



Expert group meeting on 'Prevention of violence against women and girls'
Bangkok, Thailand
17-20 September 2012

CONCEPT NOTE

EGM/PP/INF.1
June 2012
ENGLISH only

I. Background and objectives

1. In accordance with its multi-year programme of work (2010-2014), the priority theme for the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2013 will be the “Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls”. The focus of the priority theme will be on the two domains of intervention, namely prevention of violence against women and girls and support services provision to victims/survivors. Efforts have been made so far to expand availability of and access to services, with some knowledge and cumulative experience on model approaches and good practices largely provided by government services and specialized women’s and other civil society organizations.

2. In the area of prevention however, while encouraging and promising practices have evolved, there is no critical mass of expertise and interventions for the up-scaling of such efforts, neither are these efforts adequately documented or researched to demonstrate impact, particularly in low and middle income countries. It is an area of necessary and strategic intervention if the levels of violence against women and girls (VAWG) are to ever be significantly reduced. In order to contribute to a full understanding of the issues being considered in prevention and to assist the Commission in its deliberations, UN-Women, in collaboration with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO), will convene an Expert Group Meeting on prevention of violence against women and girls, on 17 to 20 September 2012, in Bangkok.

3. The focus for this EGM will be on prevention of violence before it occurs.¹ The EGM will :

- Identify evidence-based and promising prevention strategies for violence against women and girls, including strategies to reduce perpetration of such violence;
- Identify the key gaps in, and challenges for, the current approaches and initiatives in the field of prevention ; and
- Develop action-oriented recommendations to strengthen prevention of violence against women and girls.

4. In determining recommendations for action, the EGM will focus on key measures taken by different stakeholders with respect to prevention and in the context of the following critical issues:

A. Need for a strategic and holistic approach to prevention

- i. Need for political will and commitment to address the structural causes which result in violence against women and girls. Key measures taken by different stakeholders will be examined in the following critical areas :

¹ This type of prevention in a public health context is considered as primary prevention. According to WHO, the other two categories of prevention are secondary prevention: an immediate response after violence has occurred to limit its extent and consequences; and tertiary prevention: longer-term care and support for those who have suffered violence, *WHO Multi-Country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence Against Women: Initial Results on Prevalence, Health Outcomes and Women’s Responses*, 2005.

- Integration of primary prevention into laws, policies and programs;
 - Multi-sectoral approaches and coordination among State entities; collaboration and coordination between State entities and civil society;
 - Governmental leadership at senior levels and allocation of resources;
 - Legal and policy reforms to address gender inequality and discrimination; and
 - Economic empowerment of women and girls.
- ii. Transformation of social norms, behaviors, individuals and engaging relevant groups for sustainable change. Key measures taken by different stakeholders will be examined in the following critical areas:
- Awareness-raising campaigns and advocacy;
 - Community mobilization;
 - Communication for social change;
 - Involvement of men and boys;
 - Fostering networks and partnerships; and
 - Working with individuals, families and young people.
- iii. Engagement of other relevant sectors
- Working with the media;
 - Educational programs/curricula; and
 - Transforming cultures and practices of key institutions and workplaces, in both private and public sectors.

B. Strengthening a culture of evidence-based prevention planning and evaluation.

Key measures taken by different stakeholders will be examined in the following critical areas:

- Data collection on prevalence of violence against women and girls;
- Research on violence against women and girls, risk and protective factors; and
- Monitoring and evaluation of prevention strategies, including economic evaluation.

II. Global and regional legal and policy framework

5. The international community has committed itself to eliminate violence against women and girls² and recognized in various global and regional legal and policy instruments the important role of prevention towards this end. The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, identified violence against women as one of the 12 critical areas of concern that required urgent action to achieve the goals of equality, development and peace, and during its five-year review, the call for such action was re-iterated.³ It called for specific actions in order to prevent and eliminate such violence, including awareness-raising and information campaigns, educational programmes, community mobilization and promotion of the role of the media.⁴ The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women provides that States should develop preventive approaches and

² States' obligations are elaborated in international and regional human rights treaties, documents emanating from United Nations conferences and summits, as well as resolutions adopted by United Nations bodies.

³ General Assembly resolution S-23/3.

