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CSW57

Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls

Report on the online discussion on eliminating violence against women and girls — gaps, challenges and strategic directions in prevention and multisectoral services and responses

UN WOMEN

Prepared by Jo Baker for UN Women

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1. Aims, purpose and methodology

In March 2013, during the <u>57th</u> <u>Commission on the Status of Women</u> (CSW), Member States will meet to discuss areas of concern for women and girls, and work on approaches to address these issues. For this session the chosen priority theme will be the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG), with a particular focus on two key areas: **prevention** – stopping violence before it happens in the first place –[1] and **multisectoral services and responses** to victims/survivors.

To involve stakeholders in its preparation, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) organized and moderated a two-week online discussion from 23 July to 7 August 2012 on the critical gaps and challenges in these two key areas, and promising responses on the ground. This was accompanied by regional consultations and a survey in three languages. Its outreach was largely among civil society organizations (CSOs), policy makers, experts and researchers in the field of gender-based violence.

The aim of the online discussion was to provide a forum for discussion between different stakeholders; identify measures taken and good practices from different parts of the world and in diverse resource settings in the two key areas of focus; and identify any emerging issues and practices that should be considered.

This report, also available in French and Spanish, is the summary of the discussion, consultations and surveys. It will be considered in the development of two reports, which will be given to CSW Member States by the UN Secretary General to assist their discussions. It is not a comprehensive mapping exercise however, and it is important to note that the views expressed in this report are the views of the respondents – the information given has not been verified. Rather, it aims to reflect many of the key concerns and priorities of practitioners working in this field on the ground.

2. Background

On 29 February 2012, a preview expert panel on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls was convened at CSW 56 to discuss issues to be considered in preparation for the priority theme of the Commission in 2013. The presentations by panelists focused on the provision of services for victims/survivors of violence and prevention.

It is now clearly recognized that a systematic, coordinated, multisectoral and sustained approach is necessary to address all forms of violence against women and girls. Much work has been done in these areas but the panel and participants agreed that despite increased global commitment to address the issue, challenges to preventing and eliminating such violence persist.

The discussions of the preparatory panel concluded with the need to identify the critical gaps, strategic directions and promising practices that can better guarantee quality support and access to justice for women and girls subjected to gender-based violence; as well as assist in charting a course of action for reducing, and eventually eliminating all forms of violence against women and its impact for future generations.

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[1] This is sometimes referred to as primary prevention. Other forms of prevention include secondary and tertiary prevention which mean respectively: an immediate response after violence has occurred to limit its extent and consequences; and tertiary longer-term care and support for those who have suffered violence.

3. Participation

The online discussion platform was only visible to participants who requested access based on the fact that they practice in the field of VAWG. Calls for participation were sent out through a vast array of UN interagency and women's group networks and online portals, including those of UN Women, it's *Say NO – UNiTE to End Violence* portal and the UN Trust Fund for Violence Against Women as well as the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) and the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET). UNFPA and UNICEF also widely disseminated information on the online discussion through their networks. The survey (see Annex I) was also made available and sent through some UN Women offices to civil society groups who work mostly offline or wished to give inputs in French or Spanish. UN Women country offices led regional consultations with civil society groups in a number of countries in the Pacific, Latin American, the Middle East and North Africa. Media coverage, including by the Inter-Press Service, further extended this reach.[2]

The participation broadly covered geographical and organizational sectors. The body of online discussion respondents were from government ministries, international non-governmental organizations, bilateral and multilateral organizations, UN entities and interagency entities, research institutions, private sector organizations, and predominantly, national and ground level non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in countries from Afghanistan to Vanuatu. Among these, for example, were representatives from the Centre for Global Women's Leadership, Partners for Prevention, Australia's Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Action Aid, the Council of Europe, the Niger Association of University Women, the Kilimanjaro Women information Exchange, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, the Delta Women Foundation, the All India Women's Conference, and Fundacion Renacer.

4. Summary of the discussion on Prevention

4.1 Measures and approaches

Participants highlighted the promising range of measures that are emerging worldwide to address the structural causes of violence and change social norms and behaviours. Many highlighted promising practices as well as gaps in service provision, both expanded on in Sections 4.6 and 4.7 below. Among the major observations drawn from this section is the need for coordinated multi-sectoral approaches that address stereotypes at their roots through early education, media engagement, and capacity-building for service providers and policy makers.

4.1.1. *Influencing government laws and policies*

While many identified lobbying and research efforts to improve State-coordinated efforts on prevention, just a few mentioned prevention strategies or legislation already in place.

