two projects that perhaps did not have the same purpose but for this specific issue, I think it was something very important." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

## Factors that hindered effective and organic coordination between both activities

### **FINDING 6: THE LACK OF A PREVIOUS STRATEGIC DESIGN WAS A FACTOR THAT HINDERED THE COORDINATION AMONG THE IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES.**

The Implementing Partners agreed that the most relevant factor hindering an effective coordination among the activities was that they had not developed a clear and defined strategic design for coordination. The problem was especially clear to the counterparts, mainly governmental institutions, who in general failed to identify the connection between the two activities and identified misalignments in the objectives of both activities. Both Implementing Partners and governmental institutions perceived that the purposes were contradictory. For example, NUFM expected to build trust for them to work together with government institutions, which was in contradiction to the idea of auditing or supervising their work, one of the purposes of the theory of change for the HUNEF Activity.

Although the Implementing Partners repeatedly emphasized that there were opportunities for dialogue between the activities, they agreed that there was never a prior work plan that aligned the common purposes and objectives. This generated a perception of improvisation and lack of effectiveness in the collaboration between activities. To address this situation, the need was identified for USAID/Mexico to hold initial meetings with Implementing Partners and counterparts, both civil society organizations and governmental institutions, in order to clearly communicate the intention to work on a comprehensive vision of prevention of and response to violence against women. In addition, the importance of presenting a defined strategy that evidenced the forms of collaboration between activities, establishing clear meeting points and moments of participation from the outset was emphasized. Despite these efforts, the message was not clearly received by the IPs or their CSO and governmental counterparts.

*"We would have been able to work more collaboratively if from the beginning we had told the authorities that we were going to work with organizations and guarantee the efforts." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"I did know about both activities, but it seemed to me a very unpleasant situation [that HUNEF had an objective related to supervision of the authorities] ... I did not agree on many points and we do not have two visions, there has to be one, I think we complement the vision of the operation of organized civil society but it is not another vision. For me they were isolated efforts." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"There was a lack of clarity from the beginning about what things we were going to strengthen between activities and to take an objective and go with that and not go with something super broad." Implementing Partner, HUNEF.*

### **FINDING 7. THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE NEED TO ADAPT TO NEW WAYS OF WORKING WERE BOTH UNEXPECTED OBSTACLES THAT IMPACTED THE COORDINATION BETWEEN ACTIVITIES.**

The COVID-19 health crisis had a significant impact on IPs' work dynamics as they were obligated to make rapid adjustments to adapt to a new reality. This had important effects on work schedules and dynamics within each activity, which resulted in them focusing on their own work and having minimal time and energy to look for opportunities to collaborate with the other activity, mostly because from their viewpoints it was not an important objective to conserve.

According to the testimonials, limitations created by social distancing and the lack of familiarity with virtual formats minimized the opportunities to find synergies to reinforce their work. Most of the IPs agreed that the priority was to not neglect the activities that were already being implemented and

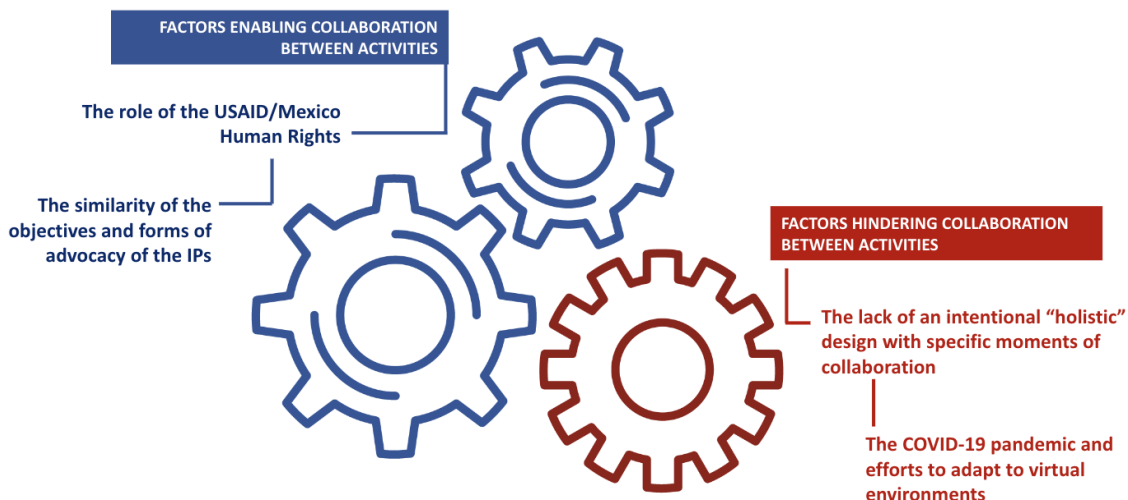
prevent the risk of losing the interest of their counterparts. This resulted in resources and efforts being focused on adapting the existing activities, which limited the capacity of IPs to actively search for opportunities to collaborate with the other activity.

*"At the beginning we had many meetings together (...) and when the pandemic came we started to have virtual meetings and it was a lot of stress and little planning, but we did talk about how to begin to see what the possibilities were for collaboration between the two projects." Implementing Partner, HUNEF.*

*"The timing, the pandemic did not allow us to work in depth with the other activity and we could not even meet in person." Implementing Partner, HUNEF.*

*"We also went through the pandemic and it was very strong and emotional and that affected collaboration a lot." USAID/Mexico / Human Rights team.*

**FIGURE 2: FACTORS ENABLING AND HINDERING COLLABORATION BETWEEN ACTIVITIES**



Source: MESA Assessment Team

**QUESTION 3: WHAT EFFECT, IF ANY, DID WORKING AS A CONSORTIUM HAVE ON IMPROVING IPs’ KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE, INCLUDING EXTERNAL PERFORMANCE?**

The interviews with the IPs generated several lessons learned for the improvement of knowledge and practices, both internal and external. Most of these lessons have to do with the internal operations and management structure of the consortium of NUFM, as the primary subject of analysis.<sup>11</sup>

During the initial design of the proposal, the three IPs that made up the NUFM consortium saw the combination of expertise and skills to improve the State's capacity to prevent and punish femicides as a strength. However, as the Activity became operational, various challenges and lessons learned arose.

**FINDING 8. FORMS OF ADVOCACY, THEORETICAL APPROACHES, AND POLITICAL POSITIONS THAT GENERATE TENSIONS IN APPROACHING AND ACCOMPANYING GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS.**

<sup>11</sup> Per the considerations established to Question 3 in the SOW.

