

In the UNIFEM scans, Cambodia was described as a country with a level of domestic violence so severe that the police and judiciary would only consider it a crime if a woman were 'stabbed, shot, unconscious or dead'.⁷⁴ These attitudes were seen as the outcome of years of war, deprivation and the violence of the Khmer Rouge, and could only be stamped out through a multisectoral approach. The Cambodian Government has recognized the extent of the violence and in 1999 created an ambitious national plan of action. This five-year effort includes educational, awareness-raising, legal and health components, and seeks to examine the status and rights of women and to bring them into the decision-making process.

'Ending Violence Against Women:
UNIFEM Regional Scan for East and South-East Asia'

Making Commitments Governmental Action Plans

Effective responses to violence against women require a multi-layered approach in which as many sectors as possible bring together their strengths and commitments. In recent years there has been notable progress in moving from legislation to plans of action — public policies that create mechanisms for advancing women's rights across the board. As of 2000, 118 countries had developed national action plans to implement their commitments to the Platform for Action produced by the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), which outlines violence against women as one of its key areas for action.⁷⁵

The best plans include components relating to education, legislative revision, government agencies and awareness-building. They provide the mechanisms and resources for government

Ethiopian girls whose families have decided not to have them undergo female genital mutilation (FGM). Villagers in their area,

working with international agencies, have started a campaign against FGM.

PHOTO BY PER-ANDERS PETTERSSON—GETTY IMAGES



and civil society to work together. They are, in essence, blueprints for addressing structures of gender inequality and making visible the social, economic, political and cultural aspects of society that must be involved if change is to happen.

Generally, plans of action are either national or sectoral. In some cases nations are required to develop plans of action through their ratification of regional agreements. All nations that join the Southern African Development Community (SADC), for example, are expected to institute a national plan of action to end violence against women. In Central America, a project supported by the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) entitled ‘Toward an Integrated Model of Care for Family Violence in Central America’ has helped all of the region’s countries prepare action plans dedicated to eradicating family violence, based on the framework established in the Belém do Pará Convention. As in Southern Africa, the plans draw on all sectors and have a primary goal of coordinating anti-violence work in a national effort.⁷⁶

In both South-East Asia and Latin America, a majority of countries have a national plan or policy to address violence against women. The Thai Cabinet approved a policy and action plan in 2000 to end violence against women and children that encompasses physical, verbal, psychological and sexual violence wherever it occurs, from the home to the workplace to the media. It includes components for prevention, legal reform, protection and welfare, education and research, cooperation mechanisms and systems for monitoring and evaluation. Equally

Mechanisms for engaging with the community have to be piloted more vigorously, because changing community norms is central to being able to address gender-based violence effectively. The best legislation, programmes and policies can be negated if they are not accompanied by adequate community support and sensitivity. Research clearly shows that the community (family networks, neighbours, organized groups, etc.) is the 'first site of response' for women facing violence. Building the capacities of community structures that can support women facing violence is critical to developing a holistic and sustained response to the issue.

– UNIFEM Regional Scan, South Asia

important, the plan takes note of the need for national budget allocations for both government agencies and NGOs to implement such activities.

Most of the Latin American plans look at violence in the family and seek to build capacity among the police, the judiciary and the health sector. In several countries, including Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru and Uruguay, women's courts have been established as part of a plan to reduce violence against women. Although they have different powers and procedures in each country, in general the courts provide legal, psychological and social assistance along with meting out justice. In several cases, the courts operate through co-management strategies with the government and civil society. In Ecuador and Peru, the courts receive technical assistance and advisory support from women's NGOs that specialize in dealing with family violence. An assessment of the programme in Ecuador shows that the percentage of abusers convicted has increased, that many couples have received counselling that has improved their relationship, and that women who have turned to the courts say that they have seen positive effects in their lives.⁷⁷

In the Republic of Georgia the State Commission on Elaboration of State Policy for Women's Advancement (established in February 1998) was asked to prepare a national 'Action Plan on Combating Violence Against Women for 2000-2002' that would focus on government bodies' efforts to protect women's human rights. In particular, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in collaboration with the Prosecutor's Office, was instructed to collect and process data regarding violence against women, to create a registry of incidents of domestic violence and to carry out preventive measures for eliminating

violence.⁷⁸ The plan is wide-ranging, including mandates to improve research into the nature, character and results of violence against women; to obtain and make information on domestic violence a subject of public discussion; to create special programmes for potential perpetrators; to develop legislation; to assist victims of violence; to develop data on sexual harassment in the workplace; to combat ethnic violence and violence against girls; and to prevent and eliminate trafficking. The executors of the Action Plan include legislative and executive bodies, as well as NGOs, trade unions and the mass media.

