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FEARLESS

Fearless women and girls - leading the way, transforming lives

Photo: Kalka Bro-Jørgensen

INTRODUCTION

Violence, or the threat of it, is a daily reality for millions of women and girls, making it one of the most widespread and insidious human rights abuses. Despite decades of hard-fought campaigning by feminist and women's rights organisations around the world and numerous instruments to eliminate violence against women and girls (VAWG), levels of violence have remained unacceptably high.

To really understand the scale of the problem, ActionAid carried out new analysis on the mortality levels for women facing violence. Our research shows that globally, 119 women are killed *every day* by a partner or family member¹ - a figure that doesn't account for other forms of VAWG.² At this rate, over half a million women and girls will die by 2030 – the deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, signed off in New York last year.

It is therefore welcome that women and girls feature strongly in the recently agreed development framework, including a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment (SDG 5) and target to eliminate VAWG in the public and private spheres (Target 5:2). But the existence of these targets alone will not bring about the change necessary. This will require a redoubling of efforts and in particular a renewed emphasis on the role of women and girls organisations leading these efforts.

States, as the primary duty bearers, have clear obligations under international law to eliminate VAWG. In order to turn the promises of the SDGs into a reality for women and girls, ActionAid calls on governments, donors and the international community to prioritise the following key actions:

1. SUPPORT AND RESOURCE WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE ACTION.
2. STEP UP FINANCING FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND THE ELIMINATION OF VAWG.
3. SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF LAWS AND NATIONAL ACTION PLANS TO END VAWG.
4. STRENGTHEN INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE SDGS AND THE ELIMINATION OF VAWG.
5. HOLD CORPORATE ACTORS ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR PART IN ENDING VAWG.

The SDGs provide the international community with a critical opportunity to take this important agenda forward over the next 15 years. ActionAid is standing with fearless women and girls speaking out against violence. But violence will only stop when we all – governments, donors, international organisations, corporate actors, civil society organisations, women and men – speak out against it. Join us to demand change and eliminate all forms of VAWG.

CONTEXTUALISING VAWG

VAWG is one of the most extreme manifestations of deeply entrenched gender inequalities, used to maintain and reinforce male power by controlling women's bodies, freedoms and opportunities. The prevalence of VAWG across the world today continues to be truly unacceptable; on average one in three women and girls will experience some form of violence in their lifetime. The threat is real and pervasive – in the home, on the streets, at school, at work, and many other spaces, whether in times of peace or conflict.³ And while all women are at risk, women living in poverty, LGBTI and migrant women, those of young or old age, or with HIV/AIDS status, are significantly more at risk.⁴

Although remarkable progress has been made over the last four decades towards recognising and addressing the injustice of gender inequality and VAWG, these advances are currently at risk of being rolled back by rising levels of economic inequality, religious fundamentalisms, and shrinking democratic and civil society spaces the world over. ActionAid research has found that women are twice as likely to experience violence in countries with weaker civil rights, than in those with stronger civil rights frameworks. In addition, an analysis of a UNODC study on global homicide⁵ revealed that 119 women are killed every day by an intimate partner or family member - this equates to five women every hour. Shockingly, lack of data from many countries as well as on particular forms of intimate partner / family homicide,⁶ such as so-called 'honour' killing, dowry-related murder, murder related to sorcery and witchcraft allegations, means that this figure is likely to be an underestimate.

Concerted action and unprecedented levels of resources are needed NOW to defend and sustain the progress to date, and eliminate VAWG in line with the commitments made in the SDGs.

PUTTING WOMEN AND GIRLS AT THE HEART OF THE SDGS

Over recent years, the UK Government has prioritised women and girls in its development assistance, and successfully advocated for a strong gender equality goal and elimination of VAWG target in the SDGs.

Now, that the SDGs are agreed, ActionAid offers a series of recommendations⁷ for how the UK can make a similar contribution during the implementation phase by aligning its resources most effectively behind proven interventions on VAWG to deliver the best outcomes for women and girls.⁸

PRIORITY ACTION 1:

SUPPORT AND RESOURCE WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE ACTION

Far from being helpless victims, women and girls are speaking out, often putting their lives on the line to challenge VAWG and gender inequality. A study covering 70 countries across four decades found that the mobilisation of independent women's rights organisations was paramount. It was the single most important factor in ensuring that global commitments to end VAWG were translated into meaningful, enduring action at local level.

