

Every Sunday afternoon in 2001 nearly 70 per cent of television viewers in Nicaragua were glued to their sets, engrossed in one of the country's most popular soaps operas, 'Sexto Sentido' (the Sixth Sense). The programme is about young women and men who struggle with sexuality, family violence, rape, HIV/AIDS and other such issues that are often kept behind closed doors — especially in the popular media. Produced by the NGO Puntos de Encuentro, with support from UNIFEM and other donors, and written by young people for their peers, the show sends staff members, including the actors, around the country, using public responses as a basis for educational sessions with young people.

Spreading the Word Advocacy and Awareness Raising

a

ctivists around the world have used the human rights framework to build new understanding about the pain women suffer and the costs to society of letting violence continue. Thus, organizations worldwide are creating both alternative and mainstream media projects that educate women and men about the rights of women and challenge cultural assumptions about women's roles, often in the face of significant opposition. In an era of growing mass media power and the increasing globalization of world culture, a large number of organizations have recognized the importance of media campaigns and have produced posters, music videos, public service announcements and



Hundreds of men took part in a men's march in Cape Town, South Africa on 25 November 2000 demanding an end to violence against women.

PHOTO BY ANNA ZIEMENSKI—AFP/CORBIS

educational curricula to get their message across.²⁴ The heightened public awareness these campaigns and materials bring about has generated a dramatic increase in the discussion of violence and the recognition that it needs to be stopped.

The scope of awareness-raising strategies gained momentum in 1991, when the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) coordinated a worldwide coalition of women's organizations to launch an annual campaign, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence.²⁵ The campaign runs from 25 November — the day first commemorated by the Latin American women's movement in 1981 to honour the Mirabal sisters, three political activists murdered by the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic — to 10 December,

Music with a Message

The little girl sees through the facades of the adult world. Wandering through a party, watching the couples make small talk, she understands that all of the women have been abused in some way by their husbands — whether through physical violence or verbal humiliation. In desperation, she turns to her father and begs him not to marry her to a trader, a jeweller or a king, but to an iron smith who will “break her chains.”

The story, told through a popular Indian music video entitled *Babul* (Father), has reached more than 26 million households throughout India and has made it to the top 10 hits list. With support from various international agencies leveraged by UNIFEM, Breakthrough, an international NGO based in India, produced the song and video as part of their effort to question a husband’s ‘right of ownership’ over his wife.

Babul is one of two videos that Breakthrough staff have written and produced about violence against women. “Through these videos we have placed domestic violence and women’s rights into the public media in a way that has never been done before,” says Breakthrough founder and Executive Director Mallika Dutt. The videos have received worldwide recognition, with one of them nominated for an MTV award, and are being used as the basis for an education curriculum on women’s human rights for grades 9 through 12.²⁶

International Human Rights Day. Tens of thousands of groups worldwide, from the global to the local, now honour the campaign. They use every tool available, from community theatre in small villages to music videos on national and regional television to symposiums and demonstrations aimed at reminding governments and society that the goal of eradicating violence against women requires the involvement of everyone. In 1999, the United Nations adopted 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, further legitimizing women’s call for government action against gender-based violence and giving UN agencies a platform for collaborating with civil society organizations working towards that goal.

The coalition that formed around the 16 Days of Activism campaign has served as a model for international organizing by encouraging women all over the world to agree on a format that can be interpreted in ways appropriate to their own country and culture. As initiator of the 16 Days campaign, CWGL sends out a call to international, regional and national organizations suggesting a theme and sample actions to be undertaken during this period. Decisions about priorities, strategies and types of event are developed locally, based on each area’s particular needs. Groups have used the framework of the campaign to press for changes in the law, to highlight specific cases of abuse and to engage in human rights education.