From the perspective of the Implementing Partners, one of the first challenges that was identified and not resolved in an effective way was the disparity between their ways of working, their theoretical approaches, and their political positions, which would inform the approach to accompanying the government institutions. According to the testimonials collected, in the first months of implementation it became evident that the IPs had different affiliations, motivations, and approaches to advocacy, which made it difficult to reach a consensus on what approach to use when working with counterpart institutions, and in the long term, generated mistrust, discomfort, and even fatigue because of the work dynamics that it created.

For example, from the perspective of the CSO, they considered it fundamental to accompany government institutions based on the needs of the victims rather than based on the institution's needs. On the other hand, the consultants adopted an approach in which they developed specific lines of attention after identifying the needs of the institutions. However, a relevant finding to this point is that although both Implementing Partners mentioned the importance of focusing on the victims, there were no records of the NUFM Implementing Partners actively considering victims in the design and implementation of program activities.

Although the difficulties identified within the consortium did not seem to have had a negative impact on the rest of the actors or on the results of the Activity, from the perspective of the government institutions, especially the Prosecutor's office and the police corporations, the approach utilized by the consultants increased the government institutions' confidence and willingness to sustain significant collaboration in the long term. This does not mean that there is only one correct approach to accompanying institutions, but rather that the consortium should have displayed greater flexibility and openness to find more collaborative mindsets that respected both approaches to the work.

*"The main challenge is that since [some consortium members] are non-feminist consultants, they do not necessarily share the same perspective on violence against women [as other consortium members]. I definitely feel that the vision on violence lacked a historical, structural, and sometimes even a focus on power relations." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"What we were doing throughout the project was working with authorities, which in itself is complex, and then the work within the consortium, a lot of wear and tear to justify the approaches, decisions(...)." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"We should have established initial scheduled sessions of coexistence, facilitated among the organizations, establish values that are important for all and build (...) written agreements. Coexistence to know who we are because this is so personal that it does involve our personalities and our emotions." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

#### **FINDING 9. PREVIOUS WORK BETWEEN TWO IPs FACILITATED COLLABORATION, THOUGH THIS DID NOT EXTEND TO THE REST OF THE ORGANIZATIONS IN THE CONSORTIUM.**

The collaboration between two IPs that had previously worked together was more fluid compared to the rest of the consortium members. As in the case of Fundación Idea and Fortis Consultoría, prior collaboration was a strength that facilitated organic and natural convergence on the achievement of objectives due to their shared vision and common ways of working. However, in contrast, Equis Justicia did not only have a different vision, but also did not share common ground in terms of working dynamics, for example, schedules, pace, and workloads, among others, which generated discomfort, tension, and mistrust within the consortium.

A relevant finding is that the IPs agreed on the importance of constructing spaces for conversation and learning—at the beginning and during the lifespan of the project—where they were able to learn about the working dynamics of each organization. This would have allowed for the development of an operating plan designed according to their areas of agreement, which would minimize tensions and maximize results. It is recognized that in the absence of previously working together, it is fundamental to invest time and effort in getting to know one another and finding effective ways to collaborate. Aspects like working schedules, workloads, and response time can significantly vary between consortium members, and as such, it is essential to establish a baseline understanding and mutually adapt to facilitate effective collaboration.

**FINDING 10. CONSORTIUM MEETINGS FOCUSED ON PROGRESS REVIEWS BUT DID NOT HOLD MEETINGS TO COLLABORATE, REFLECT, AND PLAN.**

Most of the consortium members interviewed agreed that they missed an opportunity throughout implementation by holding meetings to review progress, but not to reflect, build or reconstruct approaches, identify ways to meet objectives, and develop working documents. In retrospect, the IPs expressed their perceptions that to improve the internal coordination of the consortium they needed spaces for visualization, delimitation, and construction of common objectives. Lacking this, they did not see themselves as a "system" but as parallel organizations seeking similar but different objectives. A relevant factor contributing to this was the urgency of resolving external eventualities, which minimized the time available for strategic planning of the Activity.

In this sense, the IPs agree that for future efforts, it is imperative to build spaces for co-creation and reflection throughout the Activity, where all the staff involved (both managers and front-line staff) can participate, as they consider that this will strengthen communication and will strengthen the alignment of common objectives, as well as the development of working documents. This was a recent learning since they only began holding meetings that focus on listening and planning ongoing and future activities in a more strategic way.

*"Problems that the project suddenly faced, the joint visions of the three directorates, which were all three of us trying to solve temporary problems, or putting perspectives to address a problem that often did not coincide (...) most of the time there were certain factors that prevented us from seeing ourselves as a group or as a whole, as a single body but with many heads working towards the same objective." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"And then I think that instead of seeing it as a big system where they are working, like each one has little pieces and with what each one can do X or Y things they gave you niches." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"At least in my experience, because our meetings were more about following up on planned things, which is not necessarily bad but that was just to see how the objectives were going (...) there was no conversation reflecting on what was going on, I think that kind of thing that could have helped us, maybe to facilitate like this exchange of information, because again we had very valuable first-hand information that could have helped to open those bridges and it didn't happen." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

**FINDING 11. LACK OF CLARITY REGARDING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE OPERATION OF THE ACTIVITY INFLUENCES THE DEVELOPMENT OF INEQUITABLE DYNAMICS WITHIN THE CONSORTIUM.**

Another point where the perception of the Implementing Partners align is that, due to the nature of the grant provided by USAID, only one organization must assume the legal responsibility, which triggers



asymmetrical dynamics in terms of roles and responsibilities within the consortium. This can result in the designated legal entity functioning as the "leader of direction and strategy," while others are perceived as "assistant directors." A clear example is when Fundación Idea, upon signing the Cooperative Agreement with USAID, assumed the role of "project coordinator" from the very beginning, which created tensions with Equis Justicia as they perceived vertical power dynamics that hindered an equal partnership.

A significant learning from this finding is: the IPs themselves agree on the need for an initial framework, where dialogues between organizational leaders and relevant departments (e.g., administration and legal) can clarify the roles and responsibilities of the organizations and all individuals involved in the implementation of the Activity.

