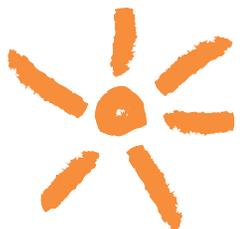


# Unite for a Better Life

A Gender Transformative Program  
for Humanitarian Contexts

## Program Basics



Unite for  
a Better Life

# About this Guide & Other UBL Resources

## Authors

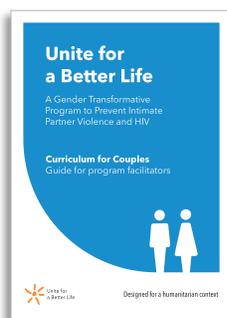
Vandana Sharma, MD, MPH, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

Jennifer Scott, MD, MPH, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Harvard Medical School

## Purpose

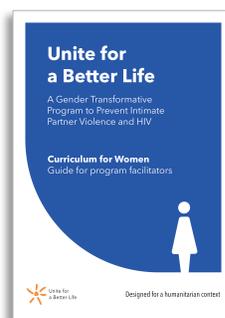
This guide was created to support implementation of Unite for a Better Life, a program designed to prevent intimate partner violence (IPV) and HIV. This guide was designed to provide an overview of the Unite for a Better Life program and its components. This guide is for program implementers working in gender-based violence prevention and/or in humanitarian settings. Other available Unite for a Better Life program resources include the following:

### Unite for a Better Life: Curriculum for Couples



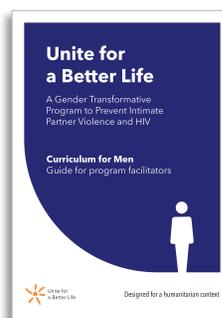
English & Somali  
Versions

### Unite for a Better Life: Curriculum for Women



English & Somali  
Versions

### Unite for a Better Life: Curriculum for Men



English & Somali  
Versions

### Unite for a Better Life: Program Implementation & Facilitator Training Toolkit



### Unite for a Better Life: Visual Media Toolkit



## Suggested citation

Sharma V, Scott J. (2019). Unite for a Better Life, A Gender Transformative Program for Humanitarian Contexts: Program Basics. Paris, France.

© Sharma V, Scott J. 2019. All rights, ownership and copyright of data and materials are retained by the authors.

## Funding

The development of this guide was funded and supported by Elrha's Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF) programme. Elrha's HIF is funded by aid from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Visit [www.elrha.org](http://www.elrha.org).



# UBL Program History & Goals

## Introduction

Unite for a Better Life (UBL) is an innovative, evidence-based program designed to prevent and reduce intimate partner violence (IPV) and HIV among women, men and couples.

In this program, groups of women, men and couples engage in crucial conversations about issues related to violence and HIV prevention.

The curriculum includes facilitated discussions, activities and exercises on such topics as gender norms, power in relationships, and conflict resolution. The sessions were designed to be delivered within the context of a community practice that brings people together.

## Program History

Developed in 2013, UBL was originally designed for a rural Ethiopian, non-humanitarian setting. The program comprised 14 two-hour sessions delivered during the traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony, a culturally established forum for community discussion and conflict resolution.

In 2016–2018, the UBL curriculum was adapted for use among a Somali refugee population living in refugee camps in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia. The adapted UBL program comprises 16 two-hour sessions and was designed to be delivered to groups of women, men, and couples as tea talks.

Both versions of the program were developed and refined after formative research and numerous consultations with direct beneficiaries and other key stakeholders.

Unite for a Better Life Program Sessions	
1	Program Introduction and Understanding Gender
2	Act Like a Man / Act Like a Women
3	Healthy Sexuality
4	Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships
5	Power in Relationships, Expressing Emotions & Dealing With Anger
6	Joint Decision Making
7	Negotiating Men's / Women's Roles In And Outside Of Home
8	Communicating With Your Partner – Active Listening
9	Talking With Your Partner About Preventing HIV
10	What Is Violence?
11	Setting Personal Boundaries In Relationships and Sexual Consent
12	Non-Violent Ways To Resolve Conflict
13	Understanding Violence And Supporting Survivors
14	Khat Use And Its Consequences
15	Preventing Sexual Harassment
16	Empowering Change And Program Closure

The original UBL program was developed by researchers and practitioners at Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), Ethiopian Public Health Association, Addis Ababa University, and EngenderHealth. The program adapted for humanitarian contexts was developed by researchers and practitioners at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center at Harvard Medical School, Women and Health Alliance (WAHA) International in Ethiopia, and Addis Ababa University. Implementation of the adapted program was supported by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Administration for Refugee & Returnee Affairs (ARRA), and Bokolmayo Refugee Camp Community Advisory Board.

“Thanks to the discussions, our husbands are respecting us more than ever. We the ladies talk about this over coffee and think that our partners (who participated in this program) are on the same track.”  
– UBL participant

“This program has made significant changes in my personal life... There were many traditional gender norms that I considered impossible to change; the program has enabled me to change this thinking.”  
– UBL program facilitator

# UBL Program Components

## 1. Gender Transformative Curricula

Unite for a Better Life uses participatory curricula tailored for the humanitarian context for groups of women, men and couples. The curricula includes facilitated discussions, activities and exercises targeting the underlying social, cultural and behavioral determinants of intimate partner violence.

## 2. Delivered within a Cultural or Community Practice

Unite for a Better Life sessions are delivered in the context of cultural or community practices that serve as a platform for intervention delivery and discussion. This increase the cultural relevance and potential effectiveness of the program, and provides an opportunity to model and practice gender equitable behaviors. The Unite for a Better Life program adapted for the Somali refugee context delivers sessions within Somali Tea Talks.