Of these, a promising example was given from Australia. Here, a landmark ten-year government plan to prevent violence against women, 'A Right to Respect', drew from an extensive multisectoral research project by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, a statutory authority. [3] It responded to findings that unequal power relations between men and women were a key cause of VAWG, along with adherence to rigid gender stereotypes, and

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[2] See IPS, '*Online Discussion on Prevention of Violence Against Women*', 31 July 2012.
http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/07/online-discussion-on-prevention-of-violence-against-women/
[3]See 'Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria' http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Programs-and-Projects/Freedom-from-violence.aspx; also
http://www.whealth.com.au/documents/health/fv-a_right_to_respect.pdf

broader cultures of violence. Its approach has focused on education and training across multiple settings, from local government, health and community services to sports and recreation, workplaces and media, arts and popular culture (See more in Section 4.6). The plan was supported by two legal reforms in the state, the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* 2006 (Vic) and the *Equal Opportunity Act* 2010 (Vic), which obliges organizations to be pro-active in preventing discrimination.

Furthering State responsibility in Europe, the *Council of Europe (CoE) Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence*[4] (the Convention), contains measures based on best practice, though it is not yet in force. The Convention, notes a CoE representative, "frames the eradication of such violence in the achievement of greater gender equality by reinforcing measures that aim at changing the hearts and minds of individuals." Governments that agree to be bound by this treaty will have to take various steps to improve prevention, among them to; regularly run awareness-raising campaigns; take steps to include issues such as gender equality and non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships in teaching material; work closely with NGOs and support their work; and involve the media and the private sector in eradicating gender stereotypes.[5]

In Afghanistan, one participant suggests that prevention efforts have been improved by the establishment of Ministry of Women Affairs and an independent human rights commission, with the provincial offices of the latter conducting prevention activities such as legal awareness and media campaigns. A lawyer in Brazil highlighted the emphasis on public policies and awareness in its *Maria da Penha Law* (2006) on violence against women.[6]

4.1.2 *Awareness-raising and mobilization*

Many respondents focused on initiatives to raise awareness and mobilize communities, as well as to address individual knowledge and attitudes.

Among effective practices put forward were participatory **events** and high profile yearly **campaigns**, such as a gender equality festival in Romania, particularly targeted at young people. In other countries, such as Nicaragua, debates, conferences in public spaces and educational fairs have been used, along with marches and demonstrations to promote legal reforms. Global campaigns such as the 16 Days of Activism each November, and the White Ribbon Campaign were mentioned as providing national focal points for mobilizing community campaigning.

Respondents have reported change through **counselling initiatives** for families and among couples have shown impact in countries such as India and Russia, particularly among low-income communities. Activities have included pre-marital counselling, family clubs and conflict resolution training. Community workshops are also encouraging men and boys to consider their exposure to media messages on gender roles, while 'sensitization trainings' for women and girls include, said one respondent, "discussion on what safety means, how communities react to or talk about domestic violence, and different types of violence."

In Guatemala, the spectrum of forms of VAWG has been effectively classified through law, to include for example, femicide and economic violence. This has had impact on public awareness of the criminality and scope of VAWG.

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[4] Often referred to as the *Istanbul Convention.*
[5] See www.coe.int/conventionviolence
[6] The 'Maria de Penha' law provided the first clear definition of domestic violence in the country and tripled the severity of sentences for offenders, while launching a $1 billion four-year campaign to increase governmental capacity to deal with violence against women at all levels,

4.1.3 *Education and the Media*

"Education works in various ways with good impact and outcomes on attitudinal and behavioural change. This measure works through engaging the government, CSOs, traditional leaders, religious leaders, women's groups, media, security agencies etc. to work harmoniously as a team to build a standard structure of peace." Nigeria

Many respondents pointed strongly to work with children and **young people and in the education** system. Successful school-based prevention programmes were highlighted, through dedicated curricula, peer and teacher trainings and award programmes. According to one respondent in Uruguay, work by one NGO at the school level has seen progress in its bid to 'denaturalize' violence and change the common perception of domestic violence as a private matter. In Bangladesh, the development organization BRAC is working on violence prevention among young girls through Adolescents Development Centers, with a focus on forms such as early marriage and dowry-related violence.

"Through a concerted effort that projects real stories of women who are survivors of violence, questions of law, issues underlying societal and cultural mindsets and self-help for survivors, the media has been engaged to preventing violence of women through awareness." USA

Media and Entertainment is also being used in many areas. In South and South East Asia, radio programmes and pre-departure trainings are being used to alert migrant women to occupational dangers, for example. In Nigeria 'Nolluwood' actors and actresses have been engaged in films and soap operas to highlight issues such as widowhood and inheritance rights, sex trafficking and other human rights violations affecting women. In Ecuador, a media company is using television spots for public announcements about violence, as well as billboards and bus advertising, while the State has reportedly run a media campaign with the message "Machismo is Violence", which according to one expert, is the first investment of State resources in outright prevention. Meanwhile, **social media** usage is on the rise in high and middle-income countries, through blogs, e-bulletins and micro-blogs.