*"The dialogue between heads (of organizations) is essential, to find ways to reconcile the fact that one of the organizations has to act as responsible to USAID and that causes legal responsibilities. It would have been constructive to have a very frank description from the beginning and reach agreements on how to build things that would allow me to be calm and operate my own thing, to reach participatory agreements." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"Being very honest, yes there were obviously asymmetries of power among the consortium. From the moment that only one organization is the direct partner of USAID and the others are the implementers, they are not seen as peers, but as someone you hire to do something and from that place there is a very clear vertical line." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

## **FINDING 12. STAFF TURNOVER SLOWED ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING AND OWNERSHIP OF TOOLS, VISIONS, AND APPROACHES.**

Key informants identified the challenge of a constant rotation of the staff of the three NUFM consortium organizations. This turnover forced them to maintain a constant learning curve that in turn impeded ownership of the project, generation of tools, and shared visions on the focus of the activities. For example, in the first years of implementation, there were better dynamics between the teams of Fundación Idea and Equis Justicia; however, as personnel turnover increased in both IPs over the years, it was clear that processes were more dependent on individuals than organizational ways of working, sharing knowledge, and documenting learning.

Documenting the process of Activity implementation was also identified as a practice that should be utilized throughout the remainder of NUFM's project implementation, as well as in future projects, since many IPs do not usually document their processes and therefore lack institutional memory that is needed when there is staff turnover or changes in personnel for diverse reasons.

*"Another important thing is that there have been many changes in the team. Of my work team, the one I started with, I am the only one that remains. Everyone else changed and in the end there were three of us who were running the project (...). There have been too many changes and that means that there have been lessons learned and then they are lost." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"I think there was a generation of analysts from Fundación Idea and Equis that had a very good rhythm when things were shared and flowed, but it has to do with the personality of the people who were there at the time and the spaces that were created." USAID/Mexico, Human Rights team.*

## **FINDING 13. IPs FELT A NEED FOR CLOSE COORDINATION WITH USAID TO RETHINK THE INDICATORS BASED ON THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE IPs AND THE EXTERNAL CHALLENGES OF THE STATE CONTEXT.**

The IPs agreed that another crucial lesson that may strengthen the success of the activities would be to coordinate with USAID to reconsider the indicators that make up the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. Aligning the project with the indicators established by USAID has been a big challenge for the IPs because through implementation they often identify results that cannot necessarily be included within the proposed M&E systems of the projects.

In particular, it has been observed that there are relevant results that emerge throughout implementation, especially those that are identified through qualitative or theoretical approaches. Those results are not always reflected in predetermined indicators, especially when punitive approaches prevail over restorative approaches. The IPs have experienced difficulty in incorporating those significant results in the M&E system due to the lack of flexibility in the indicators that were established by USAID. Therefore, the IPs suggest increased openness for adaptation and rethinking of the indicators depending on the particularities and concrete achievements of each activity.

Furthermore, the IPs have highlighted the importance of having more information about the regional-level results (results within the same state or neighbor states) that USAID is hoping for at the proposal stage. This would allow IPs to have a clear and timely understanding of the strategic objectives they are pursuing, which would strengthen their ability to develop indicators that would better represent their work. In cases where there is a vision of holistic intervention in particular, it is necessary to think about joint indicators that allow both activities to have specific spaces for advocacy and collaboration as this will promote synergy and mutual reinforcement of their efforts to achieve more sustainable results and a larger impact on the prevention of and response to gender-based violence against women.

*"The whole design may be fine, but then you can narrow down the intervention with the indicators. So it would also be very important to review the punitive or, let's say, palliative or preventive perspective of the indicators because maybe the design was good, but we closed it to the indicators or maybe the indicators only responded to a much more general design." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"The problem with the design of indicators for this project is that they were very complex indicators that in the end some were not achieved and that the information they gave was not qualitative information at all. So, we have many qualitative findings in many things such as the understanding of the authorities of collaborative work that were not to be found in any place, that they are not going to see in any of the documents that they have." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"We should be aware of the scope of the project, especially what we call impacts. The calls for proposals and theories of change should be made much more realistic by USAID and the indicators should be based on a more transformative logic." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

#### **FINDING 14. THIS EXPERIENCE HELPED CONSORTIUM MEMBERS NEW TO USAID TO LEARN ABOUT USAID-SPECIFIC PROCESSES AND SKILLS.**

A significant finding for Equis Justicia is that the organization's internal capacity to manage grants awarded by USAID was strengthened throughout this process. According to the organization's testimonial, implementing a USAID award presented difficulties despite their wide experience in receiving funds from a variety of donors, mainly due to the large number of administrative documents required and the rigorous requirements for documenting progress and monitoring indicators. However, in retrospect, Equis Justicia views this experience as providing them the opportunity to acquire technical abilities related to constructing monitoring indicators and to strengthen administrative processes that

allowed them to effectively follow up over long periods of time in terms of human and financial resource use.

The experience working with USAID increased Equis Justicia's confidence to actively look to include grants within its institutional development portfolio. The organization has recognized the value of the management processes and accountability required by USAID as it has contributed to improving their technical and administrative capabilities. This learning has reinforced Equis Justicia's determination to continue looking for funding opportunities from USAID, with the knowledge that they are better prepared to fulfill the requirements and take full advantage of the funds awarded, which will strengthen their impact in promoting justice and defending women's rights.

*"We had never operated a USAID project financially and technically, with so many indicators, with so much follow-up over such a long time period. So it seems to me that this did strengthen the part, let's say, of monitoring, follow-up, construction of indicators. I think it was a very good exercise, a, let's say, spill over of knowledge and new ways of implementing the projects, especially for our institutional development area." Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

A notable observation is the absence of any information from the IPs interviewed about learning from one another. None of the key informants mentioned experience or knowledge that they gained from the other consortium members, nor did any of the key informants express an interest in learning from the expertise, processes, tools, and experience of their partners.

**FINDING 15. ONE OF THE CONSORTIUM MEMBERS IS A FEMINIST ORGANIZATION WITH A MISSION DEDICATED TO ADDRESSING GBV THROUGH TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE, WHILE THE PRIME AWARDEE LEADING THE ACTIVITY HAS A BROADER SCOPE OF WORK AND MISSION STATEMENT.**

Key informants expressed the perception that a grant aimed at preventing and addressing violence against women should be led by a feminist organization. Organizations that have a deep understanding of the dynamics of inequality and gender-based violence against women are better positioned to implement innovative visions and more effective solutions in this environment. As discussed in the testimonials, feminist organizations' inclusive, sensitive to the context, and gender-based equality approaches, can more comprehensively address the different aspects of gender-based violence against women, including the underlying causes and repercussions in the lives of the victims. By including these organizations in the awards, a more comprehensive and effective approach to the problem, as well as the generation of knowledge and innovative practices that contribute to breaking the cycles of violence and promoting a more just and equal society for all women, would be promoted.