⁴ Paragraph 125(d), (e), (g) and (j).

all those measures of a legal, political, administrative and cultural nature that promote the protection of women against any form of violence.⁵

6. Most recently, intergovernmental bodies have placed an increasing focus on prevention of violence against women and girls. In its most recent resolution on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women (65/187), the General Assembly called for Member States to increase their focus on prevention and recognized the important role of the family, the community and civil society in the efforts to eliminate and prevent violence against women and girls. In the context of conflict, the various Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security (1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960) have contributed to a stronger focus on protection needs as well as measures to prevent and deter sexual violence.

7. The Human Rights Council underscored the duty of States to exercise due diligence in prevention and recognized that effective prevention of violence against women and girls requires action at all levels of government, the engagement of several actors and the adoption and implementation of multifaceted and comprehensive approaches that promote gender equality and empowerment of women.⁶ The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences also stressed that the obligation of States to exercise due diligence needs to extend to prevention, including the obligation to address the root causes of violence against women.⁷ Additionally, the human rights treaty bodies have asserted that violence against women constitutes a form of discrimination and have been critical in the recognition of such violence as a human rights issue.⁸ They regularly call on States parties to undertake initiatives and set up programs to prevent violence against women.⁹

8. The Commission on the Status of Women addressed the need for prevention initiatives in its agreed conclusions of 1998 on violence against women,¹⁰ and its agreed conclusions of 2007 on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.¹¹

9. Many of the regional instruments have also identified the requirement for preventing violence against women and girls before it occurs. These include the following:

- *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa* (2003) (The Maputo Protocol);¹²
- International Conference on the Great Lakes Region: *Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children* (2006);¹³
- *ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*;¹⁴

⁵ A/RES/48/104.

⁶ A/HRC/14/12 on accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women: ensuring due diligence in prevention.

⁷ E/CN.4/2006/61.

⁸ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), General Recommendation 19 (1992), A/47/38.

⁹ CEDAW/C/CRI/CO/5-6, para.23; CEDAW/C/DJI/CO/1-3, para.17.

¹⁰ E/1998/27-E/CN.6/1998/12.

¹¹ E/2007/27-E/CN.6/2007/9.

¹² *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa* (2003), Article 4, http://www.achpr.org/english/info/women_en.html

¹³ <https://icglr.org/IMG/pdf/Prevention-Fight-sexual-exploitation.pdf>

¹⁴ *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region*, Articles 4 and 6, <http://www.aseansec.org/16189.htm>

- *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women* (the Convention of Belem do Para) (1994);¹⁵ and
- *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* (2011) ('the **COE Convention**')¹⁶; and
- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.¹⁷

10. An in-depth study on all forms and manifestations of violence against women, issued by the United Nations Secretary-General (2006),¹⁸ stressed the important role of prevention, which was also identified as a main area in the framework for action of his campaign *UNiTE to End Violence against Women*. Similarly, the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children (2006) underscored the importance of prevention and highlighted that violence is not an inevitable human condition and that all forms of violence are preventable.¹⁹ The World Report on Violence and Health (2002)²⁰ also recognized the importance of preventing violence against women and girls before it occurs and recommended the creation of a social environment that allows and promotes equitable and non-violent personal relationships.

III. Current situation and rationale

11. Violence against women and girls is rooted in gender inequality. It is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world and should be prevented to ensure that women and girls lead healthy and productive lives and that their human rights are upheld. The prevalence and incidence of violence is so significant that it has devastating consequences for individuals, families and societies. It leads to physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health problems for individuals and enormous social and economic costs for societies. It is further strongly linked to other forms of violence such as child maltreatment. Many studies highlight the direct and indirect economic impact of violence against women and girls to society. Prevention therefore is also the most cost-effective strategy to address such violence.²¹

12. Whilst there is limited evidence on what works to prevent violence against women and girls, there are a range of promising practices initiated by both Member States and civil society organizations. These practices aim, among other things, to change attitudes and beliefs, to engage men and boys, to

¹⁵ *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women* (Belem do Para) (1994), Articles 7 and 8 <http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-61.html>

¹⁶ *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* (2011), Chapter 3 <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/210.htm>

¹⁷ OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/24.9/49 (1990), http://www.africa-union.org/official_documents/Treaties_%20Conventions_%20Protocols/a.%20C.%20ON%20THE%20RIGHT%20AND%20WELF%20OF%20CHILD.pdf

¹⁸ United Nations Study of the Secretary-General, *Ending violence against women-From words to action* (2006), A/61/122/Add.1 and Corr.1.

