

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Cabo Verde – The Role of The University of Cabo Verde (UNI-CV) in Preventing and Combating it

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Abstract

This paper aims to provide a brief overview of the situation regarding gender-based violence (GBV) in Cape Verde, beginning with an analysis of the statistics, legal instruments, institutional mechanisms for preventing and responding to GBV. To this end, emphasis will be placed on the role of academia, through training and capacity-building initiatives, the conduct and dissemination of studies, university outreach programmes, and gender activism in support of the cause. Accordingly, it will begin with a brief overview of the legal and institutional framework and its links to public policies on gender and GBV.

Next, a brief analysis will be provided of gender and GBV statistics from recent years. Finally, a brief reflection will be made on the role of academia in the prevention of and responses to GBV, focusing on the debates on gender and GBV promoted by this sphere of knowledge. In this case, emphasis will be placed on the role of the University of Cape Verde (Uni-CV), through the Centre for Research and Training on Gender and the Family (CIGEF). A mixed methodological approach will be adopted, involving the consultation and analysis of legislative documents, plans, programmes and reports on the phenomenon, the analysis of statistical data on GBV and, finally, a critical reflection on the role of academia in preventing and combating it, through the three aforementioned dimensions and their connection with society.

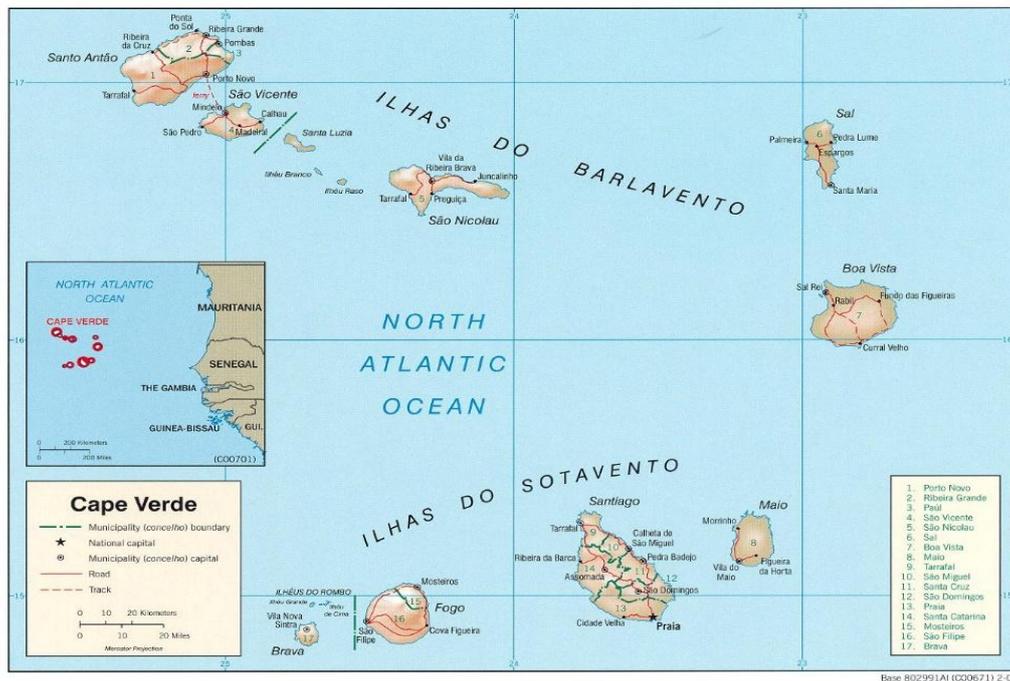
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Introduction

Contextualization

Of volcanic origin, Cabo Verde is an archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean, covering an area of 4,033 km², located some 450–500 km off the west coast of Africa (Senegal). It comprises 10 islands, nine of which are inhabited, and 13 islets, five of which are the main ones. Santiago is the largest and most populous island, and is also home to the country's capital, Praia, in the municipality of the same name. The country lies at the crossroads of three continents – Africa, Europe and America – which gives it an important geostrategic position (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Geographical overview of Cape Verde



Source: <https://www.mapsland.com/africa/cape-verde/>
<https://www.mapsland.com/africa/cape-verde/large-detailed-political-and-administrative-map-of-cape-verde-with-relief-roads-and-major-cities-2004>

According to the National Statistics Institute (INE), the country had a population of 491,233 in 2021, of whom 246,363 (50.2%) were male and 244,870 (49.8%) were female. The majority of the population lives in urban areas (364,106), accounting for around 74.1% of the total.

Cabo Verde has been making steady progress in the areas of preventing and combating gender-based violence (GBV) and promoting gender equality since its independence. This is evident both through its accession to and ratification of international and regional treaties and conventions, and through its commitments to international and regional agendas, as well as through legal mechanisms, public policies, academic research and gender activism at the national level.

Throughout its 50-year history, the country has complied to several key international instruments and adopted a range of domestic legal and institutional measures to promote gender equality and combat violence and discrimination in areas such as education, health, employment, inclusion and social security, amongst others. Despite these measures, there is an awareness of the challenges and the need to work continuously to strengthen them, and the role of academia in the production and dissemination of knowledge and gender activism has been fundamental. Of particular note is the establishment of the University of Cabo Verde (Uni-CV) in 2006 and, subsequently, in 2008, the Centre for Research and Training on Gender and the Family (CIGEF), which is an essential unit of Uni-CV, responsible for promoting the mainstreaming of gender issues both within and outside academia, through the three pillars of Teaching, Research and University Extension.

Objectives and Methodological Procedures

This paper aims to provide a brief overview of the situation regarding gender-based violence (GBV) in Cabo Verde, beginning with an analysis of the legal instruments and institutional mechanisms for prevention and response, as well as the relevant statistics. To this end, emphasis will be placed on the role of academia, through training and capacity-building initiatives, awareness-raising activities, the production and dissemination of knowledge, university outreach, and the promotion of gender activism. Accordingly, it begins with a brief overview of the legal and institutional framework and its links to public policies on gender and GBV in the country. A brief analysis of gender and GBV statistics was then carried out, in order to understand how these measures have impacted gender equality in the country. Finally, a brief reflection was made on the role of academia in the prevention and responses to GBV, focusing on research, training, awareness-raising and debates on gender and GBV. In this specific case, the role of Uni-CV, through CIGEF, was examined. This was followed by an analysis of the main advances and challenges, and finally, the concluding remarks.

