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# Factsheet Violence Against Women - The missing MDG?



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This paper is the first of a series of three factsheets on different pertinent issues concerning gender equality and sustainable development. In the context of the post-2015 agenda negotiations, we asked SDC Gender Focal Points around the world, which issues they deemed to be most important with regards to sustainable development and gender equality. Responses came in from different corners of the earth, highlighting that the main issues people were struggling with in their countries and in their day-to-day work were: Violence against women, political participation and economic empowerment.

The aim of our factsheets is three-fold

- provide practitioners with a theoretical background and indicators on these issues, underlined with case studies and best-practice examples from their own work
- lance a discussion among practitioners about how VAW can be integrated into their different thematic domains and fields of action in the most sustainable way
- highlight the importance of these three gender equality issues for the post-2015 agenda and suggest possible indicators for policy makers

## **Abbreviations**

BPfA: Beijing Platform for Action

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women

CSW: Commission on the Status of Women

FGM: Female Genital Mutilation

MDG: Millenium Development Goal

SDC: Swiss Development Cooperation

STI: Sexually Transmitted Infection

VAW: Violence against women

WEE: Women's Economic Empowerment

WHO: World Health Organisation

## 1. Introduction

Violence against women (VAW) is an international problem - it persists in different forms in all countries and societies of the world. It is currently estimated that over one third of all women worldwide have been subjected to physical or sexual violence (WHO 2013).

After the evolution of a number of human rights standards building a strong international framework on the issue in the last decades, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) of the United Nations only recently in its annual meeting 2013 adopted agreed conclusions on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. However, despite the increasing recognition of the problem accompanied by a number of human rights standards, there is still a glaring lack of data on the issue, as well as great lack of resources and political will devoted to combat this epidemic (Bunch 2008). The MDGs, as the first global target-bound framework to combat poverty and inequality, have also often been criticized for their lack of integration of this crucial issue for gender equality<sup>1</sup>. VAW has been glaringly absent from the MDGs, despite evidence that it is affecting and undoing progress in each area the MDGs focus on (Moosa 2013). Many players therefore now advocate that violence against women - often termed ‘the missing MDG’ - be integrated into the post-2015 agenda (among them is also Switzerland in its Swiss Position on Gender Equality in the post-2015 Agenda).

Violence against women is not only an important issue for the post-2015 agenda, it is also a problem that is often encountered by development practitioners in the field, as can be seen by the rich and varied feedback our E-discussion with SDC Gender Focal Points generated. It was interesting to note that despite the fact that only few cooperation offices have projects that directly deal with violence against women, it is nevertheless an issue people frequently encounter in their work. It was even mentioned, that in some cases development interventions can lead to increased violence against women:

“As a result of various interventions, women are becoming educated and right-conscious, which is creating conflict in the family and society since people are not yet ready to accept women’s mobility and progress.” (Sohel Ibn Ali, SDC Gender Focal Point Bangladesh)

The United Nations (CSW 2013) defines ‘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 in private life”.

The aim of this factsheet is not only to inform policy makers in the post-2015 debate on this issue, but especially to help development practitioners to become more aware of VAW in their day to day work across all thematic domains and to find sustainable ways to combat this phenomenon in their contexts.

The structure of the factsheet is as follows: First, the structural and universal nature of VAW shall be highlighted as well as the way the issue has been discussed in international development and policy circles, followed by the description of some concrete manifestations of VAW around the world (exemplified by case studies from different SDC offices). Consequently concrete strategies and examples for combating violence against women will be presented.

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of the MDGs from a gender perspective see: Lanz, K. (2013b). Gender goals, targets and indicators for sustainable development - problems and opportunities. SDC, IZFG. Available: [www.sdc-gender-development.net/en/Home/Publications/SDC\\_Publications](http://www.sdc-gender-development.net/en/Home/Publications/SDC_Publications)

Finally, some possible indicators on VAW that could be used by practitioners in their development projects as well as by policy makers in the post-2015 agenda will be provided.

The factsheet is based on a broad literature review as well as on the concrete inputs provided by SDC Gender Focal Points and other development practitioners.

## 2. Violence against women - a structural issue

Violence against women has many faces and ranges from discrimination regarding access to different resources (i.e. land, employment, education) to harassment, psychological and physical violence, sex-selective abortions and murder. While there are many evident forms of violence against women, there are also other structural forms of VAW that are less obvious.