## 3. High Quality Facilitation

Unite for a Better Life sessions are delivered by trained facilitators from the community. Facilitators must first complete the UBL program as participants in order to address any gender inequitable attitudes they themselves may harbor before participating in a 16-day training to build facilitation skills.

### Unite for a Better Life Program At a Glance

UBL Aim	To prevent and reduce IPV and HIV
Target Audience	Men-only, women-only and couples' groups
Number of UBL Sessions	16
Length of Facilitator Training	First complete the 8-week UBL program as participants, then 16 days of facilitation training
Frequency of UBL Sessions	2 sessions per week over 8 weeks
Participants per Group	20
Platform for Delivery of Session	Tea Talks
Session Content	Gender roles, healthy sexuality, boundaries and sexual consent, power and control in relationships, joint decision-making, task sharing, communication, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, supporting survivors

# UBL Program Design

## Theory of Change

Following a socio-ecological framework, the Unite for a Better Life curriculum was designed to address the interaction of individual, relationship, community and societal factors influencing IPV and HIV transmission within the humanitarian context.



### Societal Factors

- Gender norms (roles and responsibilities)
- Social and cultural norms that support violence
- Norms of sexuality (expression, consent, harassment and violence)

### Community Factors

- Social and physical environment
- Displacement
- Availability of substances
- Access to services addressing IPV and HIV

### Relationship Factors

- Relationship conflict
- Inequitable decision-making
- Control of resources
- Power in relationships and conflict resolution
- Safe sex practices

### Individual Factors

- Communication skills
- Alcohol and substance use
- Self-efficacy and empowerment

## Logic Model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Longer-Term Outcomes	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff time and funding</li> <li>• Adapted curriculum</li> <li>• Meeting space and materials</li> <li>• Stakeholder input</li> </ul>	Implementation of 16 sessions of facilitated discussion in women's, men's and couples' groups	Participation of priority population in program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge and attitude changes</li> <li>• Improved skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved communication and reduced conflict between couples</li> <li>• Increased task-sharing</li> <li>• Increased joint decision-making</li> <li>• Reduced HIV risk behavior</li> <li>• Reduced substance use</li> </ul>	Reduction in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intimate partner violence</li> <li>• HIV and STI transmission</li> </ul>

### Sources:

1. Heise, L. (1998). Violence Against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework. *Violence Against Women*, 4(3), 262-90.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, January 28). *The social-ecological model: A framework for prevention*. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/publichealthissue/social-ecologicalmodel.html>

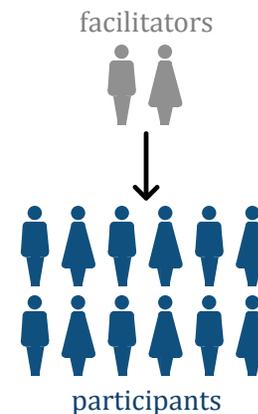
# UBL Program Design

## Facilitation Model

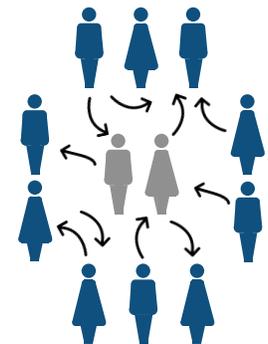
The Unite for a Better Life program is an in-person intervention delivered via trained facilitators from the community. Rather than feed knowledge to participants, the role of the facilitator is to draw out knowledge and experiences from participants and foster discussion to shape attitudes, build skills and increase motivation to change behaviors. This is in contrast to the traditional educational model where the teacher is seen as the main source of information pouring knowledge into the minds of students.

During their training, facilitators go through the Unite for a Better Life program as attendees to reflect on and address the gender inequitable norms they hold. An activity that supports this process is a visual media toolkit, a series of visual images depicting gender, social and cultural norms that put women at risk of violence. This toolkit is used to spark dialogue and build empathy among facilitators as they engage with participants.

## Traditional Teacher-led Education



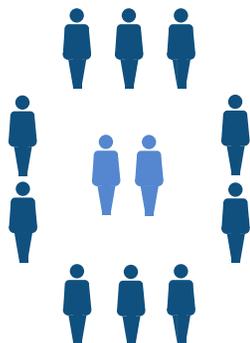
## UBL Facilitation Model



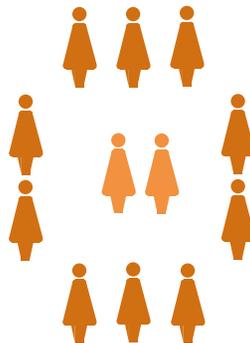
## Curriculum Versions

The Unite for a Better Life program comprises curricula for men, women and couples. The women's and men's groups require facilitation by a same-sex facilitator, while the couples' groups require one female and one male facilitator who deliver sessions jointly.

### Men's UBL Group



### Women's UBL Group



### Couples' UBL Group



# Facilitation During Tea Talks

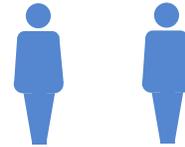
## Challenging Gender Norms in Tea Talks



Similar to many settings, gender roles are prescribed to males and females from an early age. Among Somali refugees, women would typically prepare tea for the men. Implementing the curriculum as tea talks therefore offered an opportunity to model and promote more equitable gender norms.

### Men's Group

Male facilitators role model preparing the tea in the first two sessions before asking participants to do so in subsequent sessions.



### Women's Group

Facilitating and preparing the Somali tea is done collectively, with group members rotating the responsibility.

### Couples' Group

Facilitators will also model preparation for the tea program for two sessions. The participants – one man and one woman – will then take over preparation of the tea in subsequent sessions.





[uniteforabetterlife.org](http://uniteforabetterlife.org)



Humanitarian  
Innovation fund

elrha