To carry out this study, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, involving the consultation and analysis of legislative documents, plans, programmes and reports on the phenomenon, the analysis of statistical data on gender-based violence, and, finally, a critical examination of the role of academia in preventing and combating it, through the three dimensions mentioned above and its links with society.

This study is structured as follows: an introduction, which outlines the framework and context of the subject under study, the rationale and objectives, the methodological procedures and the structure of the study; this is followed by an analysis of the legal and institutional framework regarding GBV in Cabo Verde, presenting the main instruments, programmes and plans available to the country, beginning with international commitments and agendas; this is followed by a section analysing GBV statistics in the country and, finally, the role of academia in prevention through its three pillars: Teaching, Research and University Outreach at Uni-CV.

Legal and Institutional Framework Regarding Gender-based Violence in Cabo Verde

At the time of independence on 5 July 1975, Cabo Verde was considered unviable, given its scarce natural resources, its insularity, and its erratic rainfall and constant droughts. However, the country did not give up. Various strategic measures were taken, which have made it a benchmark today as a free and democratic territory, resilient, with good governance and a commitment to promoting human rights. Its international, regional and national commitments demonstrate its dedication to gender equality and the promotion of human rights, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups, such as women.

International and Regional Commitments

With its independence and admission as a member of the United Nations, Cabo Verde automatically became one of the nations committed to its fundamental principles, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR: 1948).

Since then, this commitment has been reinforced through the country's accession to various international and regional treaties, conventions and agendas. In 1979, it ratified ILO Conventions 100 and 111. In 1980, the country acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It acceded to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and also to the Beijing Platform for Action (Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995). It is also a signatory to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1987) and the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women (2005), thereby reaffirming its commitment to gender equality and human rights.

In addition to these commitments, Cabo Verde is also a signatory to various international and regional agendas, two of which are particularly noteworthy: its endorsement of the 2030 Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Agenda 2063 "The Africa We Want". More recently, in 2017, it joined the Equal Rights Coalition (ERC).

The National Legal and Institutional Framework regarding GBV in Cabo Verde

At national level, Cabo Verde has adopted various instruments, plans and programmes that are essential for preventing and combating GBV and protecting specific groups (women, children, etc.), in line with international treaties, conventions and agendas.

First and foremost is the Constitution of the Republic, which is the supreme instrument at national level for the promotion and protection of human rights and for guaranteeing the principles of equality and non-discrimination. The Penal Code, which was last revised in 2021 by Law No. 117/IX/2021 of 11 February, introduced new provisions in Article 131(c), criminalising gender-based violence. It represented a step forward with the introduction of sexual mutilation in Article 131 and sexual harassment in Article 152. With the revision of the Labour Code, Law GBV No. 32/X/2023 introduced Chapter III, which deals with women's employment, maternity protection and maternity leave.

A major milestone for the country in terms of preventing and combating gender-based violence is, without a doubt, the Gender-Based Violence Act (GBV Act – Law No. 84/VII/11). This law follows several years of intensive advocacy work led by the Network of Women Parliamentarians (RMP), with a view to putting an end to this social scourge. Following its adoption, various plans and tools were developed to support its implementation, and a number of capacity-building and awareness-raising initiatives were carried out with key groups, namely, healthcare professionals, police officers and education professionals. Notable examples include: the Second National Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence (2015), the Second National Plan for Gender Equality 2015–2018 (2016), and manuals, including the Manual of Procedures for Health Services and Professionals (2016).

It is also worth mentioning several other sector-specific instruments that have been fundamental to mainstreaming gender equality and promoting human rights, notably the Action Plan for Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Tourism - (2017) and Resolution No. 127/2017, which marked the entry into force of the Second National Action Plan for Human

Rights and Citizenship (2017–2021/CNDHC), which includes a set of measures aimed at the promotion and protection of LGBTI people.

In addition to these measures, Cabo Verde has consistently demonstrated its commitment to women's rights and autonomy since the very beginning of its independence. For example, Law No. 9/III/86 of 31 December established the legal framework for voluntary termination of pregnancy (VTP). With the 2021 revision of the Penal Code, b) Articles 2 to 7 relating to this law were repealed and incorporated into it.

Other important instruments should also be mentioned, notably: Decree-Law 47/2017 of October 26, which allows pregnant women to attend school and provides for social and educational support to enable mothers and fathers to access and remain in the education system, with a view to ensuring gender equity and protecting maternity and paternity rights in education (p. 52); the Decree establishing social and educational support measures (2018), which guarantees quality access and retention for mothers and fathers in the education system; the Law on Parity in Politics—No. 68/IX/2019 of November 28, which established a minimum representation of 40% for each gender on candidate lists for collegial bodies of political power, ensuring greater female participation on lists for municipal and legislative elections; Decree-Law No. 41/2020 of April 2, which established the Social Inclusion Income (RSI).

Programs and Plans

Immediately after independence and the appointment of the first independent government, one of the first measures taken was the drafting of the First Program of the Independent Government, which emphasized the importance of people—men and women—in building the country. The program clearly defined the country's aspirations for education, health, labor/employment, and social protection. Education was one of the main sectors for investment. Although gender equality was not discussed at the time, the measures implemented aimed to reduce the overall illiteracy rate, with a special focus on girls, whose rates were much higher than those of boys.

In successive government programs, human capital has received special attention, and gender equality has emerged as an increasingly cross-cutting concern. In the current Program of the 8th Institutional Government of the Republic (2021–2026), it is one of the priorities.

The Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development (PEDS II – 2022–2026) serves as a macro-level tool for mainstreaming a gender perspective at the national level, promoting the integration of gender and human rights into the guidelines of various programs, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups, namely women, the LGBTQIA+ community, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

The National Plan for Gender Equality (PNIG II, 2022–2026) places a strong emphasis on women's autonomy and is therefore based on three main pillars: increasing productivity and fostering women's economic autonomy, bodily autonomy, autonomy in decision-making, and the deepening of democracy. One of the new features of PNIG II is the inclusion of FGM under Strategic Objective 2.