“Violence takes many forms, some of them overshadowed by the most immediately shocking forms of physical violence like rape, sexual abuse or other physical abuse. Economic violence strips women of the right to assets or an ability to earn a livelihood or pulls girls out of school and into the workplace; political violence keeps women out of local councils or prevents their voices being heard; and emotional violence can lead to depression and long term inability to fulfil aspirations and potential.” (Nomfundo Mbuli, Gender Focal Point Eastern and Southern Africa)

John Galtung (1996) first introduced the concept of structural violence, indicating that “conflict is much more than what meets the naked eye as trouble, direct violence. There is also the violence frozen into structures, and the culture that legitimizes violence” (p. viii). Even though he did not develop the concept with VAW in mind, it is nevertheless useful to show up how women in patriarchal cultures experience violence on a day to day basis (i.e. through unequal access to education, assets and decent work, lack of voice at home and in public, restrictions on their mobility etc.) - even without ever experiencing physical violence. VAW in this sense is exercised on a daily basis to maintain male power and control over women.

Violence against women in all its forms is often deeply engrained in societies’ culture and is therefore often deemed acceptable by both women and men. This leads to situations, where perpetrators count with being able to get away with it. Furthermore, it is important to note that most women, who experience violence, do so at the hands of their intimate partners making it in the eyes of perpetrators, victims and wider communities ‘a private issue’. Women are often blamed for being subjected to violence, because they do not conform to expected gender roles (i.e. wearing the wrong clothes, speaking up, being in the wrong place etc.) (WHO 2013). Stigmatization of victims of violence leads to a culture of silence surrounding the issue and victims being fearful and reluctant to speak of their experiences.

“According to available data, 40 % of women in Egypt concurred that wife beating was justified for arguing with the husband, 35 % for refusing to have sex, and 20 % for burning food. Also, marital rape is quite common and is often viewed as justifiable.” (Sally Yacoub, Gender Focal Point Egypt)

“Use of physical violence seems to be not only widespread, but also culturally accepted. This fact represents a result of gender stereotypes. Although in the private realm of home most women would disagree with the husband exercising predominant and controlling role, in public, women still tend to agree that such role of men should not be questioned as this is in a direct opposition to the prevailing cultural and social norms and beliefs.” (Natalia Cernat, Gender Focal Point Moldova)

In order to understand violence against women, it is therefore important to understand how global patriarchy operates in assigning different roles and attributes to men and women, as well as how gender roles shape women's and men's lives in a given society. It is important to put the spotlight as much on prevalent notions of masculinity as on notions of femininity, and how these are reproduced by both women and men.

Furthermore, the role of mostly male-dominated institutions in maintaining and reinforcing gender roles needs to be analyzed, i.e. the educational system, the legal system, labour markets, religion, the media etc.

“According to the 2009 study entitled ‘Violence against Women: Media Coverage of Violence against Women’ that was conducted by the National Council for Women (NCW) Media Watch Unit and Cairo University Centre for Research on Women and Media, 71.3 % of surveyed TV shows contained domestic violence against women (physical such as beating or psychological such as verbal insults), while 28.3 % contained community violence (such as sexual harassment).” (Sally Yacoub, Gender Focal Point Egypt)



### **Globalization, migration, violence**

The role of the globalized market economy which commodifies women's bodies and exploits their labour power also needs to be analyzed. The internationalization of the prostitution industry for example creates billions of dollars of profits every year and is based on the notion that “the only thing of value a woman has is her so-called sexuality, which, along with her body, has been turned into a sellable commodity. Her so-called sexuality becomes the only thing that matters; her body becomes the only thing that anyone wants to buy.” (Vlachová and BIASON 2005, p.69) The media in particular serves to reinforce this sexualized image of women.

Improving Employment and Income through Development of Egypt's Aquaculture Sector (IEIDEAS) project implemented by World Fish and CARE (supported by SDC Egypt).

Current austerity policies that negatively affect labour markets, working conditions and social protection, as well as public expenditures for social services are also bound to lead to increased levels of violence against

women. Different studies show the connections between poverty, unemployment and increased violence against women. Poverty and male unemployment have been found to be conducive to the spread of violence against women, as men's stress levels increase when they are no longer able to fulfill their traditional breadwinner role. Furthermore, women living in poverty often lack the resources to escape abusive relationships or to seek help (Moosa 2005).

“An argument for higher prevalence rates among rural women is their lower economic status, and respectively higher dependency on their husbands / partners, as well as a consequence of the recent economic downturn in Moldova, which has affected more rural communities, resulting in higher unemployment rates and financial difficulties.” (Natalia Cernat, Gender Focal Point Moldova)

In order to escape economic hardship, many men migrate - their migration however leaving women vulnerable to violence and discrimination by in-laws and the wider community. But women also increasingly migrate and in some countries make up more than half of all mi-

grants, making themselves vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, abuse and trafficking (Vlachová and Biason 2005).