From providing life-saving services, raising marginalised women's voices, to holding governments to account for their policies and practices, women's rights organisations and Women Human Rights Defenders have long been at the forefront of the fight to end violence. Increasingly, however, their voices are being muted and their vital work is threatened. It is therefore imperative that they feature as key partners in the development and implementation of all global VAWG commitments, including achieving the SDGs' VAWG target. Crucially they must be funded – ideally through funding instruments dedicated to supporting women's collective action and women's voice and agency.

Supporting women's collective action through respecting civil society and democratic spaces, protecting Women Human Rights Defenders, and resourcing women's rights organisations should be a guiding principle for the UK government. The SDGs cannot be achieved without it.

PRIORITY ACTION 2:

STEP UP FINANCING FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND THE ELIMINATION OF VAWG

"Governments can't say they want to address violence against women and look for quick wins – they need to fund women's rights organisations."
Onyinyechi Okechukwu,
ActionAid Nigeria

All actors, including governments, donors, international organisations, NGOs and corporate actors, have a role to play in mobilising resources and building a transformative architecture of financing for gender equality and the elimination of VAWG. For example, national governments must mobilise maximum available resources through progressive taxation to finance laws and national action plans to end VAWG. Corporates also have a role here by paying their taxes in full and ensuring that all workers, especially women, are paid a living wage. International donors should establish diverse bilateral and multilateral instruments, to fill the funding gap for gender equality and the elimination of VAWG, including through resourcing women's rights organisations.

In particular, donor champions, including the UK, can effectively turn the tide and be a source of real transformation for women and girls worldwide. The best way to achieve this – as flagship gender equality funds, such as UN Gender Equality fund or Dutch FLOWI⁹, have shown – would be through significant and scaled up investment in women's rights organisations.

A study by the Association for Women's Rights in Development found that women's rights' organisations are chronically underfunded, with an average income of just US\$20,000 per year.¹⁰

Meanwhile, OECD figures for 2013-2014 show that, of the US\$39.9 billion in aid committed to support gender equality on average per year, just over 1% was reported as direct funding for women's equality organisations and institutions.¹¹ For the same years, the UK government reported a total of US\$30,5 million on average per year in direct support to women's equality organisations and institutions.¹²

In line with its continued focus on women and girls, the UK government should galvanise action for the implementation of SDG5 and elimination of VAWG by establishing a dedicated funding instrument to increase quality funding available to women's rights organisations and women-led movements. This should include those led by adolescent girls, women with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ groups, as well as those operating in challenging contexts, such as conflict and humanitarian settings.

In order for such a funding mechanism to address the current funding gap for gender equality and women's rights organisations and show impact, it would need to make an investment of at least £70 million over a period of three years and prioritise core, flexible, multi-year funding.¹³

PRIORITY ACTION 3:

SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF LAWS AND NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

The world is not short of commitments to eliminate VAWG. From the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) to the Istanbul Convention (2011), there are numerous international and regional agreements in place. These have led to welcome new legislation in many countries, but gaps and poor implementation remain a major challenge.

Laws combined with national action plans (NAPs) – nationally tailored roadmaps to prevent and respond to VAWG in the medium and long term – are key strategies to trigger the successful implementation of existing and new commitments, including SDG5 and the elimination of VAWG. Effective NAPs should recognise and address multiple fora and sites of VAWG. They should bring together a range of actors (health and education workers, police, judiciary, urban planners, community leaders, civil society, and others) in a structured process to deliver services to respond to and prevent abuse, while also being fully costed and well resourced.¹⁴

The SDGs' target to eliminate VAWG should serve as a catalyst to reinvigorate universal efforts around NAPs. On the road to 2030, countries without NAPs should come forward and develop ambitious plans. In countries where NAPs already exist, governments should review progress and accelerate implementation. Donors such as the UK also have a key role to play in supporting the development, costing and implementation of such plans through, for instance, sector policy dialogues, technical assistance, and aid.