¹⁹ United Nations Secretary-General (2006) 'Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children'. Promotion and protection of the rights of children. United Nations General Assembly, Sixty-first session (A/61/299).

²⁰ World Health Organization, Geneva, 2002, http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2002/9241545615_eng.pdf

²¹ Sarah Bott, Andrew Morrison & Mary Ellsberg, 'Preventing and responding to gender-based violence in middle and low-income countries: a global review and analysis', *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3618*, June 2005, p.13. <http://elibrary.worldbank.org/docserver/download/3618.pdf?expires=1335555151&id=id&acname=guest&checksum=7FDDF6BB41FBC02825336CA5EAF8D019>

increase gender equality and empower women, and to support safe environments in early childhood.²² Many of these promising practices include educational programmes, community mobilization, engagement of the media, direct work with individuals, as well as interventions to address harmful conduct and disorders.²³

13. Despite the progress, most prevention programs and initiatives are still carried out in an *ad hoc* manner and rarely in context of a broader governmental commitment to address the structural causes of violence. Furthermore, many of these programs are either not yet evaluated or not evaluated effectively due to the lack of reliable information and data.

14. In order to end violence against women and girls and to prevent it from occurring in the first place, it is necessary to change the prevailing societal and cultural norms that allow violence to take place and to ensure safe and nurturing environments for children in their early stages of life. In order to achieve this, all parts of society, including individuals, those in a relationship/family, and the community need to be engaged in prevention, as factors at all these levels contribute to the risk of violence.²⁴ Consequently, the approach to prevention of violence requires a comprehensive response addressing various issues simultaneously.

IV. Critical Issues

A. Need for a strategic and holistic approach to prevention

15. The “ecological model” identifies the risk factors, as well as their interrelationship, at different levels (individual, family/relationship, community and society) that contribute to the perpetration of violence. It considers how gender, social norms and inequality play out in all levels, starting with ‘the society’ which, *inter alia*, establishes the norms for granting men control over female behavior, acceptance of violence as a way to resolve conflict, notions of masculinity tied to dominance, honor or aggression and rigid gender roles. It also highlights the importance of identifying the protective factors (e.g. more equitable social norms) that decrease or protect against risk, thus further assisting in understanding what has to be addressed in order to reduce such risk.

16. The model then moves to the community level where other risk factors begin to emerge compounding those at the societal level. Some of these include poverty, unemployment, isolation of women and family from support mechanisms. At the level of a relationship or family, some of the risks include control of income and decision-making.

²² Some of the strongest predictors for holding violence-supportive attitudes are being male and having low levels of support for gender equity or equality. See VicHealth, *National Community Attitudes Survey to Violence Against Women, 2009*. <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Freedom-from-violence/National-Community-Attitudes-towards-Violence-Against-Women-Survey-2009.aspx>, p. 8.

²³ See http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/4th_milestones_meeting/publications/en/index.html for the Violence Prevention Series produced by the WHO including those on ‘Promoting gender equality to prevent violence against women’ and ‘Changing Cultural and Social Norms that Promote Violence’.

²⁴ See the World Health Organization, *Preventing Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Against Women – Taking Action and Generating Evidence*, 2010, http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2010/9789241564007_eng.pdf

17. Finally, it identifies factors at the individual level, including but not limited to age, personal exposure to violence, level of education, anti-social behavior and harmful use of alcohol, which can all be risk factors for violence against women and girls in varying degrees.²⁵ The most current thinking on the ecological model confirms that it is factors combining and operating at different levels that lead to the probability of violence occurring and that no single factor will necessarily suffice for violence to occur.²⁶

18. The ecological model's application to prevention of violence is further complemented by an understanding of the interplay of the relevant factors across the spectrum of prevention (e.g. influencing policy and legislation, changing organizational practices, fostering coalitions and networks, educating providers, promoting community education and strengthening individual knowledge and skills).²⁷ This means that the activities and programs which are implemented across the prevention spectrum must be linked to a comprehensive framework which is coordinated to ensure that all levels are appropriately engaged.

19. What clearly emerges from this analysis is that a successful prevention strategy requires a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach which engages relevant governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations and various groups and actors to ensure that the necessary changes are sustainable. Towards this end, it is also important to adopt a life-course perspective that recognizes, amongst other things, the impact of infant and early childhood experiences which can influence the likelihood of violence perpetration at later stages of children's lives.