“Thousands of migrant workers arrive in Lebanon seeking jobs, often finding themselves working in very poor conditions. Refugee women - mostly Palestinians and Iraqis, but also other nationalities - and female Domestic Migrant Workers (DMW) - mainly from the Philippines, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal - have been subject to and are highly exposed to rights violations and abuse, particularly when it comes to Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and human trafficking.” (Soumaya Berri, Gender Focal Point Lebanon)

### 3. Violence against women in the international policy discourse

While VAW has been absent in international policy discourse for a long time, it has entered the policy agenda in the last decades and has variously been framed as a human rights issue, a development issue and a global public health issue.

#### Violence against women - a human rights problem

VAW is the most widespread human rights abuse in the world. A variety of internationally binding human rights documents<sup>2</sup> address the problem and provide an international legal framework and a comprehensive set of measures for the elimination and prevention of VAW. They address violence at home, in the community and by the state and spell out states' duties to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against women (Terry & Hoare, 2003). The most prominent of these international instruments are the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* (particularly with the General Recommendation No. 12 of its Committee in its eighth session, 1989 on violence against women) and the *Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)*. The BPfA identifies VAW as one of twelve critical areas of concern if gender equality is to be achieved. Since 1995 the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women collects information on VAW, including its causes and consequences, from different sources, recommends measures to eliminate VAW, works closely with other relevant stakeholders, adopting a comprehensive and universal approach and reports annually on VAW.



Beneficiary of the SDC Grand Lacs Programme. She buys a couple of eggs, chickens and rabbits and sells it with profit. She can't read or write (SDC, Georgia Müller).

A variety of international resolutions have also been passed in the context of VAW in conflict situations and humanitarian settings. VAW in the context of war, conflict and fragility has been addressed by the *Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security*, adopted in 2000. The resolution demands equal participation of women in decision-making on peace and security and the prevention of and protection from all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations. The most important tool translating Res 1325 into concrete policies and actions are National Action Plans. So far 40 countries

<sup>2</sup> For a list of all human rights instruments concerning violence against women see: CSW (2013): Agreed conclusions on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. Available: [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw57/CSW57\\_Agreed\\_Conclusions\\_%28CSW\\_report\\_excerpt%29.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw57/CSW57_Agreed_Conclusions_%28CSW_report_excerpt%29.pdf)



have developed such documents, including Switzerland who just adopted its third National Action Plan 1325 (2013-2016)<sup>3</sup>. Prevention of and protection from gender-based violence is a key topic of the plan.

In the context of Europe, the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)* complements and expands these standards. And only this year in its annual meeting of 2013 the Commission on the Status of Women of the United Nations discussed the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls as a priority theme and adopted agreed conclusions on it.

### **Violence against women - a development problem**

The term ‘development’ has been widely disputed. Generally, a country’s development is still measured solely by its GDP. In this sense, violence against women can be seen as an obstacle to economic growth, as many women all over the world are either prevented by their husbands from working outside the house, or are unable to do so out of fear of violence or because they are suffering from the consequences of violence. Cost analyses of violence against women have been carried out in several countries and reveal that the annual costs that arise from VAW - ranging from responses to survivors and health care costs to loss of productivity - amount to between 1.16 billion \$ to 32.9 billion \$ a year (Manjoo 2011). It is however important to note that these costs do not only arise in developing countries, but equally affect so-called ‘developed’ countries - i.e. a study in Switzerland in 1998 (a new study is being published in 2013) found that domestic violence causes an enormous economic damage of 410 Mio Swiss Francs yearly (Godenzi & Yodanis 1998).

When adopting more appropriate definitions of development, that also integrate a dimension of human wellbeing, it is even more obvious why violence against women works counter any development effort. UNDP for example coined the term ‘Human Development’, which sees the idea of development in the enlargement of people’s choices or freedom, i.e. in the areas of health, education and employment. It is clear that VAW restrains women’s freedom and choices in all spheres of life and keeps them in a situation of subordination and fear.

### **Violence against women - a global public health problem**

While the links between VAW and health problems are complex and depend on the type, severity and frequency of violence, as well as on the individual circumstances of the women and their ability to seek help, many studies confirm that VAW is a public health problem. Apart of the direct causes of VAW - injury, disability and death, women who experience different forms of violence worldwide, are also significantly more likely to experience severe mental, physical, sexual and reproductive health problems, i.e. depression and anxiety disorders, substance abuse, pregnancy and birth-related complications (i.e. miscarriages, low-birth weight babies) etc. (see WHO 2013).

