

Abstract

Over the past three decades, women's organizations have created a paradigm shift in understanding and acting to end violence against women. Where gender-based violence was once confined to whispers and silent suffering, it is now part of the public agenda. Women's groups and networks have insisted that violence against women is not only a crime; it is a violation of women's human rights. Rape, for example, is not an "affront to a woman's chastity" but rather a profound violation of her bodily integrity and her right to dignity, security, and freedom from discrimination. This article examines a recent assessment of initiatives to end violence against women that was conducted in 2002 by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and connected to current research, advocacy, and antiviolence organizing.

Au cours des trois dernières décennies, les organisations féminines ont développé de nouveaux modèles de référence en ce qui concerne à la fois la compréhension de la violence contre les femmes et l'action visant à la mettre fin. Alors que la violence sexiste était naguère confinée à des chuchotements et à des souffrances en silence, elle est maintenant ouvertement à l'ordre du jour. Les groupements et réseaux féminins ont fait clairement comprendre que la violence contre les femmes n'est pas seulement un crime; c'est aussi une violation des droits humains des femmes. Le viol, par exemple, n'est pas un « affront à la chasteté d'une femme », mais plutôt une violation profonde de son intégrité corporelle et de son droit à la dignité, la sécurité et la protection contre la discrimination. Cet article examine une évaluation récente des initiatives visant à mettre fin à la violence contre les femmes, qui a été effectuée en 2002 par le Fonds de Développement des Nations Unies pour la Femme (United Nations Development Fund for Women ou UNIFEM) en liaison avec les activités actuelles de recherche, de plaidoyer et d'organisation de la lutte contre la violence.

Durante el transcurso de las últimas tres décadas las organizaciones de mujeres han provocado un cambio de paradigma en la comprensión y la actuación para acabar con la violencia contra las mujeres. La violencia basada en el género estaba limitada a susurros y al sufrimiento en silencio, ahora es parte de la agenda pública. Los grupos y las redes de mujeres han insistido en que la violencia en contra de la mujer no es sólo un crimen, sino también una violación de los derechos humanos de la mujer. Es decir, la violación no es solo una "afrenta a la castidad de la mujer", sino también una profunda violación de su integridad corporal y de su derecho a la dignidad, a la seguridad y a no ser discriminada. Este artículo examina una evaluación reciente de las iniciativas para terminar con la violencia en contra de las mujeres, llevada a cabo en el año 2002 por parte del Fondo de Desarrollo de las Naciones Unidas para la Mujer (UNIFEM por sus siglas en inglés).

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Susana T. Fried

Almost four years ago, I stood at a podium like this at the Beijing Tribunal to give my testimony. I asked that my Government be accountable for providing women like me with the protection and support needed to leave violent relationships. At that time, there was little understanding when I sought help from professionals such as the police, social workers, hospital staff and the legal system. Today, I am proud to say women in Ireland have many more options than I did. I now work at Women's Aid to bring about change for women in abusive relationships. I have spoken out about my experience on national television, an ordinary woman using ordinary language, with no shame identified myself as a survivor, not a victim, and challenged prevailing myths that surround domestic violence.

Mary McGoldrick (Ireland)¹

Over the past three decades, women's organizations have created a paradigm shift in understanding and acting to end violence against women. Gender-based violence was once considered a taboo subject, expressed in whispers or suffered in silence. Now it is part of the public agenda. Where perpetrators could commit atrocious human rights violations with impunity (for example, by marrying the victim), the majority of countries of the world now explicitly outlaw gender-based violence.² Activist organizations, with or without the support of governments, have developed innovative efforts: providing services; drafting and lobbying for legislation; raising awareness through advocacy, education and training; and developing strong national, regional,

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and international networks to end violence against women. Although violence against women is no longer a taboo subject, the challenge now is to make it socially unacceptable.

The following article reflects on a recent assessment of initiatives to end violence against women conducted by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in 2002. The assessment is presented in the context of current research and advocacy and of ongoing antiviolenace organizing. Some of the more noteworthy findings are used to develop a series of recommendations for advancing an antiviolenace agenda.

The assessment comprises three stages. First, a desk review explored UNIFEM's support to initiatives that seek to eliminate violence against women (governmental, non-governmental and intergovernmental). Second, UNIFEM's regional offices commissioned a series of 10 regional "scans" to map the landscape of gender-based violence and initiatives that combat it, covering a significant portion of the global South. Third, several of UNIFEM's regional offices are now conducting in-depth case studies of interventions aimed at ending violence against women.

