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Confronting Violence Against Women THE POWER OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

With the SDGs, UN member states have reaffirmed their commitment to eliminating violence against women and are seeking ways to achieve this. UNRISD research has examined cases of successful advocacy for policy change in this area and has identified key drivers and conditions, in particular the active engagement of women's movements. The recommendations below can help policy makers, women's human rights advocates and funders to fully recognize the dimensions of the problem of violence against women and strategize effectively to address it.

Change Is Possible

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls on all UN Member States to eliminate all forms of violence against women (VAW) in public and private spheres (Target 5.2). Equally, it commits all states to adopting and strengthening policies and enforceable legislation to promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, a necessary first step to eliminating VAW (Target 5.c). But new policies and laws are not adopted in a vacuum. Policy change and legal reform are complex, long-term processes of negotiation and bargaining between different stakeholders' interests and ideologies.

Those wishing to influence or support such processes face the unenviable task of trying to understand where best to invest their efforts. The good news is that it is possible to bring about policy change and legal reform to end VAW, as examples in China, India and Indonesia show (see box on UNRISD Project). Evidence from these cases reveals the crucial role played by women's movements, the underlying conditions which aided them and the strategies they successfully employed. Based on this analysis, this Brief develops recommendations for promoting advocacy for gender-egalitarian policy change and legal reform.

Making Change Happen: Key Recommendations

Guarantee the right to organize and participate

Freedom of association as well as mechanisms for participation in policy-making and legislative processes facilitate efforts to advocate for policy change to end VAW. In Indonesia, it was the democratic transition at the end of the 1990s that opened spaces for women's organizations to raise their demands. In India in 2013, the Justice Verma Commission published a public call for input on reforming laws on rape and sexual assault, which provided women's organizations with an opportunity to make their demands heard.

Strengthen women's movements

Women's movements, especially where they were feminist, were pivotal in paving the way for legal

reform in the three countries studied. The reforms of Indian laws on rape and sexual assault in 1983 and in 2013 were the outcome of pressure from a nation-wide anti-rape movement. Indonesian activists from feminist organizations led the national anti-domestic violence movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s which resulted in passage of the Anti-Domestic Violence Law no. 23/2004. And Chinese women's autonomous organizations campaigned against domestic violence from the mid-2000s and finally obtained a national law against domestic violence in December 2015.

Mobilize funding for political activities

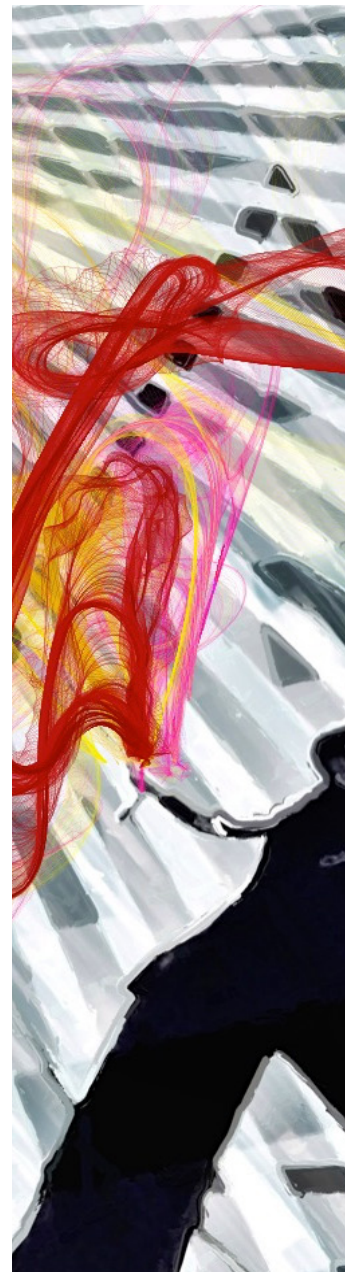
A key factor in the success of women's movements in the three countries studied was the availability of funding for long-term political campaigns. When this funding was reduced and shifted towards short-term project-based funding in Indonesia in the 2000s, women's organizations, especially grassroots ones, were visibly weakened and often stopped advocacy activities. Financial backing from states and international donors is essential to support collective action for women's empowerment and their human rights.