Other important instruments promoting gender equality have been developed and implemented over the past few decades, namely: the National Plan for Gender Equality and Equity (PNIEG 2005–2011); the Strategy for the Development of Social Protection in Cabo Verde (2006–2008); the National Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence (PNCVBG 2007–2009); the National Health Policy and National Reproductive Health Program (2008–2012); the Project for the Promotion of Rural Socioeconomic Opportunities (POSER) in 2013; the Second National Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence (2015–2019/ICIEG); the National Plan for Gender Equality (PNIG I 2015–2018) preceding PNIG II; the National Care Plan (2017–2021/MFIS), Resolution No. 143/2017, of December 6; Ordinance No. 35/2021 of May 5, 2021, establishing the tools to be made available to beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries in the Single Social Registry (CSU); Resolution No. 99/2021 of November 17, approving the National Action Plan on Gender and Access to Energy in Cabo Verde (PANGE-CV PANGE/2021-2026); Resolution No. 16/2024 of March 6, Approving the National Strategy and Action Plan Against Human Trafficking in Cabo Verde (2023–2026).

In summary, the national instruments mentioned here are aligned with global strategies and clearly demonstrate the country's commitment and engagement in promoting a culture of gender equality, preventing and combating GBV and discrimination, and promoting the autonomy and empowerment of girls and women. For example, the creation of the ICEG, the GBV Law, the amendment to the Penal Code in 2021, the PEDS (II), the PNIG, and other instruments are examples of how international commitments such as CEDAW, the 2030 Agenda for the SDGs, and the 2063 Agenda are implemented at the national level in the prevention and combating of GBV and the promotion of the empowerment of girls and women. It is also worth noting the introduction of gender-responsive budgeting in the State Budget, the creation and operation of Victim Support Centers and Shelters provided for in the GBV Law, and networking efforts, as well as the strong engagement of NGOs, as we will see below, in this struggle.

The Institutional Framework

At the institutional level, the Ministry of Family, Inclusion, and Social Development (MFDIS) is the overarching body specifically responsible for coordinating efforts to implement policies aimed at achieving gender equality.

The MFIDS oversees the CaboVerdean Institute for Gender Equality and Equity (ICIEG), which was established in 2006 to replace the Institute for the Status of Women (ICF) as part of institutional strengthening measures; it is the body responsible for public gender policies in the Country.

In 2018, the Interministerial Commission for Mainstreaming the Gender Approach, known as the Gender Commission, was established. It is the body directly responsible for monitoring the mainstreaming of the gender approach in public policies and, in particular, for following up on the measures outlined in the PEDS by sector, led by the ICIEG, which includes public institutions, including Uni-CV, through CIGEF.

The Gender Observatory/INE-CV is a virtual platform managed by the National Institute of Statistics (INE)/ICIEG, which is responsible for compiling and making available online all information related to the promotion of gender equality and equity at the national level.

It is also worth mentioning the Inter-institutional Network for Assistance to Victims of Gender-Based Violence (Rede Sol), established in 2004 and led by ICIEG, which provides support to victims of gender-based violence at the local level by coordinating the efforts of local and national public services and NGOs.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

In addition to public agencies, there are also several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In 1981, the Cabo Verdean Women’s Organization (OMCV) was established on March 27, affiliated with the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (PAIGC), the ruling party at the time, with positive impacts across various sectors, starting with education, health, and women’s rights. The OMCV ceased to be a state agency and became an NGO after 1991 with the introduction of multiparty elections. In fact, from 1992 to 1994, there was a proliferation of NGOs, as government policy encouraged greater participation by civil society in the country’s development process. It was through this organization that the Maternal and Child Health/Family Planning Program (PMI/PF) was introduced for the first time in Cabo Verde, yielding tangible results in terms of women’s sexual and reproductive health and infant mortality. Verified investments, including the introduction of the PMI-PF and a focus on family planning and the provision of sexual and reproductive health services, had direct impacts in terms of a significant decline in fertility (from 7 children per woman in 1980 to about 5.5 in 1990). The infant mortality rate also declined progressively (from 101.2‰ in 1975 to 62.9‰ and 42‰ in 1980 and 1990, respectively), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Trends in Fertility and Infant Mortality: 1975–1990

<i>Year</i>	1975	1980	1990
<i>Nº of children per woman</i>	--	7	5,5
<i>Infant Mortality Rate</i>	101,2‰	62,9‰	42‰

Source: Adapted from the National Institute of Statistics (INE), 2015

Among the various NGOs that emerged following the OMCV, VERDEFAM stands out - Cabo Verdean Association for the Protection of the Family; the Cabo Verdean Association for the Self-Promotion of Women (MORABI) – 1992; the Association of Women Lawyers (AMJ) – 2000; the Cabo Verde White Ribbon Network – 2009, which is an association of men against GBV; LGBTQIA associations; the Association for the Promotion of Inclusion of Women and Girls with Disabilities (APIMUD) – 2015; the Cabo Verdean Association for the Fight against GBV (ACLCVBG) – 2015.

Legal and institutional measures, as well as the work being carried out—whether individually or through networks—have been instrumental in reducing inequalities in the country. For example, statistics show undeniable progress in education, health, political participation, and the reduction of gender-based violence, among other areas, as we will see below.

Statistics on Gender-Based Violence in Cabo Verde: What Do the Numbers Tell Us?

In this subsection, we aim to analyze, using VBG statistics, the impacts of the aforementioned measures and initiatives. It should be noted that progress extends to various sectors, particularly health, education, and social security, among others, which will not be the subject of an in-depth analysis in this study, due to its scope.

Statistics on gender-based violence in Cabo Verde show some improvements, although the figures remain concerning. According to data from the IDSRII (2005), approximately one in five women reported having experienced at least one form of violence. In the case of physical violence, the data indicated that about 20.3% of women aged 15 to 49 had been victims, with those aged 20–29 and 30–39 being the most affected. These data also reveal that it is within these age groups that the highest percentage of women who are victims of violence by their husbands is found.

