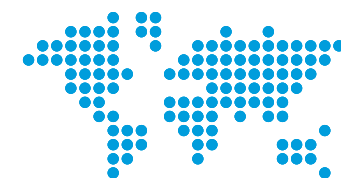


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# A FRAMEWORK TO UNDERPIN ACTION **TO PREVENT** VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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# FOREWORD

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UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL  
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UN WOMEN



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Across the world, violence against women and girls remains one of the most serious human rights violations, both a cause and consequence of gender inequality and discrimination. Its continued presence is one of the clearest markers of societies out of balance; the rise of voices that condemn it as unacceptable is a signal for hope of change, and an entry point for work to prevent it.

The focus of this framework is prevention: the steps that, through concerted action, we can take to tackle the underlying structures that still permit early marriage, female genital mutilation, the turning of a blind eye to domestic violence, the impunity of rapists, the vulnerability of a teenager reading abusive texts in her bedroom, the discriminatory and hostile attitude of service providers, including in police stations or courtrooms to women’s testimony of violence experienced.

We have made much progress over the last 30 years in improving the laws that distinguish these acts and others as ones of violence and invasion of human rights. This has been important. However, on their own, they have not been enough to change the daily

experiences of girls and women, or indeed those of boys and men. They have not yet changed the way that people think and behave, in public spaces, in private homes, in office environments, in schools, on buses and trains, in refugee camps, online and in cyberspace.

We want to foster a sense of responsibility that does not subside and a new recognition of the unacceptability of the status quo. To prevent violence before it happens or reoccurs means that our work has to demonstrate and teach what inequality is, and how its continued existence is preventing progress. We know that community mobilization, group interventions for both women and men, educational programmes and empowerment of women are some of the interventions that have impact.

Meeting the target to eliminate violence against women in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires a step-change in concerted action. When more than 70 world leaders took the podium in New York at the Global Leaders’ Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment on 27 September 2015, the majority of them made

commitments to ending violence against women and girls. The leadership of our UN system partners in taking joint action under this framework, along with the determined advocacy of the Secretary-General are strong assets in weaving consistent approaches. Added to this is the essential impetus for change in social structures that will come from media that supports positive stereotypes of girls and women as equal achievers, schools that teach both boys and girls to be academically adventurous, companies that recruit and pay women on a par with men, and that provide opportunities for both parents to share in child care and make choices about their careers and employment.

I am therefore very pleased to present the current framework to underpin action to prevent violence against women, as one of

our United Nations inter-agency responses to what the UN System can do together to eliminate violence. The framework provides guidance to policy makers and other actors working in this field. This framework will soon be accompanied by a series of additional tools and resources which provide more detailed information about what to do for preventing violence against women that can be adapted to national contexts and needs.

I believe that if we all work together, governments, civil society organizations, the UN system, and the private sector, together with individuals in communities mobilizing through new solidarity movements, we will eventually achieve a more equal world - A Planet 50-50 - where women and girls will live free from violence and discrimination.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a trailing line.

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

# Acknowledgements

## Development of the framework would not have been possible without:

- The courage of the many women subjected to violence who have spoken out about their experiences.
- Activists, especially from women’s organizations located across the globe, who have advocated for appropriate service provision and support for women subjected to violence; for legislative and administrative reforms holding perpetrators of this violence to account; and for interventions that prevent violence against women.
- The efforts by governments who are taking actions towards ending violence against women through legislative reforms, policy initiatives and implementing programmes.
- Input from women across the globe, in particular through the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and most recently, the post-2015 development agenda. All of them provided further opportunities to position the prevention of violence against women at the centre of efforts to realize their human rights, and to promote economic and human development.
- Cross-sector practitioners, researchers, government representatives and donors who have advanced the prevention of violence against women within and outside their own countries, including through development of conceptual and practice-based materials. This framework draws on these materials and they are listed at Appendix 1.
- The enduring commitment of the UN system to develop structures and programmes to respond to violence against women, to prevent its occurrence, and to advance knowledge of prevention strategies. The UN agencies engaged in supporting the development of this framework have shared their time and knowledge to ensure that the root causes of violence against women are addressed, and that we continue to develop a shared global understanding of what prevention of violence against women entails, and what are effective prevention strategies. The agency representatives are thanked for their commitment and input: Kalliopi Mingeirou and Tania Farha for coordinating the development of the framework (UN Women), Raphael Crowe (ILO), Veronica Birga and Adwoa Kufuor (OHCHR), Suki Beavers and Diego Antoni (UNDP), Joanna Herat and Jane Freedman (UNESCO), Upala Devi (UNFPA), Claudia Garcia Moreno and Avni Amin (WHO). Our consultants, Lyn Walker and Kim Webster for their research and dedication to finalize the current framework and Olivier Uzel for the design.