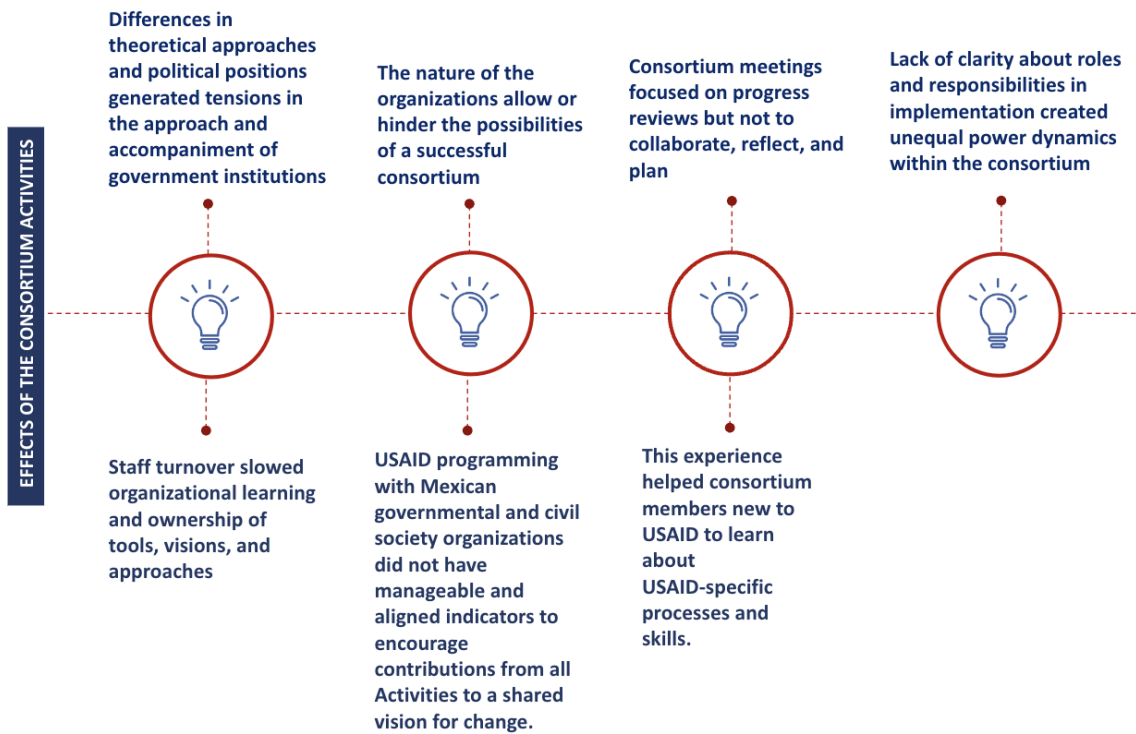
However, some of the interviewed IPs perceived the requirements included in the grant solicitations to favor larger organizations with wider technical and administrative experience. This can be interpreted as an obstacle that discourages smaller feminist organizations with less experience from bidding since they consider the administrative and human resource costs to be too high. It would be relevant to consider utilizing criteria that value an organization's trajectory, use of feminist or transformative approaches, and capacity to innovate, with the goal of encouraging more diversity and participation of different actors in project implementation.

*"If it is a project that wants to have a gender approach, that wants to have a human rights and feminist approach, the feminist organization should not be the pink-washing element, but rather it should be the one who leads the project. I think that from there we have to be coherent, and I think that when we look at the distribution of actions, who is the coordinator, even the distribution of budgets, we see precisely this*

*asymmetry between the feminist organization, which was supposed to put gender into everything and the technical part" Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

*"I think that sometimes there is an idea that consulting firms are more rigid and compliant in their administrative processes and that feminist organizations are not. And it is important for them to know that we also have audits, we have to comply with the IRS requirements, we have to report on transparency, we have six people in administration, so it is not that we do not have a robust administration area. But we do have and we have had learning curves and also mistakes, and the donor should be clear about that" Implementing Partner, NUFM.*

**FIGURE 3: THE IMPACT OF WORKING IN A CONSORTIUM**



Source: MESA Assessment Team

## CONCLUSIONS

### **QUESTION 1: TO WHAT EXTENT, IF AT ALL, WAS IMPLEMENTING A HOLISTIC STRATEGY FOCUSED ON INTERVENTIONS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS EFFECTIVE IN PREVENTING AND SANCTIONING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?**

Question 1 asks whether the holistic strategy embodied in combined focus of the two complementary F-PAR activities improved the ability to achieve the objectives of preventing and sanctioning GBV. To answer this question, the assessment team first looked at whether the holistic strategy itself was effectively implemented, and then assessed the effectiveness of applying a holistic strategy.

## **Holistic strategy implementation**

Considering a definition of holistic strategy as a strategy where two or more USAID activities complement one another to coordinate with public and private stakeholders to reach the same goal, the team reached the conclusion that a holistic strategy was not completely put in place for the F-PAR activities. This conclusion emerges because, as evidenced above, although the two activities have the same ultimate goal and were implemented in the same geographic area and time period, there is no strong evidence to show stable and/or strong coordination between them.

Through many of the interviews and the document review, the lack of implementation of a holistic approach is evident, for example:

- After analyzing the NOFOs, it was noted that complementarity and coordination between activities were not embedded in their design. NUFM started one year before HUNEF and did not have coordination with any other activity as part of their scope of work. HUNEF implementers did know about the existence of NUFM from the beginning, but did not have specific results linked to working with them.
- Interviewees from the IPs and other activity counterparts all noted that even if they were aware of the other activity, there was not a clear message about how the two activities relate to one another.
- In the interviews, IPs from both activities report having meetings to get to know each other and to plan joint work, nevertheless only one intervention involving both activities materialized.

These findings highlight the need for more strategic planning and clearer communication between USAID/Mexico and IPs, in order to establish a truly holistic strategy that facilitates effective coordination and more significant results in addressing the problem.

## **Effectiveness of the activities and the holistic strategy**

Each activity has made important progress toward the F-PAR goal of prevention of and response to GBV against women. For example, NUFM effectively strengthened the capacities of government institutions, implemented new approaches and tools, and improved inter-institutional communication. HUNEF strengthened the capacities of civil society organizations, built networks with artistic collectives, and promoted the prevention of violence against women at the community level.

However, the interviews and document review highlight that there was not a clearly articulated or understood comprehensive vision or holistic strategy to link and harmonize the efforts of both activities. The IPs and program participants indicated that in the limited examples where both activities found time and opportunity for collaboration and mutual learning, the potential for more comprehensive and substantial impact was evident. Unfortunately, these encounters were not sufficiently systematic and structured to ensure adequate collaboration and to harness potential synergies between the two approaches. This limited the capacity of the activities to generate a deeper and more systemic impact on the prevention and sanctioning of violence against women in the state of Nuevo León.