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<sup>3</sup> The Swiss National Action Plan can be found here:

[www.eda.admin.ch/etc/medialib/downloads/edazen/doc/publi/phumig.Par.0001.File.tmp/Nationaler\\_Aktionsplan\\_UNO-Sicherheitsratsresolution\\_1325\\_de.pdf](http://www.eda.admin.ch/etc/medialib/downloads/edazen/doc/publi/phumig.Par.0001.File.tmp/Nationaler_Aktionsplan_UNO-Sicherheitsratsresolution_1325_de.pdf)

“My name is Marie Thérèse. My life tipped when I was 12 years old. Three men lived in our court. I was in charge of cleaning their house, preparing their food, that kind of stuff. In the beginning I did only that. Later, I realized that they sold Marihuana, and they gave me some so I could help them distribute it. I was young and I didn’t really know what I was doing. One day they made me smoke it. Then they asked me to sleep with them. I accepted the first 2. The third one brutally raped me. He injured me with a screwdriver. After, they fled and left me there. My family couldn’t stand the humiliation and chased me away. I was ill and started living by myself. A girl helped me; she was a prostitute and she had pity with me. She got me treated because I had contracted syphilis. Afterwards, I became myself a prostitute. I lived in bars, I sold drugs and I often brought men back to my house. They bought alcohol and let me drink with them. I was always drunk, I was hanging out with bad people, very bad things happened to me ...” (Story of a beneficiary of the psychosocial support programme, SDC Grands Lacs)

Many studies in recent years have made clear the links between VAW and women’s increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and other STI’s. VAW is both a cause and a consequence of HIV infection. Structural violence that deprives women of crucial assets, such as education, land and decent employment makes them more dependent on (sometimes violent) men and more likely to engage in risky behaviour (i.e. exchanging sex for goods). Simultaneously, they are often less likely to have access to adequate information and help and are more in risk of sexual violence (Raising Voices 2008). Generally, women who are in violent relationships are not able to negotiate timing and circumstances of sexual intercourse (furthermore men who are violent towards their women, have been found to be more prone to a number of HIV-risk behaviours) (WHO 2013). Women, who have contracted HIV are often stigmatized, which leads to them being chased away from home and subjected to further violence.

“Countries that have high HIV incident have been found to have high levels of violence against women. HIV is the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age. Young women and girls are particularly at risk and count for more than one-fifth of all new HIV infections. East and Southern Africa have high rates of sexual violence with 48% of young women in Swaziland reporting having been victims of sexual violence while 59% of Zambian women have ever experienced violence since the age of 15 years. Without addressing violence against women, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) cannot be achieved and without SRHR the struggle for zero HIV infections cannot succeed.” (Nomfundo Mbuli, Gender Focal Point Eastern and Southern Africa)

#### **4. Different faces of the same problem**

While violence against women takes different forms in different societies, it is important not to think of VAW as a problem concerning only certain cultures or religions. While certain forms of violence may be more specific to some societies, i.e. child marriages, dowry murders, acid throwing, restrictions of women’s movements etc., others, such as harassment, domestic and sexual violence occur in all cultures (Terry & Hoare 2003). All these different forms of VAW however stem from the same universal problem which is grounded in gendered power relations that assert male control over the female body. Violence against women is rooted in historical and structural inequality in power relations between women and men and is characterized by the use and abuse of power and control in public and private spheres. It is intrinsically linked with gender stereotypes that underlie and perpetuate such violence. Different factors, such as poverty, alcohol or male infidelity can be factors that contribute to VAW, but the root cause of it are power imbalances between men and women, which are found in all societies.

“It is important to point out that VAW is not condoned by any religion, and it is not necessarily more common under one religion than another. Furthermore, religious arguments can be used spuriously – FGM is often justified in Mali as an Islamic tradition, but there’s nothing about it in the Koran and it’s also practiced by Christians in Ethiopia.” (Jane Carter, Gender and Social Equity Coordinator Helvetas)

According to Bunch (2008, p. xiii): “Most cultures still tolerate violence against women in both contemporary as well as traditional forms. Cultural violence is not some marginalized, exotic ‘cultural practice’ that takes place somewhere else. It is the culturally embedded practice and assumption of domination over women in virtually all societies, and the general acceptance of violence as a means of maintaining that control, even of defending ones masculinity.”

“Traditional patterns of in-family relations and commitments in Tajikistan habitually force young families to live with the man’s parents and extended family, creating thus situations where women are often put under risk of common pressure and abuse by her in-laws. The situation is further deteriorated by reviving conservative traditions and spreading radical Islamic moods that significantly limit the position and opportunities of a woman reducing her role to a housewife with almost no rights and voice. In such a position of an economically dependent, a typical Tajik woman with poor or inadequate education often faces physical and psychological violence from her husband and in-laws. Conservative male-dominant mentality, on one side, does not encourage her to disclose the abuse she suffers and approach her parents for help or support. Lack of adequately functioning prevention and protection mechanisms, on the other side, do not guarantee actual support and security for vulnerable women. As a result, being absolutely dependent on her husband and his family, with no basic rights and opportunities ensured, but a huge burden of traditional expectations and behavioral patterns, an average Tajik woman is put in a dead-end situation where she has to tolerate abuse and violence as a routine part of her life.” (Shodiboy Djabarov, Gender Focal Point Tadjikistan)

It is also important to note that even within the same culture or society, women experience different forms of violence according to their age, wealth, social status, occupation, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation.