The various events organized during the campaign have helped to educate the public and have also contributed to women’s ability to heal from trauma by speaking out. Stories are told that had never been heard before, and survivors transcend their individual experiences and politicize them. In many cases, activities bring together a broad array of individuals, civic and governmental groups and media and UN organizations, often in coalitions that have never worked together before. These collective efforts can create a powerful shift in awareness that often has an impact on governments’ recognition of their own accounta-

To Reach More than Women

bility. In many regions, Heads of State, politicians, and community and religious leaders are inspired to make commitments to end practices harmful to women and girls after listening to campaign speakers. Governments now often use the 16 Days to announce steps they are taking to ensure that impunity is no longer the primary response to violations of the rights of women.

Regional Campaigns and Networks

Increasingly, national groups are joining in regional networks to extend the reach of their advocacy efforts. Groups such as the Asia Pacific Forum for Women, Law and Development; the Comité Latinoamericano por la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer; the European Women's Lobby; the Latin American and Caribbean Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence; the Mekong Sub-Regional Network Against Violence Against Women; the Pacific Regional Network Against Violence Against Women; the South Asian Forum Against Human Trafficking; Women Against Violence Europe; and Women, Law and Development in Africa are all known for their effective campaigning activities that seek to educate broad constituencies as well as push for regional-level cooperation on standard-setting. The Mekong Sub-Regional Network, for example, founded in 2000 with representatives from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, is working on programmes to motivate changes in poli-

When the men filed into the room early one Saturday morning for their first training on preventing violence against women they had something else on their minds: football. The men from the town of Comayagua in Honduras had gathered for the training after agreeing to the Mayor's offer to purchase new football equipment in exchange for their help in educating the community. The plan grew out of a UNIFEM-funded project run by the municipality to prevent domestic violence in a region where such violence was rife.

The men were reluctant to participate until two team members stood up and urged their peers to listen. Slowly the others began to participate in the discussion. In the months that followed, local trainers facilitated sessions with the teams every Saturday morning, with topics ranging from domestic and sexual violence to machismo behaviour and women's human rights.

While some men simply endured the training as part of their bargain, others took its messages to heart. Several players proposed that teams carry placards promoting community peace and respect for women's rights before each game and during half-time. The idea was picked up, and women and children became involved also, joining the marches across the field with signs of their own.

Eventually the project reached far beyond the initial group of men who had attended the first sessions. One mother in the community spoke of the programme's impact on her daughter: "She will be able to defend herself, and she will be independent." The project also inspired a girls' football league that promoted its own message of gender equality: Girls can play football too.²⁷

Ending Impunity

In Kaolack, Senegal, activists rallied after a particularly brutal crime. A nine-year-old girl was raped so viciously she eventually died from the attack. After a police investigation, a 66-year-old religious leader admitted his guilt. But even after the girl died, local political leaders tried to prevent the family from bringing charges against the man because of his standing in the community. APROFES, the Association for the Advancement of Senegalese Women, stepped in with a multi-media strategy. They brought together allies from women's groups and legal organizations, distributed leaflets to the public, circulated a petition and hosted a public forum on violence against women that attracted hundreds of attendees and featured a dramatic re-enactment of the rape scene. Ultimately, the case was brought to court with more than 10,000 people attending the trial. For the first time in Senegal, a rapist was condemned to a ten-year prison term, the maximum sentence for a crime of this type.²⁸

cies, laws and attitudes concerning sexual harassment, domestic violence and rape.

In Europe, the European Parliament and its Committee for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities called on members of the European Union to declare 1999 the European Year Against Violence Against Women. The focus was a continent-wide, high-profile campaign that involved governments, agencies, women's organizations and other NGOs and flooded communities with information on violence against women and how to stop it. The campaign was modelled on the Zero Tolerance campaign run by the Edinburgh District Council's Women's Committee in Scotland, UK, a landmark effort to educate the public. A primary goal of the Edinburgh campaign had been to "shift the focus from changing women's behaviour to looking at men's behaviour and attitudes" and "to move the whole issue up to the political agenda."²⁹

UN agencies have also sought to work with each other in innovative ways to increase their impact. For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has

joined forces with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the NGO Save the Children to create training manuals to raise awareness about the abuse and exploitation of refugee children, including girls and adolescents who often are forced to provide sex in return for food or shelter in camps.