This article focuses on the 10 regional reports. One of the key conclusions of the assessment is that framing violence against women in human rights terms has boosted the movement's credibility and fostered a common language. Advocates' use of human rights claims has helped effect greater political will on the part of governments. Indeed, Mary McGoldrick's claims speak for many: Violence against women is far more visible today as a public issue that receives sustained attention than it was even five years ago.

Despite these achievements, UNIFEM's assessment has illustrated that violence against women remains at epidemic proportions. Among its key findings is that advances in legislation and policy have not been followed by strong and sustainable implementation plans. Moreover, its findings have revealed a significant gap in efforts to evaluate, measure, and monitor legislation, programs, and policies. Ultimately, UNIFEM's Ending Violence Against Women assessment has shown that closely tracking achievements and accurately identifying obstacles and gaps are critical to achieving a world that is safer for women.

Understanding Gender-Based Violence

Despite decades of intervention, violence against women remains one of the most pervasive forms of human rights violations worldwide. Estimates expose the magnitude of gender-based violence: One out of three women in the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime—and the abuser is usually a family member or someone otherwise known to her.³ Gender-based violence is also a public-health emergency: According to a recently adopted Council of Europe recommendation, domestic violence is the major cause of death and disability for women between the ages of 16 and 44.⁴ And, according to a recently released study by the World Health Organization (WHO), as many as 70 percent of all *femicides* are committed by the victims' male partners, and approximately a third of all girls are forced or coerced into their first sexual experience.^{5,6} In short, the social and economic consequences of gender-based violence are far-reaching. While exact numbers are difficult to come by, we know that the costs are high and are borne by all.

In public and private life, violence or the threat of violence terrorizes many women and keeps them from freely and wholly contributing to the social, economic, and political development of their communities. Violence hinders all women's abilities to exercise their human rights, and it circumscribes women's capacity to function as full citizens in society. Moreover, gender-based violence cuts across divisions of race, class, religion, age, ethnicity, sexuality, culture, and geographic region. Any woman anywhere can be a victim and a survivor of gender-based violence. Some women are targeted for violence because they are HIV positive. Others become HIV infected from an act of violence. Women can be targets precisely because of their race, caste, ethnicity, culture, or other component of their identity. For example, increasing evidence has shown that women in marginalized racial or ethnic communities are singled out for abuse and coercive migration practices.⁷ In fact, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (which monitors governments' compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination) recently requested governments to

provide information on their efforts to address the ethnic dimensions of migration and trafficking in persons.⁸

Women's organizing to end all types of violence against women has brought about dramatic changes to the landscape of norms, laws, policies, and practices that address violence against women. Today, our understanding of the causes and consequences of gender-based violence has greatly expanded. What has also grown is the panorama of governmental, intergovernmental, nongovernmental, and international organizations that have initiatives to prevent and protect women and girls from violence and to bring perpetrators to justice—whether in conflict, post-conflict, or non-conflict situations.

UNIFEM's Commitment to Ending Violence Against Women

When UNIFEM began working to end violence against women, pressure on governments from civil society organizations had already culminated in the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.⁹ UNIFEM was among the first UN agencies to take on the challenge of translating the UN Declaration into effective policies and concrete programs for ending gender-based violence. In 1992, UNIFEM identified ending violence against women as an important organizational concern with the publication of *Battered Dreams: Violence Against Women as an Obstacle to Development*.¹⁰ UNIFEM actively supported the Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights and its advocacy efforts at the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights, which produced the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action.¹¹ The Global Campaign's lobbying resulted in governments' explicit recognition that "violence against women is a human rights violation" and that "women's rights are human rights."¹² However, it was in 1995, with the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) in Beijing, that eliminating violence against women became an organizationwide priority for UNIFEM.

This was solidified in 1996, when the UN General Assembly created the Trust Fund to Support Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women within UNIFEM. Since

then, UNIFEM has committed resources and funds in excess of \$18 million (U.S.) for a range of projects whose aims are to end violence against women. The Trust Fund's main purpose is to identify and support innovative projects primarily of local or national origin. In 1998 and 1999, several of UNIFEM's regional offices spearheaded major regional campaigns to end violence against women. These campaigns—held first in Latin America and the Caribbean, then in Asia and the Pacific, followed by ones in Africa, and most recently in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia—have been among the most significant efforts to raise awareness by UNIFEM and other UN agencies. Campaigns in Latin America and the Caribbean received tremendous public attention and successfully advanced the concept that all people, not only women, were responsible for ending violence against women.¹³ The campaigns in Asia and the Pacific, as well as those in Africa, Central Asia, and Central and Eastern Europe, put to use the lessons learned in Latin America and the Caribbean in establishing their plans of action.