Throughout the analysis, it has been demonstrated that the F-PAR activities were not able establish effective channels for communication and collaboration between the diverse stakeholders involved in the prevention and response to gender-based violence against women. This left a gap in the connection and synergy that would have been necessary to maximize the impact of the activities and guarantee a coordinated and comprehensive response.

Although not mentioned in the interviews, some examples of collaboration that might have been feasible based on areas of overlap identified in the document review include:

- Creation of long-term awareness-raising training agreements between ALPAZ and the police corporations.
- Presentation by NUFM of newly created and established tools and protocols to CSOs affiliated with HUNEF in order to receive their comments and also for them to be able to communicate to victims what they should expect when in contact with authorities.

In this sense, the importance of establishing a holistic strategy that clearly articulates the objectives and promotes coordination between the activities from the beginning is highlighted, so that the expected impacts and results can be maximized.

**QUESTION 2: WHAT FACTORS (DIRECT AND INDIRECT, EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED) HINDERED AND/OR PROMOTED THE EFFECTIVE AND ORGANIC COORDINATION BETWEEN TWO USAID/MEXICO FUNDED ACTIVITIES?**

Though the assessment team recognizes that there are other factors that may have influenced the effective and organic coordination between the two activities funded by USAID/Mexico, this assessment identified the following as the most relevant factors that hindered and/or promoted said coordination.

Factors that promoted effective and organic coordination between activities:

- USAID/Mexico direct support for coordination (direct/expected factor).** The USAID/Mexico Human Rights team was the most important factor to promote effective coordination of funded activities. They were fundamental in fostering communication and articulation, as well as encouraging and organizing meetings. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that USAID's constant intervention is not a sustainable role in the long-term for activities of this nature, as this demands a high level of effort and supervision that does not contribute to the development of autonomous capacities among the IPs, generating vulnerability when the USAID team is unavailable to directly organize the collaboration.
- Overlapping audiences (direct/unexpected factor).** Convergence in objectives and approaches among IPs facilitated dialogue and collaboration, even when they did not know each other previously. Some (though very few, by design) of the interventions of both activities worked with the same target populations and experienced first hand the overlap. This promoted further collaboration - and demand from participants. One example is the work with police corporations, both for training and for developing processes.
- Previous collaboration (indirect/expected factor).** Previous collaboration promoted better coordination; this happened in the cases of individuals from Data Civica and Fundacion Idea, as well as between Fundacion Idea and Fortis, which reported that having worked together was important for their success in these activities because they were already familiar with their ways of working, which facilitated their interaction and completion of tasks.
- Inherent trust or understanding between like-minded organizations (indirect/unexpected factor).** As noted in the findings, Data Civica and Equis Justicia knew of each other's work and had previously collaborated, which increased their trust and communication.

Factors that hindered effective and organic coordination between activities:

- a. **Timing and messaging in the NOFOs (direct/expected factor).** USAID/Mexico released the two NOFOs at different times. The first NOFO (resulting in NUFM) did not anticipate the second one (resulting in HUNEF) as it had not been planned yet. This means that the first activity was designed, budgeted, awarded, and initially planned without any incorporation of the second activity or any resources earmarked for meetings, check points, tools, investments, or other ways to facilitate coordination. The second NOFO did acknowledge the objectives and ongoing work of the NUFM Activity, but the HUNEF IPs reported that although familiar with the existence of NUFM, they understood their Activity as independent and did not explicitly consider in their design and budget the resources for collaboration.
- b. **Resources and mandate (indirect/expected factor).** The two activities did not set aside the time or resources to work together, however each activity did have its own specific objectives, indicators driving their work, and agreed upon deliverables and targets. Those strategic and operational priorities were not previously designed in alignment with one another, so each activity felt a need to focus their limited resources on those mandated deliverables rather than on potential areas of collaboration, complementarity, or synergy.
- c. **Lack of physical proximity (indirect/unexpected factor).** Based in Mexico City, some of the IPs for each activity visited Nuevo León for specific activities or moments. This meant less opportunities for informal or timely communication and potential collaboration, including from the perception of the authorities who believed that local organizations had minimal time and availability to accompany long and challenging processes like those implemented as part of NUFM.
- d. **COVID-19 (indirect/unexpected factor).** The IPs perceived that the pandemic hindered collaboration because the two activities had to quickly adapt to a context they had never experienced before. This limited their time for engaging one another, and forced them to focus on their new context. However, the pandemic presented an opportunity to hold meetings more easily as they moved online, it increased the need for support from one another - especially when one or the other needed someone on site during the lockdown periods, and the teams could have designed their adaptations together. Despite this perception from IPs, materials from the two Activities show that they did collaborate during the pandemic on developing and disseminating materials on protection orders and emergency phones for women facing violence
- e. **Turnover (indirect/unexpected factor).** Staff turnover in the IPs influenced the continuity of the plans of the activities' coordination, in large part because there was a missed opportunity for the IPs to document the processes utilized and create institutional memory and learning for the project and new staff that join the activity.

Overall, the assessment identified several of the factors that promoted collaboration across the F-PAR activities, however, with the exception of USAID's direct efforts, those factors are primarily due to overlap in aspects of the activities or the IPs rather than intentionally designed collaboration. The identified factors hindering collaboration include a mix of expected challenges that could have been avoided in design or start up, and some unexpected events that would have been difficult to plan for from the beginning.

**QUESTION 3: WHAT EFFECT, IF ANY, DID WORKING AS A CONSORTIUM HAVE ON IMPROVING IPs' KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE, INCLUDING EXTERNAL PERFORMANCE?**

Under the NUFM<sup>12</sup> Activity, working in a consortium had positive and negative effects on the knowledge and practices of the IPs, including on their external performance.

In interviews, the IPs clearly stated that there were significant lessons learned through the work in a consortium. In particular, for those new to USAID or new to their role on a USAID grant, they felt that they improved their knowledge of managing a USAID grant and the tools and regulations that go along with USAID grants. They also indicated that some specific tools and processes were new to them and valuable to learn, in particular around performance monitoring. In the case of IPs that had previously worked together, they felt their collaboration was more fluid and their results more naturally complemented one another.

However, the NUFM consortium faced a number of specific challenges which generated negative effects on practices and performance. The consortium members functioned as individual groups working independently rather than as a single team. They were unable to align their visions and work processes. Rather than building trust over time, this created challenges for the consortium, principally growing distrust among some of the partners, resulting in one of the partners leaving. It was also identified that each of the organizations in the consortium did not recognize the work other consortium members undertook and lacked openness to learn about the approaches and tools others used.