Thanks to a dramatic increase in awareness-building in the last decade, many Arab countries have undertaken ambitious action plans to address violence against women. While some

programmes have been stymied by the destabilizing effect of conflict and the resulting economic distress, others have moved forward. Jordan, for example, created the 2000 Family Protection Project, a three-year programme to tackle violence at the grass-roots level, involving both government and civil society groups.⁷⁹

Morocco launched a National Action Plan to combat gender-based violence in 2002 with the support of UNIFEM, UNFPA and UNDP. The plan was developed through consultations involving some 200 stakeholders (women survivors of violence, health practitioners, educators, lawyers, judges, police and women's NGOs among others) and has seven components:

1. Legislative reform: revising the Family Code and the penal and employment codes and enhancing civil rights;
2. Legal, medical, psychological and socio-economic support for women survivors of violence;
3. Infrastructural and financial support for women survivors of violence: shelters, hotlines and specialized units in hospitals and police stations;
4. Education and awareness-raising;
5. Research and partnership building: developing databases and co-ordinating the plan of action between the Ministry of Justice and women's NGOs;
6. Training police and other actors and hiring more women police officers;
7. Overall policy: free medical care for women survivors of violence and recognition of violence against women as a violation of women's human rights.

The plan, which has been tested in two pilot regions so far, was part of a gender and development project implemented by the Ministry in charge of the status of women with two NGOs. The project included other activities aimed at combating violence against women, including developing a training manual, conducting a study on sexual harassment in schools and universities and providing support to centres for women victims of violence.⁸⁰

In those countries that lack the resources to create broad, multisectoral national plans, governments have created localized plans as in Cameroon, where each of the nation's ten provinces has an agency for the promotion of women's rights that provides trained counselors to administrative units that deal with gender-based violence.⁸¹ Alternatively, some countries create sectoral plans that are administered under an education or health department, but coordinate with other government sectors. In Malaysia, one-stop crisis centres have been introduced in hospitals as a result of campaigns and lobbying by women's advocates. They provide a range of services in one place for women survivors of violence, including medical attention, counselling and legal assistance. Medical staff are trained to recognize cases of violence against women, and special police desks are set up in the hospitals to make it easier for women to file cases if they choose to do so. The first centre was established in 1986, and by 1997, 90 per cent of hospitals in Malaysia had them.⁸²

The European Women's Lobby: A Framework for Action

All member nations of the European Union are expected to abide by the Council of Europe's Plan of Action to combat violence against women. The plan documents a long list of abuses against women and focuses on actions that can be taken by governments. In 2001 the European Women's Lobby published a detailed framework to make it easier to compare and share information on the plans of various nations and to strengthen networking among NGOs in different countries. The framework covers 11 areas and provides detailed indicators for monitoring effectiveness in each area:

Policy: Anti-violence policy should contain a clear and encompassing definition of violence against women; designate a consultation process that brings together all sectors; identify strategies and budget allocations; and lay out a framework for monitoring and indicators to measure progress.

Budgets: Budget lines should identify specific actions, policies and measures; the budget allocated to violence against women should be measured against Gross Domestic Product.

Legislative framework: Legislation should clearly address all forms of gender-based violence; it should specify criminal or civil law responses, unambiguously stipulate sanctions and include measures to prosecute state agents who are perpetrators of violence.

Remedies for redress: The primary indicator should be complaints lodged to the police, to be based on police reports, number of police interventions and their outcomes, the existence of protocols for the police to follow in cases of gender-based violence, referrals and follow-up.

Criminal and civil justice system: Indicators should be used to evaluate the structure of the criminal and civil justice system from the perspective of outcomes (i.e., convictions, sentences and sanctioning, compensation ordered), length of time between lodging a complaint and the beginning of legal proceedings, and measures to guarantee protection to the victim.

