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UNFPA

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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PROGRAMMING FOR PREVENTION, PROTECTION AND CARE



ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTENTS

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This booklet is intended primarily for development practitioners. It provides practical points to consider when designing and implementing projects addressing violence against women. This collection of 'good practices', drawn from UNFPA experience in the field, is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive. Violence against women manifests itself in different ways in different societies—from psychological abuse and physical harm to early marriage and ritual slavery—and the pathways to success vary. Nevertheless, a number of shared approaches described in this booklet have proved successful in ten projects in five regions where UNFPA is supporting national programmes. These approaches are based on a deep understanding of the culture in which they are operating and rely on the active participation of the communities they serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Thoraya A. Obaid". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'T' and 'O'.

Thoraya A. Obaid
Executive Director
United Nations Population Fund

The projects cited on the following pages were drawn from **Programming to Address Violence against Women: Ten Case Studies**, published by UNFPA and available at www.unfpa.org/publications

Readers may wish to refer to the project summaries on page 66 for a fuller understanding of the context.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

PEOPLE & CHANGE

LOCAL CONTEXT

HARD DATA

CULTURAL VALUES

RECOGNIZE THAT CULTURE IS DYNAMIC AND PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO CHANGE

Though they may appear traditional, people are often willing to adopt new attitudes, behaviours or practices if they are convinced that such change will improve their lives.

In Kenya, for instance, women who traditionally performed female genital mutilation/cutting have turned into powerful allies in the fight against it. The creation of alternative livelihoods for these women, as well as awareness-raising campaigns highlighting the dangers of the practice, were important factors in their decision.

In Bangladesh, despite long-standing traditions of child marriage and the giving and receiving of dowries, many villagers now recognize these practices as harmful and are pressuring their peers to reject them. Local imams, who were encouraged to speak out about violence against women in the context of the Koran, were crucial in changing public opinion.

“It has become clear that culture is not a sort of ‘primordial constraint’ from the past that hinders economic and social progress. Culture is constantly being changed by the people who construct it in the first place.”

THORAYA A. OBAID

UNFPA Executive Director, from the Traverse Lecture, delivered in Bern, Switzerland on 13 December 2005

UNDERSTAND THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Violations of women's rights are often sanctioned under the cover of local cultural practices and norms. People simply inherit the customs and traditions by which they live and rarely think to question them.

Promoting change requires an understanding of the role of violence against women in a particular context—its origins, how it operates, the myths associated with it, and the mechanisms and attitudes that perpetuate it. One must explore how victims themselves perceive this violence, how others perceive the victim, and the consequences—if any—for the perpetrator.

A successful project in Colombia began with a labour-intensive process of learning about communities. In the words of one project staff member, understanding the needs and aspirations of people requires that you 'enter their reality'—that you spend the time necessary to understand their beliefs, motivations, perceptions and values—without making judgements or casting blame.

“It is important to approach Magdalena Medio [Colombia] and its problems without rushing, so that we may listen calmly, so that we may understand the people, their rhythms, their way of understanding, their way of doing things.”

A Jesuit priest & Deputy Director of the Programme for Development and Peace in Magdalena Medio, Colombia

GATHER HARD DATA AND SOLICIT EXPERT OPINION

Often, the logic of hard facts can convince people to think critically about issues that have long been avoided.

In Romania, it was not until the results of a 1999 survey were broadcast by the media that domestic violence was acknowledged as a serious problem.

Similarly, credible evidence and the opinion of experts can alter the mindset of community members, who may not automatically accept the views of a project worker. In Bangladesh, research findings, proceedings of court cases and media coverage of violence against women were all used to create awareness. The opinions of specialists, such as religious leaders, doctors and lawyers, were also solicited.

In Mauritania, a research project initiated by UNFPA gathered, for the first time in that country, data on rape and other forms of sexual violence. The findings shed light on a problem that had previously gone unnoticed and served as justification for subsequent action. It took this basic evidence to convince the community that a problem existed.

“It is taboo to talk about sex, let alone sexual violence.”

NANY BRAHIM

A midwife in Mauritania

IDENTIFY AND BUILD UPON POSITIVE CULTURAL VALUES

When dealing with culturally sensitive issues, one should never assume that all customs and traditions are harmful. Indeed, many traditions are positive and can be used as powerful levers for change.

In Bangladesh, for example, the age-old practice of consulting with village elders was cultivated as a means to challenge violence against women.

The chairman of the Union Council in Baragachha, Bangladesh, says he uses traditional religious precepts to influence abusive husbands who are also devout. He reminds such men of the respect accorded to mothers in the Koran—that 'Paradise lies under the feet of the mother'—and that the women they have just beaten are the mothers of

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