A number of factors, situations, and practices led to the breakdown of the consortium:

- At the start, and later during implementation, the partners did not set aside time to align their objectives, theoretical approaches, and activities.
- Meetings that did bring the partners together tended to focus only on project status and did not include building shared knowledge, learning, identifying opportunities for improvement, or collaboration.
- The prime-sub management structure, typical of a USAID activity, created a vertical hierarchy that created perceived and real power imbalances among IPs hoping to work as peers.
- The core differences in theoretical approach, values, and work rhythms of the IPs created gaps in communication which were exacerbated by a lack of effort to directly address them.
- Throughout the interviews, the IPs of the consortium never expressed any acknowledgement of the skills and knowledge of their partners and never expressed an interest in learning from one another.

The negative dynamics of the work of the consortium led to several other effects impeding results:

- Staff turnover hindered the ownership of tools and processes and reduced institutional memory.
- Perception of lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities in managing the Activity fomented distrust among the partners.
- Recognizing that the Activity vision, strategic approach, and objectives needed guidance and leadership from the organization with a feminist mission and deep experience in the subject matter, particularly to ensure a feminist perspective of addressing GBV.

In summary, the consortium work had a mixed effect on improving IP knowledge and practices, including external performance. While there were significant lessons learned, it highlights the importance of addressing challenges identified at the outset of the project and having mechanisms in place to review and adjust approaches and strategies throughout implementation. By doing so, the benefits and learning

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<sup>12</sup> For this question, the assessment focused on the NUFM consortium, per the considerations established for Question 3 in the SOW.



gained from cross-organizational collaboration can be maximized and the internal and external performance of consortia can be improved.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**QUESTION I: TO WHAT EXTENT, IF AT ALL, WAS IMPLEMENTING A HOLISTIC STRATEGY FOCUSED ON INTERVENTIONS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS EFFECTIVE IN PREVENTING AND SANCTIONING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?**

**RECOMMENDATION 1. CONDUCT A CO-CREATION PROCESS AND/OR A CO-DESIGN PROCESS BEFORE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FUTURE HOLISTIC STRATEGIES.**

**Time Frame:** Long-term (future programming).

**Actors Involved and Roles:** USAID/Mexico Human Rights team, Program Office, and/or other technical offices leading the process and the application; IPs or potential IPs for future activities, and the key counterparts.

For future programming, IPs of the activities that are going to be part of a holistic strategy should work together to co-create and/or co-design the strategy. Actually, one of the principles of USAID's local capacity strengthening policy is to "align capacity strengthening with local priorities" and involve local implementers in co-creation and collective action.<sup>13</sup>

This planning model should take into account internal aspects of the IPs and external aspects of the state context. The model should begin with exercises to ensure a shared understanding of the expected development change, and should include a diagnostic phase to identify common ground between activities and strengths and weaknesses of each of the IPs.

The model should intentionally create spaces for dialogue and reflection where the IPs can share their experiences, knowledge, and perspectives, which will facilitate the identification of synergies, areas of collaboration, and the strengths and opportunities to learn from each IP. This will promote the development of innovative solutions adapted to the local context, as well as the implementation of complementary actions that effectively address multiple dimensions of gender-based violence.

It is important that the Human Rights team, or the relevant technical office, facilitates the creation of these spaces, but is not solely responsible for motivating and generating them. To increase the effectiveness of this approach, performance indicators that measure the creation and follow-up of such spaces could be monitored throughout implementation of the activities. Simple output indicators could include the number of times these spaces are used (e.g., number of meetings, etc.) or the number of action items agreed to and implemented. To capture more structural outcomes of these spaces, selected indicators can measure change in trust among the participants, number and type of adaptations to individual activity plans due to cross-activity agreements, or beneficiary/participant perception of activity coordination. Tools such as outcome harvesting, beneficiary feedback surveys, or network analysis can be useful.

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<sup>13</sup> USAID. Learning Lab. "Local Capacity Strengthening Policy - Seven principles for putting the Local Capacity Strengthening Policy into practice"  
<https://usaidlearninglab.org/insights-practice/self-paced-training-and-courses/training/local-capacity-strengthening-policy>

## **RECOMMENDATION 2. CREATE NOFOs FOR ACTIVITIES THAT REFLECT THE DESIRED HOLISTIC STRATEGIES.**

**Time Frame:** Long-term (future programming).

**Actors Involved and Roles:** USAID/Mexico Office of Acquisition and Assistance (OAA) and technical offices.

Launch the NOFOs for the activities at the same time if the strategy requires a holistic approach. On some occasions this might not be possible or even desirable, but it will be important that both NOFOs recognize the activities are part of a larger strategy and consider the collaboration as an integral part of the activities.

The NOFOs should include at a minimum:

- aligned objectives and measures of success (including indicators as appropriate) of multiple activities, including indicators on the activity's collaboration with other activities;
- expectations of collaboration;
- considerations for budget and staff for collaboration;
- a requirement and/or evaluation criterion that potential awardees submit examples of past collaboration and lessons learned / openness to future collaboration; and
- a requirement of the technical approach to include context analysis on other relevant activities and opportunities for collaboration with local actors, as well as explicitly stating their understanding of the value of collaboration with these other actors and activities.

Note that while aligning objectives and indicators and setting clear expectations for collaboration in the NOFO are necessary, they are not sufficient for encouraging and maintaining interest of the IPs in collaboration. As seen in the case of the F-PAR activities, they have limited time and resources to focus on collaboration, so budget, staffing levels, and incentives to continue engaging in collaboration are also necessary.

## **RECOMMENDATION 3. ENCOURAGE THE IPs IMPLEMENTING THE CURRENT F-PAR ACTIVITIES TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE LEARNING, EXPERIENCES, AND RESULTS.**

**Time Frame:** Short-term, immediate.

**Actors Involved and Roles:** USAID/Mexico Human Rights team helping to organize and facilitate the spaces for sharing and reflection as appropriate; IPs presenting and sharing their most valuable lessons learned and exploring future possibilities for collaboration.

The assessment found that both activities have individually generated significant results in the prevention of and attention to violence against women. It is recommended that from now on, additional spaces be created to also share experiences and even evaluate the feasibility of replicating these lessons learned with the partners involved. These meetings could be organized in the form of periodic workshops to share experiences, best practices, challenges, and lessons learned between the teams involved in both activities, which would foster an environment of trust and cooperation.

Sharing and disseminating the achievements and lessons learned from the implementation of both activities at the local, regional, and national levels could inspire and guide future interventions in the prevention and sanctioning of violence against women in the state of Nuevo León, and if applicable, in other states.