Table 2. Percentage of women (aged 15–49) who are victims of GBV

Indicators	Total
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<i>Percentage of women (aged 15–49) who reported having always been victims of physical violence, either by their husband or by others, since the age of 15</i>	
15-19 years old	16,3
20-29 years old	25,4
30-39 years old	26,7
40-49 years old	15,7
Total	21,5
<i>Percentage of women who reported having been a victim of physical violence, either by their husband or by others, since the age of 15, in the past 12 months</i>	
15-19 years old	14,9
20-29 years old	23,8
30-39 years old	25,8
40-49 years old	14,8
Total	20,3
<i>Percentage of women who are currently married or separated and who have experienced physical, emotional, or sexual violence at the hands of their current or former husband or partner</i>	
Emotional, physical, or sexual abuse	19,6
Physical violence	15,7
Emotional violence	14,1
Sexual violence	3,6

Source: INE – Demographic and Reproductive Health Survey (IDRS-II) 2005

In 2018, IDSR II data indicated a significant improvement compared to 2005, when approximately 10.9% of women (one in ten) aged 15 to 49 had experienced physical violence. Compared to the global average, the country shows slightly more favorable indicators, as the WHO estimates that about one in three women worldwide experiences violence, with the total number of women subjected to some form of physical or sexual violence nearing 840 million. The perpetrators were primarily ex-husbands/partners (49%) and current husbands/partners (47%), in line with the global trend, where the majority of perpetrators are (ex)partners. In the case of sexual violence, this figure stood at 5.8% of women, in most cases perpetrated by husbands/partners (50%), with 29% being former partners and 21% current partners—a figure higher than in 2005.

Overall, among women aged 15–19, the decline in the number of victims of physical violence was approximately 14.4%, a trend mirrored among women aged 20–39 nationwide. Among women aged 40–49, this proportion remained unchanged. Women are also victims of domestic violence (16%) and emotional abuse (14%). The majority of victims are in the 30–39 age group (17%), with separated, divorced, or widowed women being the most affected (33%). Urban women (12%) experienced more violence than rural women (8%).

Table 3. Percentage of women (aged 15–49) by type of GBV

<i>physical violence</i>	
<i>Women aged 15 to 49 had experienced physical violence.</i>	10,9%
<i>Perpetrators were primarily ex-husbands or former partners.</i>	49%
<i>Perpetrators were current husbands or partners.</i>	47%
<i>Sexual violence</i>	
<i>Women aged 15 to 49 had experienced sexual violence.</i>	5,8%
<i>Perpetrators were primarily ex-husbands or former partners.</i>	29%
<i>Perpetrators were current husbands or partners.</i>	21%

Demographic and Reproductive Health Survey (IDSR-III) 2018

The data also indicate that educational attainment has a positive impact on the rejection of violence: the higher the level of education, the less likely people are to accept or justify aggression by men. Specifically, 19% of women with primary education and 6% of those with post-secondary education hold this view. However, around 6 in every 100 women and 4 in every 100 men still agree with at least one of the reasons put forward by the survey to justify a husband hitting his wife. It is also worth noting that 5% of women reported having suffered violence during pregnancy. The situation is even more complex amongst vulnerable groups, such as women with disabilities.

Data from the PNIG (II) also show a downward trend in the number of cases of gender-based violence recorded by the National Police, as well as a sharp decrease in the number of gender-based violence cases filed with the public prosecutor's office and an increase in the number of cases resolved annually. However, there remains a perception that proceedings should be faster, given the risk faced by victims – and often their children. In this regard, it is important to highlight the number of cases of women murdered in intimate partner relationships, which totalled 8 in 2018 alone, with more than half being young women aged between 21 and 30. Furthermore, 5 of these cases occurred in the context of separation, 4 were homicides followed by attempted suicides, 3 of which were successful. Of these 8 cases, 7 had previous reports of GBV on record and one had an ongoing case. (PING, 2021–2025).

Academia has played a key role in all the progress made across various sectors. CIGEF, established by the Strategy and Governance Council of the University of Cabo Verde on 13 June 2008 (**Resolution No. 10/2008**) has, since its inception, been working to promote the mainstreaming of the gender approach both within and outside academia and to prevent and combat GBV, as we shall see below, prioritising actions to prevent and combat Gender-Based Violence through its three pillars, as we shall see below.

The Role of Academia in Preventing and Combating Gender-based Violence: The Case of Uni-CV, through CIGEF

The University of Cabo Verde was established in 2006, at a time when the country was halfway towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Thus, with a responsibility for the production and dissemination of knowledge, capacity building and training, as well as for producing evidence to inform public policy-making, CIGEF was established through Uni-CV Resolution No. 10/2008.

A. Studies and research – CIGEF and the production and dissemination of knowledge: research on gender-based violence and its dissemination

CIGEF is an interdisciplinary unit which, since its establishment, has been working on the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge and academic advocacy in the fields of gender and family, at national, regional and international levels. One of the main reasons for its creation relates to the evident limitations in research and the pressing need to “make efforts to deepen the theoretical and conceptual framework of gender relations in Cabo Verde” . As such, it has promoted scientific output and knowledge exchange in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. One of CIGEF's major projects, which began in 2012, was the **Gender Laboratory Project (LIG)**.

Gender Laboratory Project (LIG)

The LIG Project began in 2012. It was implemented by CIGEF and the Coordination of the Postgraduate Programme in Social Sciences (PPGCS) and its respective academic group, with the support of United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Women, ICIEG and other partners. Designed to run for an initial period of two years, it has had several subsequent editions, following the success of the first edition. LIG

brought together researchers and students at various levels of study (lecturers, research supervisors, PhD students, Master's students and undergraduates) to produce, share and disseminate knowledge in the field of gender studies and family dynamics in Cabo Verde. Consequently, it encouraged students enrolled in higher education at Uni-CV to conduct research on various aspects, namely Family Dynamics, Migration, Sexuality, Gender and Power. The LIG aimed to engage researchers and students at various levels of knowledge within academia with the purpose of introducing undergraduate students to research and fostering in them a vocation for investigation in the field of gender. A methodological approach of a participatory, transversal, and multidisciplinary nature was proposed, indispensable for the triangulation of information, assisting the process of understanding different positions and forming conclusions regarding the results achieved by the LIG. In this sense, the focus was primarily on engaging more students and researchers from Uni-CV in research on gender and/or with a gender approach.