Training of professionals: All relevant professionals (e.g., law enforcement officers, police, justice personnel, health

workers, social workers, interpreters) should be trained in gender-sensitive methods, and become capable of competently assisting a diverse range of potential victims, including migrants, ethnic or racial minorities, lesbians and gay men, and the hearing impaired.

Service provision: This should be appraised by looking at the number of shelters/refuges and their ability to serve a diverse range of violence survivors; their geographical spread; the level of government support to shelter provision; the level of other services provided such as psychological counselling, free or low-cost legal assistance, job training and employment referrals; and the quality of the services as assessed by the users.

Women's diversity: This focuses on ensuring that the above provisions are accessible to a diverse range of potential victims of violence by accounting for the number of officials recruited from migrant, ethnic, racial or sexual minority communities and the number of services available or targeted towards communities with special needs (e.g., asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and women in institutions such as homes for the elderly, prisons and mental hospitals).

Civil society — women's non-governmental organizations: The range, scope and sustainability of women's organizations, especially those reaching marginalized communities, should be a significant indicator of the range and quality of anti-violence interventions.

Data collection: Data to assess progress should be collected systematically in partnership with NGOs, and should incorporate information from the police, hospitals and other health-care providers, and legal assistance agencies. This information should be extensively disseminated, and should form the basis for education, information and communications strategies.

Prevention: Violence prevention should include raising awareness, disseminating information on gender-sensitive human rights methodologies, media and communications campaigns, and extensive efforts directed toward building non-violent, gender-sensitive curricula in primary and secondary educational institutions.⁸³

Improving Plans of Action

Political Will

As with legislation, a plan of action is only as good as the effort and resources invested in implementing it. To date implementation has been uneven, with lack of resource allocations a prime culprit in countries that have made the least progress. Given their broad sweep, it was to be expected that action plans would require a substantial investment. Yet too many governments have not mandated the resources for plans to be put into action. In Argentina, for example, Law 24 417 decrees that the Executive branch of the Government should undertake campaigns to educate and train the public on ending violence against women, but even before the current economic crisis, resources were not found to implement the law.⁸⁴ In Peru, the Law of Municipalities calls for funding to establish women's shelters, but those resources have not been allocated either.⁸⁵ Without such resources, government employees, health-care workers, social workers, police officers, prosecutors and judges do not receive the training necessary to sensitize them to gender violence and to ensure implementation of new laws and policies.

The women's police desks in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, welcomed as a positive move at their inauguration, are at risk of being shut down because many desks are understaffed or operated by staff with insufficient training. In the Philippines, the plan that created the first one-stop crisis centre called for similar ones throughout the country, yet no new centres have been opened since the first in 1995.⁸⁶ Although the social service and legal infrastructures of many countries have suffered under economic crises and austerity measures, decisions are made every day about how to allocate even the reduced resources that are available. Violence against women is not a priority when allocations are made; it is still seen as a 'women's issue' rather than a primary concern of the state, despite the many commitments made under human rights instruments.

The issue of political will is of particular importance in cases where representatives of the state are the perpetrators of violence against women. This type of abuse is especially severe for women who are in police custody or in state institutions. The asymmetric balance of power between inmates and their guards intensifies the gender disadvantages women ordinarily face. International human rights organizations have documented abuse by state agents and security forces of women under their control, as has the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women who has described numerous cases of women being raped, harassed, sexually tortured or denied medical treatment while in custody. In Turkey, for example, it has been reported that female prisoners are made to strip, beaten with truncheons, have high pressure hoses forced up their vaginas, are given electric shock treatment and are repeatedly raped.⁸⁷ Police in some areas have also become involved in the trafficking of women in some cases working with organized criminal elements to move women across borders.

India is among those nations that have attempted to rein in criminal behaviour by

police. A new section has been added to the Indian Evidence Act (sect. 114A) that makes it an offence for persons in a custodial situation (policemen, public servants, managers of public hospitals and remand homes and wardens of jails) to have sex with people they have responsibility over. In such cases, once a woman proves that sexual intercourse took place and states on oath that she did not consent, the burden of proof shifts to the accused.⁸⁸

Because these abuses are perpetrated by representatives of the state, the men involved often operate with impunity, and in some cases with the full support of the state. The role of the state in violence against women is an area of great concern; it reflects a failure to abide by the mandate to protect citizens and will require programmes that bring international, regional and national organizations into play, each supporting the others in order to confront abuses of power.