Assessing the Work

The UNIFEM assessment has documented the significant role its regional offices have played in bringing together government, civil society, UN, and other international and intergovernmental organizations to work toward review and reform. UNIFEM staff and partners from women's organizations have used proclamations about violence against women and advocacy by powerful women's human rights coalitions to press governments to create appropriate mechanisms to prevent violence and protect women and girls. These efforts have resulted not only in global agreements, such as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, but also in regional and national plans of action to end violence against women, such as those required of all Southern Africa Development Cooperation (SADC) member countries and the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Eradicate and Punish Violence Against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará).^{14,15}

The 10 regional scans of the assessment demonstrate the extent of women's organizing and networking efforts

and the leadership position that women's groups have taken in ending violence against women. Most frequently, these groups have mobilized around particularly egregious acts of violence, such as those involving rape, sexual harassment, trafficking, and domestic violence. For example, the scan on Francophone Africa (covering Cameroon, the Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and Senegal) tells how women's groups mobilized to support Veronica Akobé, who was severely sentenced after being found guilty of murdering her employer after he had abused and raped her. The groups' lobbying efforts resulted in her pardon.¹⁶

Domestic violence, or violence against women committed by a family member or intimate partner, is often on the frontline of antiviolence advocacy. Feminist analysis has compellingly shown that the family is not always a safe and secure place for women. Rather, domestic violence (also referred to as battering, intimate-partner violence, family violence, or intrafamily violence) is one of the most pervasive and common types of gender-based violence. In the first stage of organizing, women frequently created or lobbied their governments to set up sanctuaries, shelters, or to provide other services for domestic violence survivors. Women's groups then initiated coalitions and networks to move from the provision of services for individual victims to changing laws, policies, and attitudes. Women have struggled for and in many cases achieved public recognition of domestic or family violence as a violation of their human rights and a crime requiring action by the criminal justice system. These groups have lobbied for legislation, policies, and practices that provide women with protection, services, and redress for survivors, and appropriate punishment for perpetrators.

For example, the first shelter in Latin America and the Caribbean, for "battered women" (the term most frequently used during early organizing efforts) was the Julia Burgos Protected House in Puerto Rico, established in 1979. Soon after, women's groups in Puerto Rico formed the Puerto Rican Coalition Against Domestic Violence. In 1981, the first Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentro declared the 25th of November an International Day for No

Violence Against Women. By 1987, the government officially recognized the date as a day of commemoration in Puerto Rico.

In 1989, women's groups in the Southern Cone of Latin America formed the Southern Cone Network Against Domestic Violence.¹⁷ And the regionwide organization—the Latin American and Caribbean Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence—was founded in a meeting with representatives from 21 countries in 1990.¹⁸ These coalitions and networks have united and coordinated a wide range of organizations and helped give the issue greater visibility. Over time, domestic and sexual violence organizations, national coalitions, and subregional and regional networks have formed in nearly every country in the region. These organizing campaigns in Latin America, the Caribbean, and elsewhere have effected significant changes in national legislative and policy environments, as well as in regional and international statements of political will. For instance, 18 of the 20 countries in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean have legislation on domestic or family violence. These include laws focusing on domestic or family violence, as well as amendments to their penal codes that specify penalties for domestic or family violence. Eleven of those 20 countries have laws that address sexual violence, including those that specifically address sexual violence and those that are penal-code amendments.¹⁹

Legislative innovations have been tested and replicated from region to region. In Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Paraguay, and Venezuela, measures to protect victims of violence include issuing temporary restraining orders forbidding the perpetrators to be present in the household. Such protection orders also exist in Turkey, the United States, and in many western European countries. A law enacted in Germany in 2001 allows courts to order perpetrators out of the home so that victims are not forced to seek refuge in women's shelters. This law applies not only to legally married couples but also to couples who live together but are not married. In the Philippines, women's groups rallied to revise legislation on sexual violence that described rape as a "crime against chastity" rather than as a violent

crime against a person.²⁰ Under Filipino family law, in the case of rape, the woman had to prove that she did not willingly surrender her virginity. Finally, in 1997, after more than three years of continuous lobbying, the law was changed to redefine rape as violence against a person and to include oral sex and acts of sexual torture in addition to the customary definition of genital penetration.²¹