The LIG was organised into five sub-groups: Gender and the Family in Cabo Verde; Experiences of Masculinities in Cabo Verde; Gender and Migration; Gender and Violence; and Gender and Development. On this basis, working groups were set up with students; in the case of postgraduate students, the themes developed in doctoral and master's projects were divided into two approaches: 1) projects in other thematic areas, but which are intersected by the category of gender due to its pervasive nature across the whole spectrum of social relations. This group includes research on environmental conflicts in protected areas; phenomena linked to beliefs and religions; music and development in contemporary society and associativism; and 2) projects in the field of gender studies, covering themes such as motherhood and fatherhood, masculinities among fishermen, migration and inter-island flows, female heads of households, and the relationship between fishing communities and gender-based violence. Thus, throughout its implementation, various research projects were carried out, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, resulting in works that were shared both at academic conferences and in anthologies (Social Inequalities and Dynamics of Participation in Cabo Verde. LIG Anthology, 2015).

A large part of the students who joined LIG continued to work in this area, many of them gender activists and others are doctors, with doctoral theses in this area. The 4th and last edition of LIG took place in 2016-2017

Between 2017 and 2019, the Study on Violence in Secondary Schools in Cabo Verde was carried out, following on from a pilot study designed to provide input for the development of a plan to prevent and respond to violence in schools in Cabo Verde. The results showed that there is a high perception of violence in schools, with girls being the main victims and boys the main perpetrators. Various types of violence were identified, namely physical, psychological, verbal and (cyber)bullying, amongst others.

CIGEF's most recent project is the Study on Perceptions of FGM in Cabo Verde and its Impacts on Sexual and Reproductive Health – Pilot Project, which aims to understand perceptions of the phenomenon of Female Genital Mutilation in Cabo Verde and its impacts on sexual and

reproductive health from different perspectives. It forms part of the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – Understanding and building capacity for better intervention – PILOT PROJECT, which aims to create mechanisms enabling effective intervention at national level regarding FGM and its various dimensions (not only in terms of prevention and detection of cases, but also in knowing how to deal with the consequences/complications resulting from FGM).

These are just a few examples, as there is a wealth of activities, research, publications and initiatives that CIGEF has carried out over the course of its 17 years, a detailed account of which is beyond the scope of this paper. We shall mention just a few examples.

A. The publication of research findings (theses and studies) on gender and the family by CIGEF staff has been delayed

CIGEF lecturers and researchers have been continuously conducting studies on gender issues, gender equality, and the prevention and combating of gender-based violence. Furthermore, they have been focusing on publishing collections, articles and books based on the doctoral theses produced to date. To date, there are three publications based on theses, all supported by UNFPA.

The first book was published in 2020 by Edições da Uni-CV and is entitled “The Landowners. The Women of the Land. Or... No Man’s Land: Agrarian Issues, Gender and Development”, written by Carla Carvalho. This book addresses agrarian issues, gender and rural development, specifically focusing on access to, ownership and management of land in the interior of the island of Santiago in Cabo Verde.

In 2024, a book by Antonieta Lopes Ortet entitled “The Social Origin and Educational Pathways of Cabo Verdean Students in Higher Education” was published. The work discusses social inequalities and their impact on access to higher education, as well as the challenges of funding, against a backdrop of limited financial resources for many aspiring students and the need for educational reform, with more inclusive and robust measures, in order to prevent dropouts and reduce social inequalities.

The most recent work of significant impact, offering a critical perspective on GBV, is the book entitled “The Sol Network and the Special Law against Gender-Based Violence: institutional processes and narratives of women and men experiencing domestic violence in Cabo Verde”, written by Carmelita Silva and published in January 2026, which is the result of her PhD thesis in Social Anthropology. As stated in the document itself, “the aim is to analyse the institutional processes of legal production and the narratives of women and men in situations of domestic violence, who sought services of Rede Sol in Praia, Cabo Verde, as a conflict resolution strategy” (abstract), through a critical examination of GBV, focusing on Rede Sol and the implementation of the GBV Act. It should be noted that the funds raised on the day of the launch were donated to two associations, namely ACLCVBG and APIMUD, a gesture of solidarity that reinforces the role of academia in gender activism.

These publications are just a few examples of the work being carried out by CIGEF, both as a producer of knowledge and as a promoter of gender activism. Indeed, the centre has produced and encouraged the production of various other academic and scientific works, and is currently involved in—and has previously been involved in—several international projects in collaboration with European, African and American universities, many of which have resulted in joint publications. Notable examples include the IMPAR (<https://projetoimpar.eu/>) and ELEVATE-WISE (<https://elevatewise.eu/>) projects.

Promotion of National and International Scientific Events

CIGEF has organised events to publicise its work at national, regional and international levels, proving to be genuine forums for the exchange of knowledge and gender activism. Since its inception, numerous events have been organised in partnership with various academic, public and civil society institutions, both within and outside the country: the International Seminar “Fluxos e Percursos: Gender, Sexuality and Family Dynamics in Cabo Verde” (4 and 5 June 2013), held as part of the LIG Project; the International Seminar: Family Dynamics, Sexualities and Gender: Challenges in the Cabo Verdean Context (4 and 5 February 2014), also as part of the LIG project; the International Conference on Women, Gender, Health and Public Policy (2016), in partnership with the Master’s Course in Integrated Medicine, ICIEG, UN Women and the Wellesley Center for Women (WCW). The International Colloquium on Gender, Migration, Democracy and Sustainable Local Development (2018) provided an opportunity for joint reflection between CIGEF and its various partners on the centre’s journey, the activities carried out to date and future prospects, as well as on various themes, in celebration of its 10th anniversary.

The centre’s most recent event was the “International Seminar: Rethinking Gender from an African Perspective: Global and Local Perspectives”, held on 12 and 13 November 2025. It brought together participants from Cabo Verde and various other African countries, as well as those working on the African continent. It served as a pre-event for the major Forum scheduled to take place on 12 and 13 November 2026, which has already been established as a biennial event bringing together experts to rethink gender from an African perspective.