CASE STUDY: A Life Free of Violence: It's Our Right

In 1997, as the United Nations prepared to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UNIFEM brought together other UN agencies and NGOs from Latin America and the Caribbean to develop an awareness-raising campaign. The global campaign for women's human rights would focus on the theme, 'A Life Free from Violence: It's Our Right' and seek to build public understanding of women's human rights, particularly in relation to gender-based violence.

Through the campaign UN agencies developed a unified message while working in partnership with civil society groups. Each agency contributed seed funds and expertise based on its comparative advantage. For example, the United Nations Development

The Voice of Conscience

Programme (UNDP) focused on issues of governance, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on reproductive health and rights, UNICEF on the rights of girls and UNIFEM on women's human rights and the elimination of violence against women. Thanks primarily to a US\$1 million donation from the UN Foundation, the campaign had approximately US\$1.4 million to invest.

The Latin American and Caribbean campaign was launched in 1998 with broad participation by UN agencies (including, among others, ECLAC, FAO, ILO, OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UN-HABITAT and WHO/PAHO). It was the first time so many agencies had worked together on a campaign of such magnitude. The groups secured the cooperation of wide-ranging partners, including national and local governments, women's networks, media, students, advertising agencies and many others. UNIFEM's New York office and the sub-regional office in Quito coordinated the production of materials and messages and worked with a social marketing firm in Chile. The campaign initiative produced a range of materials and events including public service announcements, television programmes, inserts into large-circulation national newspapers, posters and stickers, websites, radio programmes and other multi-media materials, as well as contests, workshops and meetings. The areas of concern included domestic violence, rape, trafficking and the links between violence and HIV/AIDS.

Broadening the Campaign to Other Regions and Other Types of Advocacy

After the Latin America and Caribbean campaign's successful launch, and as reports of its accomplishments began circulating, UNIFEM decided to scale up the initiative in three ways:

- replicating the campaign in other regions, once again partnering with other UN agencies

In Latin America, machismo has often silenced women, especially indigenous women, who may be treated in public as virtual children. To counteract this, women's organizations have created 'Courts of Conscience' to allow women to speak for the first time about the abuse they have suffered. "We are here so that society realizes that it's not nature that dooms us to suffer violence just for being a woman, it is society," said Carmen Cáceres, who introduced the proceedings at the First Court of Conscience of Guatemalan Women.³⁰ The court was organized by 40 women's organizations in 1998 and heard the testimonies of 200 indigenous and rural women who were victims of the country's armed conflict.

A similar court in Uruguay documented the experiences of a group of women who were victims of sexual abuse by medical personnel in that country. While the courts have no legal standing, they have presented testimony on issues that had previously been ignored or hidden from public view. And since attorneys and experts on violence against women participate and issue 'judgments' and recommendations based on relevant national and international instruments, the courts provide public education on legal remedies — and exert pressure on governments to use those remedies.³¹

- in Africa, Asia-Pacific and the Arab States;
- creating a global videoconference in the UN General Assembly to bring the voices of activists and women who lived through violence directly to the General Assembly, and to report the results and innovations of the campaigns in the international policy-making arena;
- organizing an 'end-violence' electronic working group that linked advocates, policy makers and organizers from around the world.

In addition, UNIFEM's regional programme office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS), established in 1998, drew on all of these activities to coordinate an 18-month end-violence campaign in nine countries of the CIS during 2001 and 2002. While some cooperation was secured from UN agencies, this campaign placed much stronger focus on partnerships with national-level governments and NGOs.