**QUESTION 2: WHAT FACTORS (DIRECT AND INDIRECT, EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED) HINDERED AND/OR PROMOTED THE EFFECTIVE AND ORGANIC COORDINATION BETWEEN TWO USAID/MEXICO FUNDED ACTIVITIES?**

**RECOMMENDATION 4. GENERATE SELF-CAPACITY FOR COLLABORATION BETWEEN IPs.**

**Time Frame:** Long-term (future programming).

**Actors Involved and Roles:** USAID/Mexico Program Office along with the relevant technical office supporting the establishment of the space; IPs creating the space, implementation and follow-up meetings.

To ensure that there is a linkage, complementary objectives, and joint lines of action, it is necessary to generate spaces for work and dialogue, but above all that the responsibility for these should not fall on a single person, as occurred with the two current F-PAR activities. In order to achieve greater autonomy and strengthen the capacity of IPs, USAID could:

- Create an inter-organizational coordination committee that includes representatives of all the IPs involved in each relevant activity. This committee will be responsible for organizing and supervising moments for dialogue and collaboration.
- Establish an agenda of regular gatherings, such as meetings and workshops, in which IPs can discuss their objectives, priorities, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration. These gatherings should be inclusive and encourage the active participation of all members. They could also review progress, studies, or other knowledge generated by individual activities that might help identify priorities, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.
- Encourage the building of relationships that emphasize trust and respect between the IPs and promote empathy, active listening, and mutual support in the search for joint solutions. Additionally, encourage a culture of openness in sharing failures and challenges, rather than only discussing progress and success.
- Allocate a specific budget within activities for self-capacity building activities to promote the holistic strategy.
- Include indicators to measure collaboration with other partners. The Local Capacity Strengthening Policy highlights the need to plan for and measure performance improvement in collaboration with local partners.

**RECOMMENDATION 5: INCORPORATE AN “INCEPTION PHASE” AT THE BEGINNING OF NEW ACTIVITIES TO FURTHER INTEGRATE THE HOLISTIC STRATEGY THROUGH LEARNING AND ADAPTING TO THE COMPLETE HUMAN RIGHTS ENVIRONMENT.**

**Time Frame:** Medium term.

**Actors Involved and Roles:** USAID technical teams and OAA.

Allowing for an initial phase to understand the context, previous work, common objectives, strategies and available potential partners (including those of other relevant activities within the same holistic strategy) would enhance skill building, trust building, holistic planning, and the development of complementary and aligned programming. The findings show that lack of awareness on shared potential lessons resulted in poor collaboration. Including an inception phase might contribute to shortening the learning curve for new grantees and provide an opportunity for alignment in the application of lessons learned to the new programming.

A typical inception phase represents a dedicated period of time, most often 4-12 months, to generate learning and support adaptation at the start of an activity. The IPs usually lead the effort, but it is a participatory process meant to intentionally engage USAID, counterpart agencies, activity participants, and other stakeholders. Beyond supporting improved coordination and collaboration with other efforts, the inception phase encourages more input and buy-in from local stakeholders and provides valuable confidence in applying adaptive management principles. The final product of the inception phase is often an inception report and related updates to key program management deliverables including the Statement of Work (SOW), Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan (AMELP), and Annual Workplan.

**RECOMMENDATION 6: PROMOTE CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN USAID TECHNICAL TEAMS TO ENSURE SHARING OF EXPERIENCES AND IMPROVE ALIGNMENT ACROSS INTERVENTIONS OPERATING IN THE SAME GEOGRAPHIC AREA.**

**Time Frame:** Medium term.

**Actors Involved and Roles:** Led by the Program Office in collaboration with the diverse USAID technical teams sharing objectives and/or operating in the same locations.

As highlighted in some of the key informant interviews, there are often multiple efforts in the same state that are not all aligned to the same vision. This provides a disjointed and sometimes contradictory experience for activity participants and external counterparts. It can also lead to unsustained progress toward activities' goals and the Mission's Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) objectives. Further, the USAID/Mexico Performance Management Plan (PMP) learning agenda highlights the Mission's interest and opportunity for increased collaboration across technical teams, across activities, and with external stakeholders in Mexico.

USAID, led by the Program Office, can improve these situations by facilitating more structured conversations among USAID technical teams that share objectives, contribute to the same CDCS Results Framework intermediate results (IRs) or Sub-IRs, and/or interact with the same activity participants and counterparts. Recognizing the time constraints of USAID/Mexico staff, these conversations can take place at opportune moments, such as when a new program is being designed or solicitation planned, during reviews of PMP, as part of any staff retreat, as part of a regular portfolio meeting (by inviting a second team to join a specific meeting), and of course during Mission-wide strategic planning and review activities such as Performance Plan and Report (PPR) sessions, CDCS development/revision, PMP development/revision. The Annual Partners' Meeting and potential Regional Partners' Meetings could be opportunities to engage IPs across different technical areas in these conversations. As highlighted above in Recommendation 2, IPs can design and plan for regular collaboration with one another, with USAID's guidance, encouragement, and support.

**RECOMMENDATION 7. IN THE CASE OF AN UNFORESEEN CHALLENGE THAT AFFECTS MULTIPLE ACTIVITIES, USE IT AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO INCREASE COLLABORATION; DEVELOP A FLEXIBLE RISK AND CONTINGENCY PLAN TO DEAL WITH UNFORESEEN SITUATIONS DURING PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION.**

**Time Frame:** Long-term (future programming); Medium term (if applied at close out).

**Actors Involved and Roles:** IPs.

It is recommended that IPs be asked to develop a risk and contingency plan to reduce learning curves in unforeseen situations as one of their post-award deliverables. Even if this is currently done as part of the proposal phase, the IPs acknowledge that it tends to be too general and useless when real risks arise. To

strengthen the risk and contingency plans, a risk control toolkit could be developed to provide actionable, concrete guidance on how to document and address unforeseen situations, as well as decision making strategies for high-risk situations which establish a clear chain of command that includes subject-matter areas relevant to USAID .

This plan could also be generated as a document of good practices created by the current Implementing Partners as a way of closing out the current projects and as a guide for future implementers.