Beneficiary of the SDC Grands Lacs Programme. Every animal she sells secures the school attendance for one of her offspring (SDC, Georgia Müller).

### **Violence throughout the life cycle**

Women experience different types of violence throughout their lives. Many girls are never even born or do not survive the first months of their lives due to sex-selective abortion and female infanticide (the UN estimates that between 113 million to 200 million women are missing worldwide) (UN Women 2013). Furthermore girls are often not provided their brothers, leading to a much higher mortality rate of girls between 1 and 4 than boys of the same age (Vlachová & BIASON 2005).

When they are older, girls are often discriminated against when it comes to access to education, some are forced to help their mothers in the household, while their brothers go to school. Furthermore it is estimated that about 6000 girls a day (more than 2 million a year) are subjected to female genital mutilation (Vlachová & BIASON 2005). Another 25’000 girls are estimated to be subjected to early marriage every day,

making them more prone to sexual and physical violence later on (ICRW 2005). Adolescent girls all over the world experience sexual harassment, sometimes leading to sexual assaults and rape.

“According to the 2013 'Study on Sexual Harassment in Egypt', of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN), 99.3% of Egyptian women have experienced some form of sexual harassment. It is worth mentioning that, post the January 2011 uprising, sexual assaults and rape were directed at women who were politically active and opposing the regime with the justification that women, by marching in crowded areas, made themselves susceptible to violence. Sexual assaults have culminated during the protests at the end of June 2011, with some organizations reporting unprecedented numbers of attacks. The alarming thing is the almost total impunity for such crimes, and a recognized barrier of access to justice for women.” (Sally Yacoub, Gender Focal Point Egypt)

Violence and discrimination stay with women throughout adult life. While some women are not even allowed to work and face restrictions on their mobility in the public space, others are discriminated against and harassed at work. Furthermore, the majority of women who experience violence do so at the hands of their intimate partners and husbands, making adulthood particularly dangerous for women (see ‘Intimate partner violence’).

The discrimination and violence that women experience throughout their whole lives also contribute to their increased vulnerability and poverty in old age. While the media often portrays sexual and domestic violence as a problem of younger women, many old women all over the world are victims of sexual and physical abuse. In some societies old women are also subjected to particular kind of violence, i.e. property grabbing, witch hunts etc. (UNFPA 2012)

### **Intimate partner violence**

Intimate partner violence is the most widespread form of VAW. It is however also the most hidden form, as it generally takes places in the ‘private’ sphere of the home. Women are often afraid to speak about it and to seek help. There is now however a growing body of research showing the magnitude of the problem. A WHO multi-country study on domestic violence found that worldwide between 15% and 71% of women reported physical or sexual violence by their intimate partners (WHO 2005). The wide variations in prevalence between countries however have to be interpreted with care,



Improving Employment and Income through Development of Egypt’s Aquaculture Sector (IEIDEAS) project implemented by World Fish and CARE (supported by SDC Egypt).

as they are also related to differences in the readiness to speak about violence. The ‘culture of silence’ surrounding the issue might be stronger in some countries than in others.

Furthermore, women frequently experience emotional abuse in intimate relationships, which includes being insulted and made feel bad about oneself, being humiliated and belittled in front of others, being threatened with harm etc. Many women consider emotional abuse to be more devastating than physical violence. The above-mentioned WHO study found that between 20% and 75% of the interviewed women had experienced acts of emotional abuse in the last two months (WHO 2005)

## War / Armed conflict

War and armed conflict not only bring about increasing levels of violence against women, it has also been theorized that a culture that accepts violence against women also creates a culture that accepts the violence of war, militarism and other forms of conflict and domination.

Before armed conflicts break out, gender roles are often emphasized and reinforced, i.e. women as the backbones of society and men as their protectors. During wars and armed conflicts, women's work burden of looking after the family tends to increase due to lack of basic commodities and services, their vulnerability increases as they often become heads of households (which leaves them with no male protection), and levels of VAW simultaneously increase. Systematic rape is used as a weapon of war to humiliate men, who have failed in their duty to protect women (Cockburn 2004).

Systematic violence against women does not come to an end, when fighting ends. During reconstruction, women tend to experience continuously high levels of violence, as well as stigmatization if they have been raped by opponent forces. Women, who have been displaced are also vulnerable to VAW in refugee camps, particularly if basic services (i.e. water and sanitation) are inadequate or inexistent. This is due to the fact that women often have to walk far to fetch water or to defecate and therefore make themselves vulnerable to assaults.