Political will and commitment to address the structural causes of violence against women and girls

20. Until the structural and institutional factors which result in women's inequality and discrimination are addressed - starting with the attitudes of individuals and moving across the spectrum to the role of Governments in removing barriers - the wide-spread and sustainable prevention of violence against women and girls will remain a challenge.

21. In relation to addressing structural barriers to equality, Governments are responsible for enacting and implementing laws and policies which address women's inequality and for providing the political will and leadership necessary to achieve any social transformation. A key action for them should be to develop and implement laws and policies to ensure that women and girls have equal rights to political participation, education, work, social security and an adequate standard of living.²⁸ Certain groups of women and girls²⁹ are exposed to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and face even greater risks of violence³⁰ and their particular needs have to be taken into consideration. As such,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lori Heise, "What Works to Prevent Partner Violence – An Evidence Overview" Working Paper, December 2011, p. 7

http://www.dfid.gov.uk/R4D/PDF/Outputs/Gender/60887-Preventing_partner_violence_Jan_2012.pdf

²⁷ See Prevention Institute, http://www.eatbettermovemore.org/pdf/1PGR_spectrum_of_prevention_web_020105.pdf

²⁸ Ibid, p. 35.

²⁹ Including indigenous and migrant women, adolescent girls, those from rural areas or ethnic minorities, women with disabilities or living with HIV/AIDS, among others.

³⁰ Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences*, 2 May 2011, (A/HRC/17/26).

Governments should ensure that prevention is linked to or integrated into public health, education, employment and development policies and programmes and not addressed in isolation.³¹

22. Legal and policy reforms must be accompanied and complemented by a range of activities taking place at all other levels and by multiple stakeholders. In order to achieve sustainable changes, it is necessary that all interventions are coordinated by an effective governmental mechanism.

23. To date, many Member States have increasingly adopted a more comprehensive response to preventing violence against women and girls and have contributed to the development and implementation of a number of programmes with promising results. Budget allocation to support these programmes however, has been limited. In order to identify these promising practices, as well as the gaps and challenges which exist for developing a holistic approach to prevention of violence, the EGM will examine key measures taken by multiple stakeholders in the following critical areas:

- Integration of primary prevention into laws, policies and programmes;
- Legal and policy reforms to address gender inequality and discrimination;
- Economic empowerment of women and girls;
- Multi-sectoral approaches and coordination among State entities;
- Collaboration and coordination between State entities and civil society; and
- Governmental leadership at senior levels and allocation of resources.

Transforming social norms and behaviors, individuals and engaging relevant groups for sustainable change

24. The underlying aim of preventing violence is to transform social norms which influence behaviors within the society.³² Sustained prevention of violence against women and girls requires multi-sectoral interventions which reinforce existing positive social norms and create new ones that dissuade individuals from perpetrating it. The successful application of the social norms perspective and relevant strategies in the abandonment of harmful practices indicates that it could also be employed to address violence against women and girls in general.³³

25. The social norms perspective highlights that behaviours may persist because those who engage in them believe that they are expected by others to act in a certain way. For example, violence may not be reported by women and girls because this would break the social norm of family honour or the prevailing social norms that define girls' and women's role in society.

26. To establish or change social norms, action must be undertaken to change social expectations. Such action requires the engagement of multiple actors in society and public discussions to enable a favorable environment where collective agreements can take place. It is also necessary to build alliances with agents of social transformation that go beyond the traditional partnerships which have successfully

³¹ Considerations must be taken in this context for scenarios where Governments themselves are implicated in committing sexual violence, e.g. in the context of intra-State conflicts.

³² Heise, *op.cit.*, p.13.

³³ UNFPA and UNICEF *Accelerating Change: 2011 Annual Report, UNFPA/UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting*, 2011 (<http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/publications/pid/10418>)

addressed violence against women and girls to date, including the important role youth, men and boys play in developing non-violent, pro-social families' and communities' environments. Prevention interventions must be underpinned by community awareness-raising campaigns and mobilization aimed at changing attitudes and reinforcing respect, equality and non-discrimination for women and girls and creating a culture of non-violence.