A Multisectoral Approach

Action plans frequently call for coordination among different sectors to improve responses to violence and eliminate biases against women, yet they often suffer from a lack of coherence or coordination. Service providers running health sector interventions may not consult with their peers involved in judicial or educational interventions. In addition, there may be a lack of trust between government officials and NGOs that can prevent the kind of dialogue necessary to implement a complex plan. NGOs are particularly important; they are often best placed to serve as monitors of government policy. They are commonly the primary service providers to women survivors of violence and are well placed to identify and suggest remedies for obstacles women encounter in seeking assistance. Yet without sufficient resources, NGOs struggle in the face of extraordinary demand.

The next steps must involve ensuring better coordination at all levels — implementation, and coordination plans, funding and support must all be in place. States must take responsibility for ensuring that resources are available to women and to service providers.

Even with proper resources, action plans can work only if the broad strokes of a regional or national campaign are reinforced at the local level. In some cases, local governments have created their own action plans, often in cooperation with NGOs. Others have worked to establish more trust in the communities that they serve. In Hyderabad City, Sind, Pakistan, community beat officers based in community health facilities report to a woman Assistant Sub-Inspector whose mandate is to protect vulnerable groups from violence. The officers receive special training in human rights and in responding to domestic violence, wear a distinctive, easily identifiable uniform and often patrol with members of the community as a way to build local trust.⁸⁹

Models that draw on the community at large have also been developed to respond to cases of violence. The Duluth Model, developed in Duluth, Minnesota, US, has been copied as far away as Romania and the Russian Federation. It entails community organizing and advocacy to review training programmes, policies and texts with a view to safeguarding women who have

Bangladesh: Making the Police Part of the Process

been subject to domestic violence. All policies and procedures are reviewed by members of the communities being served, who look for, among other things, procedures to safeguard against the use of race, class or lifestyle biases in implementing policies. The overarching aim is to put in place policies that act as a general deterrent to battering in the community.⁹⁰

Promoting Gender Equality

Although awareness-raising is an essential component of end-violence work, it is often left out of action plans. Awareness-raising should not only include police, judges and health-care and social workers but society at large. School curricula for children can be shaped to promote an equality-based view of gender relations and to include programmes on violence prevention. An understanding of the dynamics and effects of gender-based violence can be promoted in curricula for police academies and law, medical and other professional schools. Women also need to be the focus of awareness-raising to ensure that they know about the services and legal actions available to them.

Overall it is clear that plans need to be strengthened. They represent a good beginning, but they need more funding and a greater commitment of resources of all types. Governments must accept their responsibility to eliminate gender-based violence and give national action plans the clout they need to make it happen.

When Ishrat Shamim, the president of the Centre for Women and Children's Studies (CWCS), described the conference as a 'working' meeting, she meant it. As soon as she finished welcoming the 32 police officers and NGO representatives, she divided them into groups and set them to work designing a training manual for law-enforcement personnel on gender-based violence.

Early on, Shamim had decided that the best way to get a manual that the police would actually use was to include them in the planning process. She also brought NGOs to the table because, as one police chief acknowledged, "A good mutual relationship between police and civil society is a must to prevent violence against women."

The interaction and shared perspectives of the two groups resulted in a training manual that reflects survivors' needs and clarifies the role of law enforcement in cases of domestic, sexual and dowry-related violence, as well as trafficking and acid throwing. With a grant from UNIFEM, CWCS staff have trained more than 400 officers in 12 regions of the country — in many cases, the officers themselves wrote to Shamim requesting training.

"After most of the sessions the participants are more committed to community policing," says a CWCS staff member. "On several occasions they have called us to ask for help in dealing with a victim of violence."

CWCS staff members realize that they have a long way to go in Bangladesh, the South Asian country with the highest number of reports of gender-based violence. They hope to extend the programme throughout the country to ensure that all women are fully protected.