“In the context of the armed conflict that has affected Colombia for more than 50 years, violence against women represents one of the major violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law. Sexual violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as forced displacement, intra-family and community violence, social and reproductive control, threats and murders are only some of the risks and violations that women and girls, particularly in rural and remote locations, confront. The situations of risk and vulnerability increase with difficulties to access basic services (health, sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial care) and effective protection and prevention mechanisms (security, justice, guarantee of non-recurrence).” (Catalina Sierra, Gender Focal Point Colombia)

Furthermore, post-traumatic stress disorders, uncertainties and indignities that accompany flight and reconstruction are conducive to higher levels of domestic violence in post-war countries.

“Heightened domestic violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina is linked in many cases to the legacy of the war, posttraumatic stress disorder as well as high unemployment, poverty and addiction. In a still very strong patriarchal society such as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, these events place women at a higher risk of domestic violence.” (Almir Tanovic, Gender Focal Point Bosnia and Herzegovina)

However, post-conflict situations can also provide windows of opportunities for challenging and redefining gender roles, as social and political structures need to be recreated. Most often though, women who played crucial roles in maintaining social order during conflict times, are relegated back to the private sphere of the home during the process of reconstruction (Vlachová & BIASON 2005). Furthermore VAW should be integrated in reconciliation processes including the dealing with the past.

## 5. Addressing violence against women

It is of utmost importance that violence against women is not seen as a women's problem, but fundamentally as a problem of men and unequal gender power relations. In order to sustainably combat VAW, it is therefore necessary to combat the underlying causes of VAW – gender roles and power imbalances between women and men. And this can not only be done in projects that focus on VAW directly, but in all thematic domains. Attitudes that condone violence against women and assert male power and control over women, as well as notions of masculinity that are tied up with violent behaviour plus the impunity of VAW need to be actively challenged. In order to address VAW in a sustainable way, it is therefore very important to invest in prevention activities, to take men as an important target group, to focus on men's perceptions and behaviours, to make men solely responsible for the violence they are using and to show the benefits of violence-free lives for all community members. Traditional gender roles and notions of masculinity and femininity need to be challenged.

“Target people of the awareness programs are mostly women. The training or awareness messages are of limited impact since the broader environment is mostly gender insensitive.” (Sohel Ibn Ali, Gender Focal Point Bangladesh)

“It is necessary to transform the patriarchal attitudes of the overall population, and of men in particular, by informing them about the consequences of violent actions and involving them in the activities considered traditionally to be „feminine”, exposing them to other gender roles to overcome stereotypes.” (Natalia Cernat, Gender Focal Point Moldova)

Sustainable development implies long-term changes in people's attitudes and behaviours. In order to sustainably combat VAW, attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate gender inequalities and maintain power imbalances between women and men in the following institutions and among their staff need to be challenged and changed:

### Legal system

The first step in combating violence against women is often to outlaw it and make all forms of harassment and violence (including traditional forms of violence, i.e. FGM) punishable by law.

“Passing a new law criminalizing female sexual harassment, stipulating deterrent penalties for the harasser and at the same time facilitating the procedures for arresting the harasser through evidence provided on the site of harassment. This also requires reinforcing the role of police.” (Sally Yacoub, Gender Focal Point Egypt)

Furthermore traditional customs and legal provisions that do not grant women equal rights to education, land and other resources need to be abolished. Gender equality and anti-discrimination need to be the cornerstones of individuals' constitutionally granted freedom.

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) also provides an important framework under which measures have to be taken to eliminate cultural, social, political, economic and legal practices that discriminate against women.



Lebanon ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2002, however, with a number of reservations (Article 16). Lifting reservations on Article 16 of the CEDAW about equality between men and women in marriage and family life has still to be advocated for. (Soumaya Berri, Gender Focal Point Lebanon)

However, in order for these legal measures to be effective and sustainable, law systems need to be efficient and law makers knowledgeable and willing to use these laws. Furthermore, women need to be aware of the possibilities for seeking redress in case of harassment or violence.

“Capacitate government officials and law making structures such as the courts, police, department of justice, parliamentarians to understand the impacts of violence against women and to enact appropriate laws.” (Nomfundo Mbuli, Gender Focal Point Eastern and Southern Africa)

“Increase the level of self-identification and request for services, by informing victims about their rights, especially about the protection measures, existing services; to ensure assistance for victims in cases of protection orders’ issuance implementation, as well as during the legal proceedings.” (Natalia Cernat, Gender Focal Point Moldova)



Beneficiary of the SDC Grands Lacs Programme. To see cows and sheep passing the village means happiness to her. It makes her forget that her parents cast her out in fear of AIDS. She could have been infected while she was raped (SDC, Georgia Müller).