Strengthen technical knowledge in women's movements

The women's movements against VAW in China, India and Indonesia were successful thanks to support from and leadership by professionals such as lawyers and scholars. They provided the capacity to draft legislative proposals and provide evidence, tailoring them to the legislative mechanisms for policy change and legal reform.

Why do some issues get more policy traction than others?

In China, India and Indonesia, demands to end VAW through new laws and policies had more policy traction than policy issues related to women's empowerment and gender equality (domestic workers' rights, equal sharing of unpaid care work). Campaigners were able to catalyse solidarity between women's and other organizations, such as religious groups, human rights organizations and political parties. Because all women are affected by violence, this unites them across other social divisions in their demands for state action to end VAW.



The UNRISD Project: When and Why do States Respond to Women's Claims? Understanding Gender-Egalitarian Policy Change in Asia

The research focused on women's advocacy for the approval of the Law against Domestic Violence, 2015 in China, the amendment of the rape laws in 1983 and in 2013 in India, and the approval of the Anti-Domestic Violence Law no. 23/2004 in Indonesia. The project also examined policy change processes for protecting domestic workers' labour rights and for equally sharing unpaid care work in the three countries (see Project Brief no. 5).

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Improve women's movements' knowledge of, and access to, international human rights law

Both Indonesian and Chinese activists submitted shadow reports to the Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), using international human rights law to push their states to take action against VAW. Women's movements also need support to access to international and regional institutions and procedures that monitor human rights, such as the CEDAW Committee and the UN's Human Rights Council.

Facilitate inter-generational learning among activists

Because policy change is a long-term project, knowledge transfer from one generation of activists to the next is crucial for remaining effective despite staff turnover. In Indonesian grassroots women's organizations, advocacy efforts were weakened because of insufficient knowledge transfer to incoming staff, often due to lack of financial resources.

Enhance solidarity between women's organizations and with other movements

Women's organizations are stronger and more powerful when they create alliances between different women's groups, as was the case during the

Indian anti-rape campaign in the late 1970s and in the Chinese Anti-Domestic Violence Network in the 2000s.

Alliances which extend into other sections of civil society require lengthy consensus building and compromise, but are even more powerful. A case in point is the Indonesian Advocacy Network to Eradicate Domestic Violence. Initially established by a feminist organization, it grew to include other women's organizations, human rights organizations, religious leaders, political parties and mass media.

Connect with champions within the state

Networking with women and men in decision-making positions is a strategy for success. The Indonesian anti-domestic violence movement effectively connected with the National Commission for Women and with women members of parliament to channel its claims into the state policy arena.

Use mass and social media

The mass media, and more recently social media, are crucial for making women's demands visible and reaching out to supporters with personal stories. In Indonesia, women victims of violence shared their experiences through mass media, attracting support for the national anti-domestic violence movement. In China, messages against domestic violence were placed in a famous national TV drama, while the All China Women's Federation collaborated with national TV channels to train journalists on how to report domestic violence cases.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Thanks to the long-term efforts of activists, often over decades, there has been remarkable progress in policy and legal reform aiming to end VAW. Nevertheless, some key demands remain contested and have so far been excluded from the political agenda of the state, such as criminalization of marital rape in India, and violence against LGBTI people in all three countries. Campaigning on these controversial issues will be a long and iterative process.

Agenda 2030 can provide fresh impetus to adopt policies and laws against VAW and to monitor their implementation, which frequently lags behind policy change successes. Strong women's movements are key actors on the ground, and the SDG monitoring process provides them with an additional channel for holding states accountable.

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This Research and Policy Brief was prepared by Paola Cagna and Joannah Caborn Wengler.

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