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# INTRODUCTION

“Millions of women and girls around the world are assaulted, beaten, raped, mutilated or even murdered in what constitutes appalling violations of their human rights. We must fundamentally challenge the culture of discrimination that allows this violence to continue.”  
**UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.**

Violence against women (VAW) is a one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world, rooted in gender inequality, discrimination and harmful cultural and social norms. It is also increasingly recognized as a public health issue that adversely affects the health of women. It is estimated that approximately 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO, 2013a). The prevalence and serious impacts of this violence make it one of the most significant issues to be addressed in our time.

Due to sustained efforts by the women’s movement, governments and other stakeholders, the issue of VAW is now positioned as a priority on global human rights, health and development agendas. The elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls and of all harmful practices are now part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and included as specific targets (i.e. targets 5.2 and 5.3) in the Sustainable Development Goals, providing a strong mandate for moving forward. Much of the responses to date to VAW have focused primarily on intervening with affected individuals after the violence has occurred. Such strategies are essential to

mitigate the devastating mental, physical, social and economic effects for women experiencing violence, ensure justice and accountability, and prevent its recurrence. It is important to continue to improve these responses. At the same time, there is also an increasing need to address the broader factors that contribute to prevalence at a population level, and to implement programmes that prevent such violence from occurring in the first place.

There is increasing evidence that a range of individual, community and societal characteristics and conditions are associated with a higher risk of VAW. Among these are gender-discriminatory laws and policies, as well as social norms, behaviours and attitudes that condone such violence and that promote unequal gender power relations. However, these are neither fixed nor inherent features of particular individuals or groups – rather, they are shaped by social and economic forces, and hence can be changed over time. This, along with a growing body of prevention practice, suggests that it is possible to prevent VAW. It will require a coordinated and multi-sectoral approach involving multiple strategies implemented in a mutually reinforcing way with individuals, as well as communities and organizations, and at the broader societal level.

Living free of violence is a fundamental human right and taking steps to prevent this problem is essential to ensure that the human rights of women are realized. Effective prevention has the potential to both prevent violence from occurring in the first place and to complement the actions of the response system to avert repeated cycles of violence. In doing so, it also holds the promise of reducing the social and economic costs of violence. In addition to those borne by individual women,

these include the costs of providing health care, police and judiciary services and child and welfare support, as well as costs resulting from the erosion of human capital and lost productivity.

Prevention cannot be a short-term effort, but rather an endeavour that requires ongoing commitment from governments and other stakeholders, increased research to inform and monitor progress, and persistent action that addresses VAW at its source.

The framework contained in this document draws together contemporary knowledge and practice in violence prevention. Its focus is on addressing the

root causes as well as risk and protective factors (see *Key terms and concepts* below) associated with VAW. It outlines roles that stakeholders working across countries, regions, communities, sectors and disciplines can play in contributing to the eradication of VAW. It is envisaged that the framework will be utilized to underpin future strategies to prevent VAW across the globe and will act as a unifying ‘road map’ to maximize the success of combined efforts. The framework is intended to be a living document which will be updated and revised as new practices emerge, and in consultation with partners.