Violence Against Women as a Human Rights Issue

As women's groups and networks have gained experience, they have also begun to recognize the limitations of a strategy that focuses primarily on legislative and criminal justice reform. They have increasingly argued that violence against women is not only a crime; it is also a violation of women's human rights. In other words, rape, for example, is not an "affront to a woman's honor or chastity" but rather a profound violation of her bodily integrity and her rights to dignity, security, and freedom from discrimination.

A deeper understanding of the causes and consequences of violence against women as a form of gender-based violence has accompanied the expansion in activism. Most activists and researchers now agree that gender-based violence stems from an interaction of individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural factors. In 1993, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women provided a consensus definition of violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."²² The Declaration stresses that violence against women stems from gender inequality (and institutionalized unequal power between women and men); it takes a variety of forms—physical, psychological, or economic; it includes acts of violence or the threat of such acts; and its manifestations in both public and private life are public issues requiring government action.²³

The claim that "women's rights are human rights," as declared in the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, calls attention to gender-specific aspects of human rights

violations.²⁴ Gender-sensitive human rights advocacy has stressed that bringing a gender analysis to human rights shows that women experience gender-specific forms of violence that are different from those experienced by men.²⁵ Even when the rights of women and men are similarly violated, women's cases are less visible and therefore less frequently condemned and their perpetrators not as likely to be brought to justice. Furthermore, using a gender perspective in human rights advocacy requires acknowledging the differences among women, as well as the differences between women and men, and thus designing policies and programs that focus on the ways in which certain factors, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, or caste, make women vulnerable to particular forms and heightened levels of violence.

The regional reports in UNIFEM's assessment repeatedly illustrated that stressing that violence against women is a human rights violation has moved the antiviolence agenda forward in many ways: First, it has provided a powerful lens that shifts the focus on violence against women from a private to a public matter. In so doing, it has added greater credibility to activists' claims and established a common language. Second, it has offered an opportunity to anchor and build global and regional networks. Third, it presents a methodology for determining government obligations. Under human rights law, for example, states are required to act with due diligence to address and end violence against women. Under this obligation, government officials, or those acting with the sanction of the state, must not commit acts of violence against women—that is, they must *respect* the human rights of women to be free from violence. Governments must also *protect* women's rights by instituting laws, policies, and practices that protect victims of violence, provide them with appropriate remedies, and bring the perpetrator to justice. Finally, they must also *fulfill* these rights, by ensuring the appropriate infrastructure to support these laws, policies, and practices and to render them effective. Moreover, the progress of these instruments and infrastructures must be reviewed periodically and steps taken to remove any obstacles and barriers that prevent the elimination of violence against women.

The regional reports from central and eastern Europe and central Asia document how women's groups have identified sex discrimination and sexual harassment as serious problems and barriers to their human rights. Organizations in Croatia and Slovenia have initiated public-education projects, such as one on "How to Say No to the Boss."²⁶ As part of Slovenia's awareness-raising campaign, trade unionists distributed 30,000 pamphlets and 6,000 posters at banks, post offices, train stations, and health centers and during press conferences. A Web site was also created for the campaign.²⁷ The Women's Rights Center in Warsaw, Poland, has had some success in its efforts to offer legal representation to individuals who are using Poland's antidiscrimination and labor laws to bring sexual harassment claims to trial.²⁸

Women's Groups Take the Lead

Supporting this advocacy is increasingly sophisticated action-oriented research, such as that conducted by the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling in Jerusalem (WCLAC), with the support of the UNIFEM Trust Fund.²⁹ Since 1994, WCLAC has been working with other women's groups in the region to ensure that the establishment of a Palestinian state does not become an opportunity to codify laws that permit "honor killings."³⁰ Unfortunately, little reliable information exists about the practice. Police and court records tend to offer one-sided accounts of a woman's death as explained by her father, brothers, or uncles who usually label it a suicide or an accident. Death certificates are no more helpful. To shed light on such practices, WCLAC has been searching out accurate information.