In the case of COVID-19, which caused disruption across all development programming, the two F-PAR activities prioritized a focus on their own adaptation over opportunities to coordinate. However, a significant unforeseen challenge that arises affecting multiple activities (such as COVID, a natural disaster, a significant change in political leadership, or other challenges) can also be an impetus for increased coordination and an opportunity to align adaptations further. For example, as a major disruption will create similar challenges for many activities and their IPs, quickly learning about one another's creative adaptations to the new context will help each activity find practices that may work for them. Additionally, some activities will often have better access to different stakeholders, geographic locations, or understanding of effects after a disruptive event, so sharing information (or materials or other resources) across activities will help all activities respond more effectively. A variety of mechanisms can facilitate this type of learning or knowledge and resource sharing, including periodic meetings, shared databases or documents, and/or group communications platforms set up for the specific purpose.

**QUESTION 3: WHAT EFFECT, IF ANY, DID WORKING AS A CONSORTIUM HAVE ON IMPROVING IPs' KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE, INCLUDING EXTERNAL PERFORMANCE?<sup>14</sup>**

**RECOMMENDATION 8. CREATE SPACES FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN IPs TO GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND SHARE WORK METHODS AND DYNAMICS BEFORE COLLABORATING ON JOINT PROJECTS.**

**Time Frame:** Long-term (future programming).

**Actors Involved and Roles:** USAID/Mexico Human Rights team accompanying the spaces; IPs creating the space.

USAID should create spaces, for example through co-creation processes or other similar networking and knowledge sharing events, to identify and consolidate common ground areas, understand compatibility, and areas of collegial disagreement. These spaces could contribute to strengthening of institutional and individual ties, as well as identifying ways of working and shared missions and visions.

This could begin in the proposal phase or earlier where potential consortia present standardized information that would allow for an assessment of the compatibility of member organizations, activities, management styles, institutional strengths, and areas of opportunity, or any other variable that might contribute to building better partnerships. This could also provide a valuable opportunity to present specific commitments - adapted to each set of strengths and weaknesses - to improve the chances of success of future consortia.

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<sup>14</sup> For this question, the assessment focused on the NUFM consortium, per the considerations established for Question 3 in the SOW.

**RECOMMENDATION 9. ENCOURAGE MEETINGS FOR REFLECTION AND CO-CREATION, RATHER THAN MEETINGS TO REVIEW PROGRESS.**

**Time Frame:** Short-term.

**Actors Involved and Roles:** USAID/Mexico Human Rights team suggesting the focus of the meetings; IPs prioritizing spaces for reflection and co-creation rather than review of progress.

Implementing Partners should be encouraged to hold meetings for reflection and co-creation and not only to review progress.

It is necessary that the Human Rights team, or the relevant technical office, emphasize to the IPs that, although it is important to achieve results, it is also relevant to improve approaches, expertise, and skills to achieve deeper and more sustainable impacts over time. The [Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting toolkit](#) presents a wide variety of attitudes, tools, and practices to support this.

**RECOMMENDATION 10. DEFINE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW COMPLIANCE WITH ROLES REGULARLY.**

**Time Frame:** Long-term (future programming).

**Actors Involved and Roles:** IPs.

Taking into account the importance of effective communication and the need to establish clear roles and responsibilities within consortiums from the beginning of project implementation, the following mechanism is recommended to define roles and responsibilities:

- Develop a roles and responsibilities document at the beginning of implementation that describes the roles, tasks, and responsibilities of each organization in the consortium. To ensure division of responsibilities does not create silos, the document should also include roles and agreed upon responsibilities for coordination, knowledge sharing, communications with USAID, and deliverable management. This document should be reviewed and agreed upon by all parties involved, including the USAID/Mexico Human Rights team, or the relevant technical office.
- Establish a democratic and participatory decision-making process in which all IPs have a say in key project decisions. This may include the creation of a coordination committee.
- Promote transparency and open communication among the IPs, sharing relevant information and regular updates on the progress of the project and the contributions of each organization. This will help ensure that all parties are informed and can collaborate effectively.
- Establish accountability and follow-up mechanisms to evaluate and monitor the performance of each organization according to their roles and responsibilities. This will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that all IPs are meeting their commitments.

If deemed appropriate, USAID should consider including this process as a start-up activity in the NOFO.

**RECOMMENDATION 11. GENERATE STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY AND STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN AN ACTIVITY AND ITS COUNTERPARTS.**

**Time Frame:** Long-term (future programming); Medium term (if applied at close out).

**Actors Involved and Roles:** IPs.

The F-PAR activities faced a number of challenges due to high staff turnover, in particular related to the loss of institutional memory, a need to duplicate previously started efforts, and the loss of network relationships. To ensure continuity of institutional knowledge and practices developed in future projects, IPs should:

- Develop and maintain detailed documentation of standards, processes, procedures, and lessons learned during activity implementation. This will allow new team members to quickly become familiar with the project background and approaches. It will also build institutional memory and improve the activity's ability to adapt to changing situations or risks.
- Establish a knowledge repository accessible to all staff containing key project information, including documents, reports, tools, and resources. This will facilitate consultation and access to relevant information by current and future staff of all IPs involved.

**RECOMMENDATION 12. IMPROVE NOFO DESIGN AND SELECTION PROCESS TO ENCOURAGE INVOLVEMENT OF INNOVATIVE APPROACHES. STRENGTHEN AND ACCOMPANY ORGANIZATIONS WITH TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES TO ENSURE THAT THEY HAVE A GREATER INVOLVEMENT IN THE DESIGN OF THE ACTIVITY.**

**Time Frame:** Long-term (future programming).

**Actors Involved and Roles:** USAID/Mexico Human Rights team.

Based on feedback from consortium members, selection processes for activities working in sensitive and challenging subject matter like GBV must value and prioritize the inclusion of transformative approaches in proposals. They should also ensure that organizations with specific perspectives crucial to success, such as feminism in this case, are recognized and supported in the design and management of the activity. This will contribute to generating a deep and sustainable impact on issues of violence against women.

NOFO design and selection criteria can also be developed to encourage more collaboration within an eventually awarded consortium. As seen in the F-PAR activities, newly formed consortia need time to build trust which can be encouraged through an inception period or through setting team building priorities for startup. Under NUFM, IPs also highlighted that priorities are often set through the indicators established to measure success. Therefore, including indicators that explicitly measure collaboration and coordination across the Activity's objectives will encourage more coordination among consortium members.

Further, the USAID Local Capacity Strengthening Policy highlights two principles relevant here: (1) appreciate and build on existing capacities and (2) be mindful and mitigate unintended consequences of local capacity strengthening. By providing training and technical support on administrative and grant management skills to organizations with transformative approaches and deep local context knowledge, USAID can ensure that their perspectives are adequately considered and applied in the implementation of activities. This will also help USAID to avoid a common unintended effect of rewarding organizations with past experience with USAID over those with innovative approaches new to USAID.



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