# 1. KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS USED IN THE FRAMEWORK

**Culture** – distinctive patterns of values, beliefs and ways of life of a group of people. This can be a group that shares a common characteristic such as gender, ethnicity or race. It can also apply to a range of social entities such as organizations (e.g. the culture of a football club), or communities or groups with a common interest or shared geographic origin. Culture is a dynamic concept that is influenced by environmental, historical, political, geographical, linguistic, spiritual and social factors (Paradies et al., 2009). In this framework, the term ‘culture’ is used in this broad sense. This is in contrast to some other contexts in which it is used interchangeably with race or ethnicity.

**Gender** – the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female, the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable (Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, 2001).

**Gender inequality** – the gender norms, roles, cultural practices, policies and laws, economic factors and institutional practices that collectively contribute to and perpetuate unequal power relations between women and men. This inequality disproportionately disadvantages women in most societies.

**Gender equality** – the concept that all human beings, regardless of sex, are equal in dignity and rights and free to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make choices without discrimination and the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices.

**Gender transformative approaches** – encourage critical awareness of gender roles and norms. They include ways to change harmful gender norms in order to foster more equitable power relationships between women and men, and between women and others in the community. They promote women’s rights and dignity; challenge unfair and unequal distribution of resources and allocation of duties between men and women; and consider the specific needs of women and men. Such approaches can be implemented separately with women and girls, and with men and boys. However, they are also being increasingly implemented with both women and girls and men and boys together and across generations – either simultaneously, or in a coordinated way in order to challenge harmful masculine and feminine norms and unequal power relations that may be upheld by everyone in the community (WHO, 2013b).

**Intimate partner violence (IPV)** – any behaviour by a man or a woman, or a boy or a girl, within an intimate relationship, that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm to the other person in the relationship. This is the most common form of VAW (WHO and LSHTM, 2010). IPV may sometimes be referred to as ‘domestic violence’ or ‘family violence’, although these terms also encompass violence by and against other family members.

**Non-partner sexual assault (NPSA)** – the experience of being forced to perform any unwanted sexual act to or by someone other than a husband or partner (adapted from WHO and LSHTM, 2013)

**Protective factor** – an attribute or exposure that reduces the probability of the occurrence of a disease or other specified outcome (in this framework, VAW). See also risk factor and root cause.

**Risk factor** – an attribute or exposure that increases the probability of the occurrence of a disease or other specified outcome (in this framework, VAW). See also protective factor and root cause.

**Root cause** – that which is directly responsible for initiating a problem (in this framework, gender inequality is a root cause of VAW). It is typically a necessary condition for the problem to occur, and needs to be considered, along with other factors – in this framework referred to as risk and protective factors – to address the problem.

**Sex** – the biological characteristics that typically define humans as male, female and/or intersex.

**Social norm** – a contributing factor and social determinant of certain practices in a community that may be positive and strengthen its identity and cohesion, or may be negative and potentially lead to harm. It is also a social rule of behaviour which members of a community are expected to observe. This creates and sustains a collective sense of social obligation and expectation that conditions the behaviour of individual community members, even if they are not personally in agreement with the practice. If individuals reject the social norm they can risk ostracism, shunning and stigmatization. This marginalization may include the loss of important economic and social support and social mobility. Conversely, if individuals conform to a social norm, they expect to be rewarded, for example, through inclusion and praise. Changing social norms that underlie and justify violence and harmful practices requires that such expectations are challenged and modified (adapted from United Nations, 2014, p. 14).

**Systems approach** – involves bringing together a range of structures, functions and capacities from across different sectors to respond to and prevent VAW in a given context. This may include relevant sub-systems (e.g. the health system, the justice system, the education system), agencies, social, civic, government and non-government organizations and institutions, communities and families. The system is organized around a common goal and attention is paid to coordinating the actions of different actors, organizations and sub-systems so that each is mutually reinforcing. A systems approach involves a formal governance structure, and emphasizes cooperation, collaboration and coordination among stakeholders. Roles and responsibilities are agreed between stakeholders according to their respective skills and attributes.