CIGEF has also organised a series of debates and talks, inviting figures from various organisations in the public and private sectors and civil society to discuss specific issues facing our society, such as those that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic: the ‘Conversations in the Time of COVID-19’ series (2020–2021); In 2025, a series of thematic debates on gender and sexuality was organised during LGBTQIAPN+ Pride Month, in celebration of LGBTQIAPN+ Pride Month, entitled ‘(De)constructing Notions of Gender and Sexuality: Promoting Equality in Diversity’ in partnership with UNFPA.

CIGEF was also a partner in the First International Forum on Women and the Challenges of Development, held under the slogan ‘MORE Participation, A BETTER Future’, which took place in the city of Praia, Cape Verde, on 30 May 2025 (<https://forummulher.cv/sobre/>).

In addition to organising and partnering with the various activities mentioned above, CIGEF has been making its voice heard across the globe at regional and international scientific events, where activism and academic engagement come together to promote reflection on gender equality and the human rights of women and girls. Among these, we would like to highlight a few:

- Participation in 2016 and 2018 in the side event organised alongside the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York (United States), at the invitation of the Wellesley Centers for Women (WCW);
- Participation in the 11th International Seminar on Gender Studies and the 13th edition of Mundo de Mulheres (Florianópolis, Brazil, 2017);
- Attended the 18th IUAES World Congress – Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil (2018);
- Participation in the 14th edition of Mundo de Mulheres, which took place in Maputo, Mozambique (2022);
- Participation in several editions of the Luso-Afro-Brazilian Congress of Social Sciences, in Brazil and Portugal, having co-organised the 15th Luso-Afro-Brazilian Congress of Social Sciences (CONLAB) and the 4th Congress of the International Association of Portuguese-Language Social and Human Sciences (CONAILPcsh), which took place at Uni-CV in 2023.

Academic Mobility Projects

Academic mobility has also led to the exchange of knowledge, scientific output, academic events and the publication of anthologies.

It was part of the project “Mundos em Circulação: perspectivas on Cabo Verde (CAPES/AULP)”, led by the Department of Anthropology (DAN) at the University of Brasília (UnB), which included research and academic exchanges between staff and students from the two institutions, academic events held in both Cabo Verde and Brazil, and the publication, at the end of 2016, of an anthology resulting from the research carried out by the team members, bearing the same title, which emerged from the seminar entitled “Worlds in transformation and established forms of sociability: family, gender, migration and popular culture in Cape Verde”, held in Praia in 2015.

The CIMPI project, ‘Redes de cooperación interuniversitaria Canarias – África’, brought together universities from the Canary Islands and Africa, including Uni-CV, through the CIGEF. In addition to research and international conferences, it also resulted in several publications, including “Politiques d’égalité des genres dans les universités atlantiques d’Espagne et d’Afrique de l’ouest”, in 2012. In the case of CIGEF, the team members contributed a chapter entitled “Les politiques de promotion de l’égalité de genre au Cap-Vert: dialogue entre l’Académie, les institutions Publiques et les ONG”.

CIGEF is currently involved in ERASMUS+ projects alongside European and African partners, notably IMPAR and ELEVATE-WISE, both of which run for three years and involve mobility between institutions in the partner countries.

The CIMPI project, ‘Canary Islands–Africa Inter-University Cooperation Networks’, brought together universities from the Canary Islands and Africa, including Uni-CV, through the CIGEF. In addition to research and international conferences, it also resulted in several publications, including “Politiques d’égalité des genres dans les universités atlantiques d’Espagne et d’Afrique de l’ouest.” In the case of CIGEF, the team members contributed a chapter entitled *Les politiques de promotion de l’égalité de genre au Cap-Vert: dialogue entre l’Académie, les institutions Publiques et les ONG*”.

These occasions provide unique opportunities to exchange experiences. More than just forums for demonstrating how the country has been implementing the guidelines of international conventions, treaties and agendas, they enable the sharing of practical approaches to preventing and combating GBV. Such sharing is particularly crucial in a context where economic, material and technical resources are becoming increasingly scarce. Studies carried out by academics offer valuable contributions with concrete suggestions on strategies for preventing and combating GBV.

A. Training Initiatives – Introduction to/addressing gender issues in course curricula

With a view to mainstreaming gender equality objectives across the design and development of Uni-CV’s policies and practices, CIGEF has been organising training and awareness-raising seminars for management and administrative staff, students and teaching staff over the years, in partnership with ICIEG and with technical and financial support from UNFPA, occasionally involving other national and international partners. Consequently, it has carried out various training initiatives on gender, gender equality, GBV and human rights. Shortly after its establishment, it organised a training programme for gender trainers, which included representatives from various public institutions and civil society organisations working to promote gender equality and prevent GBV.

The aforementioned LIG Project was more than just a research project. It included capacity-building activities for undergraduate students in every iteration. During the period in which it was in operation, three gender workshops were held for the student body, alongside preliminary training activities for undergraduate students between 2012 and 2014, including undergraduate scholarships and fieldwork grants for postgraduate students.

With a view to introducing the undergraduate curricula in 2012, an institutional evaluation study of CIGEGF was carried out, which concluded that the centre enjoyed greater visibility outside the academic community. In this regard, a set of measures was proposed to enhance internal visibility and achieve the objectives of mainstreaming the gender approach within the academic community. Consequently, the Seminar on Gender: Concepts and Issues was designed and implemented for lecturers, students and administrative staff; it has been held on several occasions, with the collaboration of colleagues from other universities and national and

international institutions. In 2023, a session aimed at a specific group was held at Campus II as part of the Open Course on Gender and Health: Dialogues from Cabo Verde, with the overall aim of training nursing students at the São Vicente campus in the areas of gender identities and diversity, health and gender identities, sexual and reproductive health, feminism and health, gender-based violence (GBV) and obstetric violence, and mental health and gender identities.

The Training of Trainers on Gender and Family, held in September 2021, aimed to strengthen participants' theoretical and practical knowledge in the fields of gender and family, and to develop their teaching skills and abilities so that they could deliver training in these areas.

In 2021, the first step was taken towards drawing up Uni-CV's Equality Plan, the terms of reference for which have already been approved.