Key Achievements from UNIFEM's End-Violence Campaigns

One of the major innovations of the campaigns was the link established between officials in the international arena and women on the ground who had suffered violence and were organizing against it. Many international leaders came away with a deepened awareness of women's experience and of the necessity of ending gender-based violence once and for all.

The success of the campaigns is attributable to a diverse range of organizations, actors and initiatives that were able to stimulate attention and action in several areas:

- *Laws and Policies:* In Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the campaigns strengthened existing initiatives to improve or change laws and develop national plans of action.
- *Practice and Implementation:* The campaigns highlighted the importance of involving law enforcement agencies, the judicial system, health-care providers and male allies in protecting women and preventing violence. In the Caribbean, the campaign stimulated the development of protocols between police and crisis centres.

The courage of survivors to speak out has had a strong impact in terms of raising awareness. Public understanding has been improved, with fewer tendencies to blame the woman. Despite these efforts it is evident that society still considers domestic violence, and to a lesser extent rape and trafficking, a private matter. Research indicates that it is not just attitudes about violence against women that must be changed, but it is the more general community attitudes and socio-cultural traditions that have defined women that must change.

– UNIFEM Regional Scan, East and South-East Asia

- *Partnerships with Men:* The campaigns encouraged men to demonstrate against violence in Kenya and South Africa, and also promoted the involvement of men worldwide in the White Ribbon Campaign against gender-based violence.
- *Increased Attention by UN Agencies:* Many agencies collaborated to heighten awareness of violence against women, quite a few of them working on the issue for the first time. Inter-agency thematic groups on gender reported that the campaigns provided a focus and purpose to their activities and increased their visibility.
- *Gender-Sensitive Media Coverage of Violence Against Women:* Through campaign-related activities, mainstream and alternative media outlets worldwide covered efforts to end violence against women and reported on the legal and policy changes its elimination requires. Journalists in all regions received training on how to report on violence against women.
- *Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs):* The use of ICTs by UNIFEM and its partners created a global forum for the end-violence campaign. In preparation for the Interagency Global Videoconference, UNIFEM sponsored an online discussion that became a lively virtual community of advocates, practitioners, organizers and policy-makers who engaged in a rich discussion on the approaches used by people working on the eradication of violence from women's lives. The virtual community gathered about 2,500 people from over 80 countries and fostered collaboration among various groups.

Key Lessons Learned from the End-Violence Campaigns

Independent evaluations have been undertaken of the campaigns in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and CEE/CIS, and stakeholders in Asia-Pacific conducted an internal assessment. The evaluations generated lessons at two levels: first with regard to their impact; and second with regard to the process of coordinating inter-agency advocacy campaigns.

1. Lessons on the impact of the campaigns:

- As illustrated by the results noted above, achievements were significantly greater than could have been anticipated by the modest investment. In order to move forward, a much stronger investment in both time and resources is needed.
- In some countries, the campaigns generated demand from women survivors that could not be met, highlighting the acute shortage of legal counselling, shelters, health care and other services.
- In other cases, the campaigns generated interest in introducing legislation without assessing in-country capacity to draft rights-based legislation. This resulted either in delays or in the introduction of laws without adequate provisions to protect women's human rights.
- The importance of baseline studies became evident. These are needed to measure changes in attitudes and behaviours over time and the differential impact of diverse actions.
- It is now clear that the fundamental changes needed to reduce violence against women will require sustained, long-term public awareness and advocacy campaigns.

2. Lessons on coordinating inter-agency campaigns:

- The campaigns demonstrated the ability of UN agencies to collaborate effectively around a key women's human rights issue.
- Significant savings resulted from the ability of campaigns in one region to adapt materials from other regions. At the same time, decentralizing the coordination of the campaigns allowed messages to be tailored to the needs of countries and communities with many language, cultural and class differences.
- The number and range of partners, as well as the limits of in-house expertise, often slowed down the production and dissemination of materials and messages.
- Issues of organizational identities and leadership arose, and attribution of achievements became an area of concern, suggesting the need for closer monitoring and coordination throughout the life of a campaign.
- In a few cases, the entry of the UN agencies into campaigns on ending violence created tensions with women's organizations and networks that had been instrumental in putting the issue on the public policy agenda in the first place.
- Partnerships were primarily limited to those between women's organizations, UN agencies, media and governments. In future campaigns other sectors should be brought in, including other human rights NGOs, trade unions, universities and the private sector.