To that end, WCLAC opened a social services unit to counsel women who had been accused of violating their family's honor. Through this work, they have attempted to more accurately identify cases of so-called honor killings, as well as to broaden the definition of femicide from an *act of murder* to a *method used to control women's sexuality and to punish them for any real or perceived attempts at non-compliance*.³¹ To document the process, WCLAC analyzed information from a variety of sources, including clients,

families of victims, health officials, police, and judges, among others. They completed questionnaires, carried out guided interviews, and copied records from the police and courts. The final research report included more than 100 pages of data on these “honor killings”—now redefined as femicide—including the number of cases, types of cases, analysis of cases, and individuals’ stories. With this information in hand, WCLAC has brought the reality of femicide into public view, reframing the problem, providing services, and supporting more intensive advocacy.

The work of WCLAC is one of myriad ways in which women’s groups challenge pervasive, gender-based premises that underlie much of the discrimination and violence against women. UNIFEM’s assessment documents other instances in which women’s groups are using advocacy, action-oriented research, outreach, and education to address urgent and pressing issues and to reaffirm that violence against women is no longer publicly sanctioned.

At times these initiatives have called attention to the ways in which violence crosses all women, no matter what their social status, race, sexual identity, or background might be. The assessment did, however, discover other initiatives that illustrate how gender-based violence can be locally and culturally specific—for instance, cases of stove burnings in Pakistan, date rape in the United States, acid throwing in Bangladesh, dowry deaths in India, so-called honor killings in some parts of the Middle East and South Asia, female genital mutilation in Africa and the Middle East, and the list goes on. Whatever the form and manifestation of violence, women’s groups are redefining the issues and leading efforts to reshape legislation, policy, and practice, all of whose goals are ultimately to eliminate all types of violence against women.

Next Steps: Making the World Safer for Women

While a great deal of progress has been made, obstacles to ending violence against women remain substantial, and gaps continue to be identified in legislation, policies, and practices. These barriers must be confronted, otherwise violence will remain pervasive. The following describes some

of the achievements and possible barriers to realizing the goals that UNIFEM's assessment identified.

Implementing and Enforcing National Legislation and Policy

Increasingly, international and regional norms and standards are being used as the basis for national legislation and policy—from the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Eradicate and Punish Violence Against Women (Belém do Pará), to the South Asian Agreement on Regional Cooperation's (SAARC) Protocol to End Trafficking in Women and Children. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been used in judicial procedures, such as in Nigeria and India.³² All too often, however, these human rights standards remain only words on a page, never being effectively implemented. States remain vastly unaccountable for following through on their commitments—whether they involve developing policy, legislation, or programming. For example, despite commitments made at the Beijing Conference, in relation to CEDAW and other human rights instruments, the South Asia regional scan notes that governments continue to avoid intervening in “private matters” that involve violence against women, despite their strong family planning policies.³³

Collaborating and Networking

National and regional networks have expanded dramatically and are coming together to share information and experiences. The Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women, for instance, held its third regional meeting to end violence against women in 2001. Also, the Mekong Sub-regional Network Against Violence Against Women, is bringing to the forefront otherwise invisible issues, such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, and sexual violence. These networks, however, frequently operate on shoe-string budgets, which makes their longevity tenuous and hinders their ability to engage in long-term planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

Looking Back at Beijing 2000

The five-year review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2000 urged all countries to repeal discriminatory legislation by 2005. Many countries responded: Egypt abolished a law exempting men from rape charges when they marry their victims. Yemen, as well, passed a law in December 2001 allowing women to pass on their citizenship to their children, though only in cases where their husband has died or in the event of divorce.³⁴ Unfortunately, one of the goals of antiviolence legislation, especially those which pertains to domestic violence, is to keep families together, whether or not that is in the best interests of women and girls. Moreover, new forms, or intensification of, violence resulting from broader political, economic, and social factors (such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic) continue to challenge legal systems and strain health-care providers—many of whom have not been trained to identify or deal with victims of gender-based violence.