**Violence against women (VAW)** – 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 private life (United Nations, 1993).



## 2. PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls (VAW) was a priority theme of the fifty-seventh session of the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women held in 2013. The meeting drew on preparatory work to which a range of UN entities and experts from across the globe contributed (United Nations, 2013). This included the work of the Expert Group Meeting on the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls, held in Bangkok, Thailand in 2012 (UN Women, 2012).

The agreed conclusions of the Commission's fifty-seventh session called upon governments, UN entities, international and regional organizations, national human rights institutions, civil society – including non-governmental organizations – the private sector, employers' organizations, trade unions, media and other relevant actors to participate in a coordinated global effort engaging multiple strategies across sectors to prevent violence against women and girls (United Nations, 2013). In addition to initiatives to prevent further violence by strengthening responses to affected individuals, the Commission also emphasized the need to address social norms, structures and practices that increase the probability of violence against women and girls.

The evidence, concepts and theories involved in preventing VAW have been documented in a range of international sources – key documents are listed in Appendix 1. It is not the intent of this framework to identify any new approaches or findings. Rather, the aim is to bring together and synthesize the findings of these many studies into a single framework agreed by key UN agencies. It is envisaged that the framework will promote a common understanding and approach to

prevention, and more specifically, that it will:

- Be utilized by relevant UN and international agencies and national policy makers to plan and implement coordinated and well-targeted approaches to prevention.
- Support local, regional and national planning and implementation of evidence-informed strategies to prevent VAW.
- Strengthen a shared understanding regarding the factors contributing to and protecting against VAW, and the role different sectors and disciplines can play to prevent this violence.
- Assist a range of actors to develop a common language to discuss the prevention of VAW.
- Benchmark current evidence and knowledge to provide a base on which to continue to build.

The framework is not intended as a detailed 'how-to' guide for those implementing specific initiatives to prevent VAW, but rather for those engaged in policy development and programme and project planning in organizations, communities and governments. It is anticipated that it will be especially important in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, where specific targets and indicators will apply to many of the precursors of VAW, in particular those relating to gender inequality and poverty reduction, as well as to the elimination of VAW itself. It is also important to consider this framework in the context of specific areas of work such as the forthcoming global plan of action to strengthen the role of the health system in addressing interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children.

## 3. THE SCOPE OF THE FRAMEWORK AND APPROACH TO ITS DEVELOPMENT

### 3.1. A focus on intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence

Violence against women (VAW) manifests in different forms including, but not limited to:

- intimate partner violence
- non-partner sexual assault
- forced pregnancy and abortion
- trafficking
- so-called 'honor crimes'
- sexual harassment and exploitation
- stalking
- sorcery/witchcraft-related violence
- gender-related killings/femicide/feminicide
- female genital mutilation
- child, early and forced marriage.

Some groups are disproportionately affected by VAW because they experience multiple forms of discrimination. These groups include: women with disabilities, women from ethnic or racial minorities or indigenous groups, sex workers, lesbian, bisexual or transgender or intersex women, among others. VAW tends to increase in

specific settings such as prisons, institutions for people with disabilities, and juvenile centers. It also tends to increase in settings of humanitarian crises including conflicts or wars.

Based on the data available, intimate partner violence (IPV) and non-partner sexual assault (NPSA) are among the most prevalent forms of VAW globally. These forms of violence, as discussed in the following section, have serious consequences for women and their children, as well as for communities and nations. While there remains much to be learned, knowledge and practice relating to these forms are better developed relative to other forms of VAW. For these reasons, many of the strategies suggested in this framework are drawn from research and practice in addressing these two forms of VAW.

However, many of the general principles and approaches, and some of the strategies identified may also apply to other forms of violence and harmful practices against women, since many of these forms of violence are interrelated and share common risk factors (Heise, 2011, p.4).