Next Steps on Advocacy and Raising Awareness

Whether designed to address domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment or practices such as FGM or 'honour killings', the work of ending violence against women entails changing entrenched practices and attitudes at the individual, community and institutional levels. The use of wide-ranging media has proved to be an effective tool for promoting the type of large-scale social changes required. But there are a number of constraints. In particular, end-violence campaigns regularly suffer from a lack of funds and the professional media expertise needed to ensure strategic and sustainable outreach.

The issue of resources is critical. Major government campaigns such as those to end smoking or encourage seat belt use in the United States, or to prevent infant deaths from dehydration and diarrhoea in the global South, cost millions of dollars. In 1998, for example, the US Department of Transportation requested US\$20 million from Congress toward implementing its seat belt campaign, to be supplemented by millions more in state money and funds from private organizations and public service groups.³² In comparison, the entire Latin America and Caribbean end-violence campaign had a budget of US\$1.4 million.

Realistic funding allows campaigns to build over time — which is what it takes to change embedded cultural notions. Ending violence against women will require commitments of time and money commensurate with the gravity of the problem. As violence increases worldwide, the challenges for women's rights advocates increase also. But women's

groups, who still coordinate most awareness-raising campaigns and rely almost exclusively on small donations and the work of volunteers, generally have neither time nor money.

Since many campaigns do successfully raise awareness, the funds needed to respond to rising expectations must be built into campaign budgets, and the appropriate mechanisms for enforcement must accompany the effort. Raising expectations that cannot be met is a serious problem. As women become aware of their rights, they look for services and support that may not be widely available. In East Africa in 1999, for example, NGOs sponsored a public education campaign on violence against women. They produced posters, ads, jingles and educational curricula that were extremely effective: A growing number of women began to realize that they did not have to live with violence. This led to a significant increase in women seeking services such as legal aid and shelter referrals, but those services did not exist in great enough numbers to meet the demand. Hardly any were provided by national or local governments, and NGOs, which did provide some services, had extremely limited resources. Ultimately, victims could not find help when they needed it, and the few existing services were stretched — and stressed — far beyond their limits. An essential part of advocacy campaigns must include funding for and the development of sufficient services to respond to newly-created consciousness.

Funding is also critically needed to protect women once a campaign is in progress: Successful campaigns may lead to a backlash that puts women in increased danger. They are accused of destroying traditional norms and have been attacked, beaten and raped for trying to educate other women. Lawyers defending women's rights have been shot in places as diverse as Pakistan and the United States.

Political will is the other essential ingredient for awareness-raising campaigns. Yet governments have been slow to commit to the effort. The Asian Legal Resource Centre, based in Hong Kong, in a statement to the 2001 session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, noted that progress to stop violence against women in Asian countries was seriously hampered by the failure of governments and state institutions to recognize that cultural values and traditional patterns had not changed.³³

These examples show how complex a task it is to challenge cultural norms. Clearly, culture is not the static entity described by opponents of change. It is constantly changing in response to shifts in society, new developments in the world and pressure from various groups. Around the world, in many different cultures, women are struggling to free themselves of norms that have stifled their lives. In this context, awareness-raising campaigns that seek to respect the best of traditions and honour the public's attachment to the past while promoting positive change have the greatest hope of success. As activist groups learn from previous initiatives and build stronger networks with other organizations, the impact of these campaigns will intensify, building greater support at various social and political levels.