27. In order to identify gaps and challenges as well as promising practices toward transforming social norms, behaviors, and engaging individuals and relevant groups for sustainable change, the EGM will examine key measures taken by multiple stakeholders in the following critical areas:

- Awareness-raising campaigns and advocacy;
- Community mobilization;
- Communication for social change;
- Involvement of men and boys;
- Fostering networks and partnerships, including community and religious/faith-based leaders, civil society and women's groups; and
- Working with individuals, families and young people.

Engaging other sectors

28. In order to achieve the necessary transformation at all levels, in addition to Governments, both national and local, other public and private sectors should be also targeted and engaged. Some of these include:

- Schools and educational institutions to develop respectful relationships and gender equality training and integrate them into school curricula;
- Media to influence the way in which violence against women is portrayed, sanctioned or condoned and gender stereotypes are perpetuated; and
- Employers and other institutions, both public and private, to ensure change in organizational and institutional culture, implementation of anti-discriminatory policies and practices and encouragement of women's participation at all levels.

B. Strengthening a culture of evidence-based prevention planning and evaluation³⁴

29. Measuring the impact of prevention programmes is important in designing strategies for their scaling-up. Identifying successful and sustainable solutions, as well as developing a better understanding of the impact of risk and protective factors, can only be achieved through effective monitoring and evaluation. Although the potential of many prevention initiatives is promising, there are some prevailing challenges to measure the effectiveness of such programmes, including the lack of reliable data and rigorous evaluation as well as the application of inconsistent methodology to assess their impact.³⁵

³⁴ *Researching Violence Against Women-A practical guide for researchers and activists*, World Health Organization and PATH, 2005

³⁵ *Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on good practices in efforts aimed at preventing violence against women*, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A-HRC-17-23.pdf>

30. Additionally, many of the prevention programmes which have been implemented and evaluated to date have largely been undertaken in isolation of an overall framework or systemic approach and without clear theoretical underpinnings. It is possible therefore, that the initiatives which do not work in isolation might work in the context of a holistic approach.

31. Furthermore, whilst changes in behavior and attitudes have been identified within shorter timeframes, the impacts of many significant and sustainable prevention interventions are not seen until long after the action has been taken. As such, there is critical need for more research, monitoring and evaluation of programmes in relation to the short, medium and long term impacts.

32. Sustaining Government commitment to prevention in this context is difficult, especially given the funds and resources needed for long-term evaluations. In addition to the resources required, it is critical to develop appropriate evaluation methodologies to deal with the complexities of multi-dimensional issues and multi-sectoral approaches.

33. In order to identify the remaining gaps and challenges as well as promising practices in addressing these challenges, the EGM will consider ways in which the evidence base can be continually improved by examining key measures taken by multiple stakeholders in the following critical areas:

- Data collection on the prevalence of violence against women and girls;
- Research on the risk and protective factors influencing violence against women and girls; and
- Monitoring and evaluation of prevention strategies, including economic evaluation.

V. Profile of Participants

34. The EGM will be attended by 18 relevant experts³⁶ appointed by the Under Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women in consultation with ESCAP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO. In selecting the experts, the criteria of geographical balance and, to the extent possible, gender balance, will be taken into consideration. Experts will include academics and practitioners from relevant fields, as well as representatives from networks and associations which address violence against women and girls, in accordance with the objectives identified above. UN Women and the other co-host UN agencies will provide travel and daily subsistence allowance to appointed experts.

35. Observers from Governments, the United Nations system, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and academia are welcome to attend the EGM at their own expense.

VI. Documentation

36. The documentation for the meeting will include:

- A background paper commissioned by UN Women and its partners outlining the major issues to be discussed;
- Papers prepared by experts on specific issues in line with their expertise; and

³⁶ Final numbers to be confirmed.

- Papers prepared by observers, which will be made available but not formally presented at the EGM.

VII. Organization

37. The EGM will be convened by UN Women in collaboration with ESCAP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO on 17 to 20 September 2012, in Bangkok.

38. The EGM will be conducted in English and all documentation will be in English.

39. The EGM will meet in plenary and in working groups. Presentations by the experts in plenary will create the framework for discussions. Experts will work in small working groups to discuss specific issues/themes and draft concrete policy and programme recommendations targeted at various stakeholders. The recommendations of working groups will be reviewed and finalized in plenary.

VIII. Expected Outcomes

40. The outcome of the EGM will be a report, containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations directed at Member States and other stakeholders. The report will be made available at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women and on the website of UN Women and other co-host agencies.