In some countries such as Spain, a respondent reports that the media is governed by legislation on gender-based violence that includes a provision whereby all stories about the topic include a reference to the national legislation, and the mandatory note that gender-based violence is a crime.

4.1.4 *Engaging groups and networks*

"Simply regurgitating words from a manual are of limited use. The words must have accurate cultural meaning and reflect the traditions as they take place on day to day basis. This will alert them to early danger signs." Australia

A number of respondents wrote of progress with **faith-based networks** among communities that have been side-lined by mainstream awareness projects. Examples ranged from work with healthcare providers and mosques in the UK, to collaborations with Sikh and Christian

religious leaders to develop sermons and hymns on respect and gender equality in Australia and Tanzania. Others have worked with religious leaders to develop downloadable fact sheets and advice, or are translating basic legal rights and information into multiple languages, both as text and in multilingual radio broadcasts in migrant communities.[7] To embed messages more creatively, one group in Australia has used community-based theatre workshops that interact with audiences among the Indian migrant community. One commentator noted: "They recognized behaviours comprising domestic violence, but had a significant lack of awareness of its legal and criminal implications and the type of help possible."

Many effective initiatives have begun to **target men and boys.** In Georgia for example, male sports role models such as rugby players have brought messaging on prevention – based around gender equality, respect for women and rejection of violence – to sports games, and through outreach, to media, to schools and youth correction facilities under the framework of the UN Secretary General's UNiTE Campaign. Meanwhile MASVAW, a community-based social movement in northern India has reportedly seen some attitudinal change through its work with men and boys on university campuses and community settings, on issues such as sexual harassment on transport, and domestic violence.

Work with positive male role models has also been effectively used, particularly those with influence over boys and young men. In Switzerland, White Ribbon Ambassadors, many of them politicians, have led to expanded public awareness. In Australia 'Fair Game: Respect Matters' is a program delivered by the Victorian branch of the Australian Football League, which seeks to change club cultures by increasing women and girls' participation in community football clubs.

4.1.5 *Empowerment and advocacy*

> *"Seminars of building and developing capacity among girls and women should be provided so as to make women strong and capable of participating on different development matters, and defending their rights against any kind of violence."* Tanzania

Practitioners identified a growth of **empowerment programmes** among gender-based violence focused organizations, with more resources and budget being channelled into such projects.

One US-based NGO uses **leadership schools and training** among its prevention methodology in countries from Guatemala to Jamaica. This allows "women to be more effective advocates for violence prevention policies and build stronger alliances with local authorities," notes a representative. Other outreach activities have included door-to-door surveys and mobile human rights civic festivals, which have expanded the vocabulary of women looking to advocate for their own safety.

Participants from Gambia to Thailand prioritized boosting women's education and entrepreneurial skills through training, as a path to independence and greater protection. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is also reportedly promoting strategies to reduce precarious work situations for women by, inter alia, combining labour market regulation and action labour market measures that use a gender perspective; paying attention to occupational safety and health needs of women and men; including women in social dialogue such as on tripartite bodies and in collective bargaining; and use international labour standards to promote equality in the world of work.

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[7] See the association of Victorian Women Lawyers, http://www.vwl.asn.au

> *"Through leadership skills, the grassroots groups can communicate their community's needs in public and political spaces they may have been formerly excluded from."* USA

Some NGOs are involving communities of women in **research and evidence-based advocacy**, and have found that more women are reporting cases of VAWG to partners and community development facilitators as a result, demonstrating the linkages between prevention activities and the need for well-resourced and sustainable responses to victims/survivors. In Cameroon, a National Women's Observatory has reportedly been strategically involving grassroots women leaders in advocacy and consultation, which has included setting up women's advancement centres for informal education and training in trade in partnership with NGOs. In Guatemala one foundation is walking with local women to map safety hazards and vulnerabilities in their environments, and is advocating for structures that would allow women to introduce these issues at the local government level. It is also working with local women on "gendered land management plans to address the socially embedded rises and inequalities that exist in urban and rural public spaces."[8]

> *"We should combat gender discrimination; increase women's incomes… protect the land rights of rural women, greatly promote public service and create conditions for women to balance their work and family. Only by being economically independent can women get rid of the situation of depending on men."* China

Progammes in Tanzania from the organization KWEICO tie economic aspects in with information and advocacy sessions for women. These can "justify reasons for spouses and other family members to allow them to attend group meetings in which knowledge and support on rights is also given," it was noted.

Take Back The Tech!' is a global campaign run each year by the Association for Progressive Communications during the international 16 Days of Activism campaign. It gives workshops on how to use ICT for advocacy and how to create a safer online environment, and has documented the violence that women face both online and off. "I don't forward Violence" for example, called for internet and mobile phone users to challenge and change the culture of sharing violence and degrading images of women and girls.[9] The programme has reportedly seen results from marginalized communities, such as lesbian and transgendered people,