### 3.2. Adolescent girls

Adolescence is a stage when girls begin to establish intimate relationships with men and boys, exposing them to the risk of intimate partner and dating violence as well as sexual violence from non-partners. In addition, in many countries where there is a high prevalence of harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage, girls are likely to be at heightened risk of IPV (UNICEF, 2014b, p. 13). Child, early and forced marriage is a human rights violation and

in most circumstances a harmful practice in itself (Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices). Despite the progress that has been made in ending child marriage, it is estimated that at the current pace of change, by 2050 some 700 million women worldwide will have been married as children (UNICEF, 2014a).

The risk of sexual violence perpetrated against women outside of their families also increases in adolescence (UNICEF, 2014b, p. 167). Although most of the research on IPV and NPSA has involved adult women, it is reasonable to assume that some of these issues may also be relevant to adolescent girls (herein referred to as women).

3.3. A focus on stable contexts

The approaches proposed in this framework depend on governments being in a position to lead prevention efforts. While there is likely to be some overlap in approaches undertaken in stable settings and those undertaken in less stable circumstances – such as conflict and post-conflict settings and fragile states –knowledge and practice in prevention in non-stable contexts is still emerging and requires further development before more specific guidance can be offered (UN Women, 2012).

A list of resources pertaining to other forms of VAW and VAW in conflict and other humanitarian settings is provided in Appendix 2.

3.4. Prevention as part of a comprehensive approach

Addressing VAW involves a continuum of interdependent and mutually reinforcing interventions. While they are conceptualized in different ways by different organizations, the following continuum is used to underpin this framework:

- Preventing violence before it occurs (that is, preventing ‘new cases’ of VAW).
- Preventing the recurrence of violence (that is, preventing women from being re-victimised and men from perpetrating further violence).
- Preventing or limiting the impacts of VAW, through the provision of short- and long-term care and support.

All levels of intervention are important for a

consequences. As can be seen above there is considerable overlap and interdependence between levels of prevention, and between activity implemented before and after violence has occurred. However, the focus of this framework is on prevention as described in the shaded parts of Table 1 below. This includes opportunities to prevent violence before it occurs through early intervention.

The importance of an effective response system and links between the response and prevention systems are noted as crucial foundations for prevention (see section 6.2.1). However, responses to violence are the subject of existing policy frameworks. While ongoing reform of the response system through these existing frameworks is critical, such reform is not the focus

Table 1: Focus of the framework and its place in a comprehensive systems approach to eliminating VAW

	Prevention	Early intervention	Response
	focuses on the population as a whole, and the range of settings in which gender relations and violent behaviour are shaped, to address factors leading to or protecting against VAW	focuses on individuals and groups with a high risk of perpetrating/being a victim of VAW and the factors contributing to that risk	focuses on those affected by violence and on building systemic, organizational and community capacity to respond to them
Preventing violence before it occurs	Build social structures, norms and practices that protect against VAW and/or reduce the risk of it occurring	Mitigate the impact of prior exposure to risk factors and build protective factors	Contribute to social norms against VAW by demonstrating accountability for violence and women’s right to remedy and support
Preventing recurring violence	Build social structures, norms and practices that protect against and/or reduce the risk of recurring exposure to/perpetration of violence		Provide remedy and support to women affected by violence and hold individual men using it accountable. In demonstrating this, it also strengthens social norms against VAW
Preventing long-term harm from violence	Build social structures, norms and practices that maximize the prospects of rebuilding lives after violence, minimize its impacts and reduce the likelihood of recurrence in the longer term		Support to individuals to prevent negative impacts of violence, promote rebuilding and reduce the likelihood of recurrence in the longer term
Examples	Building women’s economic independence, while working with both men and women to strengthen equal and respectful relationships. Shifting norms toward gender relations and VAW through mutually reinforcing group education, community mobilization and local media activities.	A psycho-educational programme for children who are exposed to parental violence to address the consequences of this exposure as a risk factor for future perpetration or victimization.	A workplace policy to strengthen support for women workers affected by IPV (e.g. paid leave provisions, co-worker sensitivity training). Legislative and procedural reform to strengthen access to justice for victims of sexual assault.

= the focus of this framework

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