Creating and Enhancing Support Mechanisms

New institutions and mechanisms have been pioneered, such as women's police stations in Brazil and Jordan, women's and people's courts in India and Guatemala, and one-stop shelter/services in Malaysia or Nicaragua. Pakistan is experimenting with ways to make police more accessible to victims of crime and violence in the community. To do this, beat officers are operating out of community health facilities, under the command of a female assistant sub-inspector. These officers wear special uniforms, often patrol their area with members of the community, and have received gender-sensitivity training.³⁵

Unfortunately, lack of data, especially baseline statistics, hampers efforts to measure the impact of these initiatives. Too often, however, community-based interventions and sectors lack coherence and coordination. To do this, they need to engage in strategic planning that would link interventions in time and space. Interventions stemming from a strategic framework would increase their abilities to identify long-term effects and to define goals and objectives

precisely. Improving the level of trust between governments and NGOs would also improve their ability to engage in sustained dialogue. Finally, NGOs and governments need to coordinate their efforts so that decision-makers in various sectors—health, criminal justice, and education—are encouraged to consult with one another.

Adding Support Services

The range and extent of support services for victims-survivors have significantly expanded to include legal-aid centers, shelters, and hotlines for victims of abuse, most recently in countries such as Jordan and Yemen. Central Asia now boasts a network of shelters and crisis centers that the Open Society Institute helped support. This network played an important role in *A World Free of Violence*, the UN Inter-Agency Regional Campaign, coordinated by UNIFEM in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Demand for those services, however, far outstrips the capacity of the current infrastructure.

Meeting New Challenges

Crises and emerging issues have added stress to existing services and programs. For example, in many countries, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has caused and resulted in increased violence against women. UNIFEM's Southern Africa office has made this one of its main program areas. The process of integrating a perspective on gender-based violence into HIV/AIDS programming or HIV/AIDS awareness and intervention into gender-based violence programming has been slow to develop and has at times posed particular challenges to women's organizations. The regional report from Southern Africa described this challenge in the context of service provision:

The traditional methods of counselling have been those where women raise issues and the counsellor cannot initiate a discussion outside of those issues raised by the clients. These methods may no longer be viable in the light of the HIV/AIDS pandemic where a woman may present all the conditions that qualify her as being at risk of being infected and yet the counselling techniques would not permit the counsellor to bring up a discussion

on HIV and AIDS. . . . It is against the background of some of these challenges that organisations such as People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) in South Africa are revisiting their counselling techniques. POWA is exploring alternative ways of counselling to make it more proactive and permissive for bringing up critical considerations for women but without taking away their leadership in crafting solutions for the challenges that they face. POWA is also dealing with the challenge of raising a new breed of counsellors with a new culture of sensitivity to HIV/AIDS for themselves as well as for the clients served.³⁶

From Words to Action: Transforming Rhetoric into Practice

One of the most pressing issues to emerge from the Ending Violence Against Women assessment is how to bridge the gap between rhetoric and practice, especially regarding legislation, policy, and resources. Increasingly, governments at the national level and in international venues have called for an end to violence against women. In statement after statement, violence against women—including rape by intimate partners or strangers, beatings by husbands or fathers, sexual harassment in the streets and in the workplace, forced marriage, and forced prostitution—is acknowledged as being all too prevalent, and in many societies its ubiquity continues with impunity.

In addition, governments continue to ignore their human rights obligations. The report from Southern Africa contains a good example, noting that one of the strongest indicators of a government's commitment to ending violence against women is the funding allocated to initiatives directed at ending violence and to those policies that will have an impact on interventions to end violence. But despite signs of advancement—every country in Southern Africa has recently or is currently revising its laws on gender-based violence—the budgetary allocations needed to turn policy into action have not been made. In other words, a large gap remains between governments' rhetorical commitment to ending violence against women and their efforts to turn rhetoric into financial and human resources.³⁷

While budgetary allocations are one measure of the gap between rhetoric and action, a chasm is also evident in leg-

islation, its implementation, and the measures taken to monitor its impact on the judicial and criminal-justice systems. The regional reports show that most government officials are not accountable for their human rights obligations, and impunity for gender-based violence remains the status quo. The circumstances in which implementation fails or results in unintended consequences vary widely. Some laws contain elements that conflict directly with the intentions of the drafters, such as a domestic violence law in the Ukraine that includes a clause allowing the police to arrest the victim for “provocation.”³⁸

In other instances, parliaments fail to implement or operationalize mechanisms that would uphold the government’s bold statements of commitment. Frequently, regardless of protocols and sentencing guidelines, police, prosecutors, and judges continue to use their own beliefs to interpret legislation, despite it being contrary to the intent and purpose of law. To ensure that legal and policy advances have a real and sustained impact, women’s rights advocates must develop better mechanisms for anticipating these implementation pitfalls and institute more consistent monitoring methods that can function as an early warning alert about legislation that is going awry.