### **Education system**

Girls and boys are often trained early on to live up to their respective gender roles and expectations. It is therefore important that study plans be revised to integrate gender equality and to promote the breaking of gender barriers and discrimination. They need to be trained in non-violent ways of interaction and of dealing with conflicts. Girls and boys need to be made aware of existing laws against violence against women and of ways of seeking legal assistance. Furthermore they need to be made aware of the gender bias in media and society and be empowered to think for themselves and to define their own gender roles.

Teachers are often themselves perpetrators of violence against girls. They therefore equally need to be trained and sensitized on VAW.

### **Media**

Bearing in mind the way the media shapes people’s perceptions and attitudes, it is of crucial importance to address the way gender roles and VAW are reported in the media.

“Considering the importance of media shaping the community’s perspective, it is also crucial to revisit and evaluate the coverage of media outlets and how they contribute to promoting or condemning VAW.” (Sally Yacoub, Gender Focal Point Egypt)

The media can however also be used proactively to spread messages conducive to gender equality and show up the consequence of violence against women for women and for whole societies.

“Launching an awareness / media campaign concerning violence against women that portrays the negative consequences of violence. The campaign needs to involve all stakeholders, from government institutions, religious leaders, civil society, and activist groups.” (Sally Yacoub, Gender Focal Point Egypt)

**Religion and Tradition**

Religious views and traditions that actively discriminate against women and assert male power over women need to be challenged. They can however not be challenged from outside and need to be understood in their context - it is therefore important to work with local male role models, community and religious leaders etc.



Beneficiaries of the Youth-Friendly Health Centre in Soroca, supported by SDC in the frame of the project “Healthy Generation – Scaling up Youth-Friendly Health Services in Moldova” (Dumitru Doru).

“Promote the role of the executive popular and religious leaderships in combating female sexual harassment” (Sally Yacoub, Gender Focal Point Egypt)

“Work with community structures (traditional leadership) to raise awareness of gender based violence and to take specific actions to protect women, girls and children.” (Nomfundo Mbuli, Gender Focal Point Eastern and Southern Africa)

A SDC-funded project in Bangladesh for example uses the following approach:

“Discussing the assaults / abuses in the local area and community and stopping physical violence with everyone’s assistance in the community. For example by putting an end to physical abuse and eve teasing (public harassment) through public meetings and punishing the perpetrators through local courts called a 'shalish'. Child marriage, dowry, etc. along with physical abuse are being battled by these individuals after receiving economical and social empowerment”. (Sohel Ibn Ali, Gender Focal Point Bangladesh)

Strengthening local women’s rights groups can also be an effective way of challenging gender power relations (Moosa 2013). A study in seventy countries over four decades showed that the existence of strong and autonomous feminist movements were the main driver of policy change and legislation concerning VAW (Htun & Weldon 2012).

**Health System**

Most women come in contact with health care providers at some point in their life. It is therefore clear that the health sector plays a crucial role in combating VAW. Health system strengthening therefore needs to include sensitizing and educating all health personnel on the different faces and the underlying causes of VAW, as well as building the capacity of health



systems to deliver a variety of services that are relevant for women at risk or victims of violence, i.e. shelters, raising awareness groups etc.

In order to reach a sustainable reduction in the incidence of VAW, health providers should not only be encouraged and enabled to detect VAW, but also to spread preventive messages and to adequately refer women experiencing violence to relevant services and projects.

“I went to a sensitization session, incognito. And I saw other women speak of their problems. They were like me! They had been raped and abandoned. Some of them were still prostitutes. For three sessions I only listened. I didn’t know that there were so many women with the same problems as me. Then I decided to speak and to tell my story. I did not want this life anymore. I consequently started attending workshops on mental health, sexual violence; I attended a discussion group with a psychologist. We were there almost every day! And every Tuesday we were among ourselves, we contributed 50 FRW, we made plans, at that point we understood how we had been affected by all of this. We decided to get out. First we were about 30. Now we are more than 67 women! Now, I feel better. I stopped being a prostitute. I sell potatoes on the market. I can buy soap and cream; I have become beautiful again. I have also started working for myself and to be politically active. People around me have noticed that I evolved. I have been elected a member of our local development committee. I have even become a counsellor in my village.” (continued story of a beneficiary of the psychosocial support programme, SDC Grands Lacs)



Improving Employment and Income through Development of Egypt’s Aquaculture Sector (IEIDEAS) project implemented by World Fish and CARE (supported by SDC Egypt).