A. University Extension Programme

Uni-CV has a strong focus on community engagement. Consequently, the open course entitled 'Seminar on Gender: Concepts and Issues' has also been adapted for other sectors of society (NGOs, the public sector, businesses), particularly primary and secondary schools, NGOs and other sectors.

Através do Projeto Divulgação dos ODS no Ensino Superior com início em 2021, já foram realizadas várias atividades que permitiram trabalhar os ODS junto com grupos específicos, como é o caso do Projeto Clube de Leituras Inclusivas onde o público-alvo era crianças do pré-escolar e do ensino básico e professores/as e outros agentes educativos dos agrupamentos escolares de forma lúdica. Portanto, tanto dentro como fora da Academia membros do CIGEF têm-se dedicado ao ativismo académico de género, visando a promoção de uma cultura de igualdade e da não discriminação.

Through the 'Promoting the SDGs in Higher Education' project, which began in 2021, a number of activities have already been carried out to engage specific groups with the SDGs. One such initiative is the 'Inclusive Reading Club' project, which took a playful approach aimed at pre-school and primary school children, as well as teachers and other educational staff within school clusters. Therefore, both within and outside the Academy, CIGEF members have been dedicated to academic gender activism, aiming to promote a culture of equality and non-discrimination.

CIGEF has organised various activities in partnership with the aforementioned organisations, including dedicated sessions for dialogue between academia, public policy-makers and civil society, as well as sessions focused solely on civil society dialogue; open discussions within communities; workshops; training initiatives for the target audience; knowledge-sharing; and other similar activities. Various workshops, lectures and round-table discussions have been held, often as part of special events, either in partnership with NGOs or with public institutions promoting gender equality. For example, in 2022, the round table "Gender Equality – Challenges for Sustainable Development in a Context of Climate Change" was held to mark

Women's History Month, featuring a special appearance by Catarina Furtado, actress, dancer, presenter and UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador.

In 2026, similar to previous years, February 6 was celebrated as the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, with an open conversation with students of the university residence, under the motto "Accelerate the pace and strengthen alliances." The High Authority for Immigration (AAI) and CIGEF, UNFPA, held a workshop entitled "*Addressing and Building Partnerships for Tackling FGM in Cabo Verde*," which aimed to encourage reflection on the need to create an integrated intervention between sectors and institutions. In 2025, it was celebrated with the presentation of the provisional results of the Study on the perception of FGM in Cape Verde. It is noteworthy that, within the scope of this project, a first exchange with Portugal and Guinea-Bissau has already taken place, aiming, above all, at sharing experiences with countries experienced in this matter.

Only in the year 2024 were several university extension activities carried out, aligned with the SDGs and within the framework of Uni-CV/CIGEF's mission to mainstream the gender approach and promote the acceleration of the SDGs, towards the realization of the 2030 Agenda.

It is important to say that the United Nations, through UNFPA, has been CIGEF's strategic partner throughout its existence in the design and implementation of its activities.

Training Actions within the Framework of University Extension

In addition to training activities for the academic public, which also include people from other institutions, CIGEF has benefited several NGOs, schools, and other public entities with training activities within the framework of its gender activism, as we will see next:

- Training Workshop on Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation and Human Rights – June 2015 in partnership with UN Women, United Nations Human Rights, Fundación Triángulo, Canary Islands, CNDHC, ICIEG;
- Training workshop on gender, GBV, and victim assistance techniques for the teams of the Houses of Law (Casas de Direito), with the main objective of training the administrative staff of the Houses of Law, providing them with knowledge on gender, gender-based violence (GBV), and victim assistance techniques, so that they are able to receive and refer any victim who seeks this service on a daily basis (2016);
- Gender equality training for community leaders, aiming to empower community leaders by providing them with knowledge on gender, gender-based violence (GBV), and human rights, in order to share the knowledge acquired with the local community, in partnership with ICIEG and UNFPA (2017);
- Training in Menstrual Dignity - Dignity in motion: to liberate menstruation from stigmas and embarrassment, with the main objective of increasing health literacy about menstrual dignity for this group of women/adolescent girls who experience vulnerability;

- Workshop Immigration, Gender, and Harmful Practices: Why Talk about Female Genital Mutilation, for associations and entities that deal with immigration and gender;
- IEC actions on issues of gender equality, non-violence, and discrimination outside academia with schools and school groups;
- Actions of information/training and awareness-raising on SRH (FGM) issues, with prevention and awareness-raising activities on FGM issues in schools, health centers, and within immigrant communities;
- Training in Gender and Human Rights for Community Animators in 2021, aimed at equipping the animators of the Safende community (residents – nationals and immigrants).
- At the same time, in 2023 several activities took place such as the International LGBT Film Festival, the Workshop: Female Genital Mutilation: Concept, legal framework and its impacts on women's health, the Workshop “Female Genital Mutilation and its impacts on women's health” aimed at immigrant women.

Gender activism also extends to CIGEF's participation in campaigns related to gender equality and GBV prevention, support for the formalization of associations promoting gender equality and inclusion. It was at the origin of the process of creating the LGBTI Association of Praia and APIMUD and has acted as a collaborator ever since. It even supported financially the creation/formalization of APIMUD, of which it is a partner. Several members of CIGEF were involved in the creation of the Cabo Verdean Association for the Fight Against Gender-Based Violence (ACLVCVBG), also being members of that association. Their participation in drafting proposals for laws and public policies should also be highlighted, as well as membership in RedeSol and the Interministerial Commission for the mainstreaming of Gender Issues, as in the case of the National Care Plan (2017-2021) and the Parity Law (2019).

CIGEF has also positioned itself as a partner and active participant in various activism marches against Gender-Based Violence:

- HeForShe/TheyForThem, a UN Women solidarity movement for gender equality. At the national level, the slogan was, BÓ KÊ ÓMI, BÓ KÊ RAPAZ, JOIN THE CAMPAIGN TOO. WE ARE COUNTING ON YOU! It featured the participation of high-profile personalities, namely the then President of the Republic, who was one of the ten heads of state chosen worldwide as faces of the campaign;
- Since 2016, it has been an active partner of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign, which starts on November 25 and ends on December 10. Under the slogan “Paint Your World Orange: mobilize resources to End violence against Women,” various activities have already been carried out, including marches in favor of a culture of equality and non-GBV;
- In 2017, it was a partner of the United Nations Campaign For a Free and Equal Cabo Verde designed for three years, aiming to contribute to the elimination of homophobia

in the school environment, in work activities, in the media, but also to combat violence and discrimination against LGBTI people by promoting citizenship, which involves everyone;

- Praia Pride 2022 held in June, the month of LGBTI Pride, under the slogan "For the Social Inclusion of the LGBTI Community in Cabo Verde - We are the Human Resistance in Cabo Verde".