UNIFEM’s scans have revealed other areas that require more attention. More accurate and more accessible measurement mechanisms are needed to more systematically identify what is working and what is not. These should include the following:

- Indicators that allow for cross-regional comparisons of the rates, forms, characteristics and costs of gender-based violence as well as of the impact of programming, legislation, national action plans and other governmental and nongovernmental interventions.
- Data collection and documentation practices that are fully disaggregated, enabling a detailed understanding of when and how violence occurs and by whom. However, as a number of the scans observe, government bodies responsible for gathering this information are frequently under-resourced, inadequately trained, or

uninterested in vigorously enforcing antiviolence legislation.

- Better and more consistent monitoring and evaluation systems to provide information on the impact of particular interventions and sequences of interventions.
- Urgent, emerging, or under-recognized issues need to be addressed more assiduously, such as the intersection of violence against women and HIV/AIDS; the junction of armed conflict and violence against women, often in brutal forms; rising levels of violence against women connected to communal violence or fundamentalist projects; dangers and exploitation associated with voluntary or involuntary migration or trafficking; intensified regulation of women's sexuality leading to targeting of those who don't conform to social norms for particularly vicious retribution; rape and sexual abuse of young girls; the impact of global economic changes on levels and forms of gender-based violence; sexual harassment in the workplace as a form of gender-based violence; virginity testing; acid attacks; and gang rapes.

More attention to contentious issues that involve definitions and concepts can help to clarify the goals, purpose, and appropriate targets and audiences for various efforts that work to end violence against women. The goal is not to reach universal agreement but to build consensus on the lexicon, thus enabling conversations that use a common terminology. This includes consideration of the following:

- Variation in forms, impact and appropriate strategies for different communities (i.e., different ethnic groups, indigenous groups, refugees or internally displaced).
- Grappling with contending definitions that set the framework for legislation, policy, and advocacy (e.g., "gender-based" violence, "family" violence, "domestic" violence, and "violence against women").
- Designing strategies to address context-specific forms of gender-based violence (persecution of single women as witches, honor killings of gay men, targeting of unmarried, pregnant women for stoning, etc.).

In this context, reaching out to new constituencies or potential allies is also critical. Working with male allies is becoming an issue that requires thought and attention. A number of scans have documented projects that have collaborated with men. Others scans recommend giving greater attention to male aggressors. Projects that address youth are also increasingly popular, and a number of different methodologies used in working with young people are described in the scans. Finally, the media is another key avenue with which advocates are increasingly building partnerships.

An Agenda for Moving Forward

UNIFEM's assessment on ending violence against women sought to map the landscape of initiatives that address sexual and gender-based violence in order to better grasp the scope of interventions and identify progress and obstacles.³⁹ One of the key outcomes of the regional reports was a clearer view of gaps in legislation, policy, and programming. Some of the proposals that emerged from the assessment are well-known but are still hampered by a lack of political will, as well as by social institutions and attitudes that continue to sustain gender inequality, discrimination, and violence against women. Proposals include such feminist mainstays as the following:

- Empowering women and girls, and eliminating discriminatory legislation (especially property and inheritance laws that deny women access to resources).
- Expanding women's access to education and control over resources, increasing the availability and reliability of health information and strengthening women's legal and human rights literacy, and augmenting women's and girls' control over their bodies.
- Raising the cost of abuse to perpetrators and the penalties for government inaction by ensuring that strong, appropriate, and adequately specific legislation is in place and that all measures are taken to implement and enforce the legislation.
- Providing redress and remedies for victims, including providing appropriate and accessible health care, psy-

chological counseling, and legal services.

- Conducting action-oriented research that helps to clarify the causes, consequences, and emerging forms of violence and to pinpoint the most effective responses.

The scans also identified gaps and areas that have yet to receive adequate attention in antiviolence initiatives, regardless of the initiator of the program or project. Among the changes most frequently suggested in the regional reports are the following:

- Involving “unconventional” allies, such as men, youth, and community and religious leaders. More effectively engaging these allies will strengthen efforts to change deeply held attitudes that lie at the root of gender-based violence. Mainstream human rights, social justice, humanitarian aid and development organizations are also important allies to mobilize in the effort to eliminate violence against women.
- Fine-tuning efforts to raise awareness and sensitivity to violence against women. These efforts are effective only when they are directed toward a clear and definitive audience. Too often, “awareness raising” reaches a general audience, and its message is not adequately focused on particular groups. More sustained and strategic work with mainstream and alternative media can provide a significant boost to these endeavors.
- Strengthening community-based programming. Antiviolence interventions are most effective when they are rooted in the experiences of the communities they are seeking to influence. The more participatory the methodology, the greater the potential for transformation. Often, antiviolence initiatives focus on legislation, training professionals, and reforming the criminal-justice system. While such efforts are important, they do not address the social, cultural, and economic issues on which gender inequality is based.
- Using advocacy, mobilization, and networking to cut across issues and constituencies. Some of the key areas on which to focus advocacy and organizing might

include incorporating marginalized communities into antiviolence efforts; confronting new forms and manifestations of violence, such as the intersection of HIV/AIDS and violence against women; and the ways in which globalization generates new opportunities for cross-border action, while creating additional obstacles to women's economic empowerment, sexual autonomy, bodily integrity, and personal security. These negative factors keep women from fully enjoying their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

- Applying measurement and information techniques to document progress and challenges. These are key to advancing efforts to eliminate violence against women. What is needed are more substantive and detailed information in the form of documentation, monitoring, and evaluation of antiviolence interventions (both governmental and nongovernmental); data on the incidence and prevalence of gender-based violence; meticulous and in-depth information that links causes, consequences, and manifestations of violence; detailed, comprehensive, and comparable information—both quantitative and qualitative—on the personal, social, economic, and political costs of violence against women; and reports that use common indicators to track progress.

Beyond these specific refinements in strategies to address gender-based violence, the assessment has also raised the following three larger issues of concern. First, numerous studies have shown that inadequate coordination between and among governments, donors, and NGOs hampers the effectiveness of antiviolence programming. Different aspects of each effort to prevent violence, protect victims, provide remedies, and punish perpetrators should be integrated so that the various physical, psychological, economic, social, and cultural components can be addressed. Working across legal, criminal-justice, health, and education sectors is crucial to constructing policies as complex as their causes to address violence against women.

Second, each regional report stressed the importance of constructing a strategic framework on gender-based vio-

lence. Too often, and despite past experience, antiviolence interventions are conducted on an “as-needed” basis, in response to outbreaks of violence or to new expressions of concern or political will. Efforts to eliminate violence against women will be far more effective if they are grounded in a more comprehensive approach that uses specific interventions to respond to specific forms of violence. Such an agenda must negotiate a delicate balance between using targeted strategies, priorities, and methods for monitoring and evaluating violence and being flexible enough to determine the critical and emerging issues, geographic and cultural differences, and changing environments that are specific to a situation. Such an agenda must take into account the fact that all women are potential victims of violence but some women are targeted for specific forms and heightened levels of violence because of their race, ethnicity, sexuality, culture, geographic location, or because they are refugees, lesbians, disabled, indigenous, among other factors. Moreover, these same identity characteristics also largely determine a woman’s access to information, services or remedies.

Finally, interventions designed to combat violence against women will only be effective when the level of available resources match the scale of the problem. This is the most urgent lesson learned from tracking progress over the past few decades, requiring immediate attention: Women’s advocacy and official measures have had an impact. Violence against women is now recognized as a human rights violation and a crime requiring official action. Despite this progress, governments are not yet held fully accountable and perpetrators continue to act with impunity. If increased human and financial resources do not accompany statements of political will, then violence will continue, despite the best efforts and imagination of antiviolence organizers.

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25. See, for example, C. Bunch, “Transforming Human Rights from a Feminist Perspective,” in: J. Peters and A. Wolper (eds.), *Women’s Rights, Human Rights: International Feminist Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 1995); R. Coomaraswamy, “To Bellow Like a Cow: Women, Ethnicity, and the Discourse of Rights,” and R. Copelon, “Intimate Terror: Understanding Domestic Violence as Torture,” in: Rebecca J. Cook (ed.), *Human Rights of Women: National and International Perspective* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).
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29. The story of WCLAC is an extract from C. Spindel, E. Levy, and M. Connor, *With An End in Sight: Strategies from the UNIFEM Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence Against Women* (New York: UNIFEM, 2000).
30. “Honor” killings refer to murders or attempted murders conducted in the name of maintaining family “honor.” Generally, they occur when a family decides that the actions of a family member—usually a girl or woman, but honor crimes have also been committed against homosexual men—have dishonored the family. In many countries, a defense of “honor” will mitigate criminal penalties.
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