### Labour market

Given the fact that unemployment and poverty lead to higher levels of violence against women, it has been argued that general economic empowerment, and particularly women’s economic empowerment (WEE) can play a role in combating VAW. However, there is also evidence that projects aimed at women’s economic empowerment can lead to escalations of VAW at least in the short-run, as men feel threatened and / or left out (Moosa 2013). It is therefore important to carefully construct and evaluate WEE projects and to include men and potential risks of VAW in the project design.

“The above-mentioned UNWOMEN study on sexual harassment in Egypt suggested measures to address harassment including: 1) Alleviate poverty and improve the country’s economic situation as a whole, 2) Create jobs for young people of both sexes to reduce long hours of leisure time and ensure that they can play an active and positive role in the development of their homeland.”(Sally Yacoub, Gender Focal Point Egypt)

It is important to sensitize employers to assume responsibility for protecting their employees against violence, including sexual harassment at the workplace. In order to provide women and men with long-term job security and reach sustainable poverty reduction, it is also important to review and alter macro-economic policies that have negative impacts on labour markets and social protection.

## **6. Violence against women in the post-2015 agenda**

Gender equality is a crucial issue that needs to be prominently placed within the post-2015 agenda, as a stand-alone goal, as well as a transversal theme within all goals. While the international community has not yet decided whether and how to integrate gender equality in the agenda, women activists, NGOs and international institutions are already debating the content such a goal on gender equality should have. The broad consensus is that there should be one or several targets related to VAW under a broad-based stand-alone goal on gender equality. Furthermore there are suggestions that VAW should be mainstreamed in all other goals (Moosa 2013). Whatever form the new framework will take, it is crucial that VAW is addressed in all its forms, ranging from structural violence, discrimination, harassment to sexual violence and murder. The framework must therefore be flexible enough to accommodate all (culturally and locally specific) forms of violence.

In order to reach a sustainable reduction in the much too high incidence of VAW, underlying power imbalances that perpetuate gender inequality need to be addressed. While attitudes will take time to change, putting gender equality and VAW on the international policy agenda will give it high visibility and will serve to allocate resources to these crucial areas of international development.

Some indicators to compare progress between countries, as well as general indicators that can be used at national as well as project level to measure prevalence of and attitudes towards VAW will be provided below:

### **Indicators International Level**

- National Demographic and Health Surveys that integrate questions on the prevalence of violence against women
- Countries that integrate VAW in primary and secondary school curricula, as well as in teacher training, media training and health care personnel training institutions
- Countries that have comprehensive legal frameworks, outlawing all forms of violence and discrimination against women
- Countries with strong multi-sectoral service response for victims of violence (including legal services, health care, psychological care, reintegration, skills training etc.)
- Countries that have ratified CEDAW without any reservations, as well as evidence of implementation (i.e. CEDAW periodic reports)

### **General Indicators**

It has been found, that the best way of obtaining accurate estimates on VAW, is to ask women, whether they experienced specific acts of violence (i.e. slaps, pushes, shoves; strangling, burning; threatened with a weapon, forced to have sex with someone etc.), rather than asking in broad generic terms (i.e. intimate partner violence, sexual violence, physical violence etc.) (WHO 2013).

- % of women who report experiencing violence in the past year (differentiated by specific acts of violence, including culturally specific forms of violence, i.e. FGM)
- % of women who report ever experiencing violence (differentiated by specific acts of violence, including culturally specific forms of violence, i.e. FGM)

- % of women and men who believe a woman can refuse sex to her husband (see WHO 2005)
- % of women and men who believe wife beating is acceptable (see WHO 2005)
- % of women and men who believe that FGM / early marriage / other traditional forms of violence against women are acceptable
- number of female murder victims

## 7. Conclusion

Development can never be sustainable, if more than half of the world's population are disadvantaged and discriminated against throughout their lives and if more than one third of all women experience violence. As long as women all over the world are afraid to go to certain places at certain times, are afraid to speak up, to take their lives into their own hands, one can not speak of sustainable development. In order to sustainably change women's lives and allow them to live lives free of violence and fear, gender power imbalances, as well as gender roles need to be changed.

It is therefore of utmost importance that not only the post-2015 agenda will seriously address VAW in all its forms together with its underlying causes, but also that development practitioners all over the world take it seriously and try to integrate components aimed at the prevention and eradication of VAW into their projects - may it be through addressing VAW directly or through combating its underlying causes, the power imbalances between women and men, in all other thematic domains.

This document shall therefore serve to fuel discussions among practitioners on:

- how VAW can be addressed directly,
- how the different thematic domain practitioners work in are linked with VAW and power imbalances between women and men,
- how VAW can be addressed in the different thematic domains having the most sustainable impact and
- how VAW can be integrated in the different project monitoring instruments.

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