Actions, capacity-building activities, and participation in international campaigns reinforce the country's engagement in fulfilling the guidelines of global agendas, but specific campaigns carried out at the national level also show how certain actions need to be thought out, planned, and implemented, taking into account the specificities and diversities of the local context. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was necessary to launch specific campaigns to reach the victims, particularly the "Maskara19" campaign created by ICIEG during the lockdown period, to help women at risk, which was a form of reporting through a number created for that purpose or, alternatively, it was enough to go to a pharmacy and say Maskara19 for it to be understood that the woman was at risk.

Final Notes: Advances, Challenges, and Final Considerations

The path taken by Cabo Verde in terms of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, preventing and combating GBV, and all the work that has been carried out by public institutions, civil society, academia, and through international partnerships, results in visible and tangible gains. The commitments made to gender equality and equity are reflected both in internal mechanisms and in adherence to international conventions, treaties, and agendas.

As a result, a decrease in the records/processes of GBV cases is observed: in 2005, about 1 in 5 (21%) women reported having been a victim of physical violence, either by their husband or by other people since the age of 15; in 2018, the proportion of women who experienced physical violence was 10.9% and 5.8% had already experienced sexual violence at any point in their life (IDSR II, 2018). Compared to 2025, there was a decrease of 14.4% in women who suffer physical violence from the age of 15 in the age group of 15 to 19, suggesting a significant trend of improvement in relationships among the young population. Also, according to this source, the rate of births carried out in health facilities assisted by a qualified professional was 97%, and the rate of prenatal consultations (4 recommended consultations) was 86%. Life expectancy is 79.1 years for women and 69.7 years for men. The overall mortality rate in 2017 was 4.6‰, being 5.1‰ for men and 4.6‰ for women.

There is a clear decrease in maternal mortality, a decrease in the equality gap in access to education, an increase in the school enrollment rate, and gender parity in primary education, with currently more girls in higher education.

According to data from the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 by the World Economic Forum, Cabo Verde moved up to 52nd place among the 153 countries evaluated, with an index of 0.725

and a positive change of 3.38%. The indexes show that the country was close to eliminating gender disparities in the areas of health and survival (0.974) and education (0.970). They also indicated disparities regarding economic opportunities (0.790) and political empowerment (0.160). In 2025, the index stood at 0.769, ranking 30th globally and second in Africa.

In 2006 the creation of the National Public University in 2008 (Uni-CV), followed by the creation of CIGEF, was decisive for the development of research, training actions, and activism in favor of gender equality and equity. Notwithstanding these advances, challenges remain that need to be overcome:

- Slowness in the justice process: this might be the Achilles' heel and, although it is considered that there has been an improvement, it still lacks greater speed;
- Victims' reluctance to file complaints, for fear of retaliation by the aggressors, or of separation, especially if the aggressor is the family's provider;
- Gender disparities continue in the regions. We still face gender imbalances in the more remote islands and municipalities;
- There is a gender gap in secondary education to the disadvantage of boys (higher rates of dropout and school failure);
- Gender disparities are noted in vocational technical courses, with some niches filled almost 100% by boys and others by girls; there is sex segregation of students in technical training and higher education courses in engineering and ICT, which continue to represent another central challenge in education, limiting women's access to the labor market;
- There is a noticeable increase in cases of femicide, sometimes accompanied by (attempted) suicide;
- Women with disabilities face multiple discrimination – because of gender, because of the social stigma associated with disability, and because of the consequences of this condition - low level of education and low income; consequently, low level of education and low income. For example, GBV increases exponentially when it is a woman with a disability;
- There are no references in the national statistics at INE about the LGBTIQ+ population beyond many challenges related to their inclusion;
- We do not have a balanced government, something that had already happened before;
- There is still a large number of informal jobs, mostly held by women, and the mandatory social protection system still needs to reach more people;
- High unemployment rates constituted an obstacle to equal access and combating vulnerability (Furtado, 2013, pp. 61-62);

- Despite the reduction of the gender gap, women still bear the greater burden of unpaid work, reflecting social norms that assign them the role of caregivers. They devote more hours to unpaid work: the 2012 study on Time Use and Unpaid Work shows that about 90% of women compared to 73% declared performing unpaid work (INE, 2012); 92.4% of women and 71.0% of men carried out unpaid work, with the national average being 81.7%. Similarly, women devote more hours per week (19.6 compared to 12 for men) (INE, 2022).

Therefore, the progress made is undeniable; however, the challenges still persist, and it becomes imperative to take some measures, namely the strengthening of the mainstreaming of gender equality promotion policies; the strengthening of investment directed at women's economic empowerment; the strengthening of actions to combat GBV, in prevention, reporting, care, assistance, protection, social awareness, and territorial coverage, among others.

In summary, the panorama described above demonstrates that Cabo Verde has made an excellent bet and a remarkable journey through efforts to promote gender equality, autonomy, and the empowerment of girls and women since its independence. This can be verified both through its adherence to international treaties and conventions, its commitments to international and regional agendas, and its internal legal and institutional mechanisms. Such measures had a positive impact on all sectors of society. In fact, the creation of Uni-CV, which, in fulfilling its mission, established CIGEF, which is the body responsible for mainstreaming the gender approach inside and outside academia. If today the country is at the level it is, it is due to a journey carried out with great effort and determination, with resilience, where women and men worked hand in hand, confident that step by step transformation is possible and equality increasingly a reality.

Finally, it should be noted that participation in regional and international scientific events for knowledge exchange and sharing of the country's experiences in promoting gender equality is a concrete example of gender activism, sharing experiences, and learning for the construction of global and local strategies to confront GBV. The fight is everyone's.

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