The UK government should provide necessary technical assistance and funding to support developing countries to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate their National Action Plans on VAWG.

PRIORITY ACTION 4:

STRENGTHEN INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE SDGs AND THE ELIMINATION OF VAWG

Robust accountability mechanisms will be critical to achieving SDG5 and its targets. In order to do just that the international community must take stock of the progress to date on elimination of VAWG and agree ambitious review and follow up mechanisms to monitor the realisation of SDGs.

For that purpose, the UN Secretary General should launch a global periodic monitoring report (e.g. every three years), similar to the *2006 UN Secretary General's In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women*,¹⁵ on the state of progress in eliminating all forms of VAWG. This would provide a key tool to facilitate governments' accountability for implementation of long standing and new obligations. A new accountability tool in its own right, such a report could also feed into and support global follow up and review of the SDGs' VAWG target, as well as incentivise quality and timely data collection at country level.

The UK government should support a UN-led global monitoring report, enforceable SDG review and follow up mechanisms, as well as transformative indicators for SDG5 and the target on VAWG.

PRIORITY ACTION 5:

Address underlying cause of women's economic inequality and hold corporate actors accountable for their part in ending VAWG

Women's economic inequality - an injustice and development challenge in its own right - exacerbates women's vulnerability to violence and makes it more difficult for them to break the cycle of abuse. Nowhere in the world are women economically equal to men.¹⁶ ActionAid has found that women in the Global South could be \$9 trillion better off¹⁷ if their pay and access to paid work were equal to that of men. Poverty, discrimination in the labour market, and the lack of protective mechanisms all make women easy targets for violent abuse in the workplace, meanwhile undermining their economic rights. This leaves them at greater risk of violence at home, in the streets, in the workplace and elsewhere.¹⁸ The state is the primary duty-bearer for guaranteeing women and girls' right to live a life free from violence. The recent announcement of a UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment can play an important agenda setting role. We welcome the role of the UK Government, and the Secretary of State in spearheading this initiative. Now is the time to ensure that the underlying causes of women's economic inequality, including the links between women's economic inequality and their vulnerability to VAWG, are fully acknowledged and addressed.

Transnational corporations are increasingly major employers of women around the world. While women undoubtedly value the opportunity to engage in paid work, lack of effective regulation has led to transnational corporations being complicit in acts of abuse against women workers, community members or Women Human Rights Defenders. In 2014, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution to start developing a legally binding international instrument on transnational

corporations.¹⁹ If governments are serious about eliminating all forms of VAWG, they must constructively support the Council's efforts.

In addition, given that almost half of women experience sexual harassment at work, along with other forms of verbal, psychological, and physical violence, it is vital that governments support the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention initiative on gender-based violence in the workplace. This could provide a global standard on protection and response, outlining clear responsibilities of employers, governments and trade unions.²⁰

The UK government should play a key role in galvanising support for the development of a legally binding instrument on transnational corporations and the proposal for the new ILO Convention on gender-based violence in the workplace. The UK's contribution to the new UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment should examine and address the links between economic inequality and violence.

The world is not lacking opportunities to address gender inequality and eliminate VAWG, nor is it short of expertise and solutions to get this momentous job done. The international community must do everything it in its power to galvanise the political will and resources to realise the ambition of the SDGs and with it a long-term vision for structural transformation. Without it, women and girls will continue paying with their bodies, their choices, their opportunities and their lives for generations to come.

Photo on front: Thuzar Tin runs the 'Women's Federation for Peace' in Yangon, Myanmar.

This briefing references two existing reports: 'Fearless – Standing with women and girls to end violence' and 'Promises to Keep'. Both reports are available at: www.actionaid.org.uk/fearless

INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS ARE CHRONICALLY UNDERFUNDED

"If there is violence in the house the world is not peaceful. If you get peace in the home you will see there is peace in the world."

Thuzar Tin set up the 'Women's Federation for Peace' (WFFP) when, following 2009's Cyclone Nargis, she saw a rise in violence against women in her community in Myanmar.

Women frequently arrive at the WFFP having been beaten by their husbands. Many of those Thuzar Tin helps are at greater risk of violence due to poverty, economic dependence, and lack of knowledge of their rights.

As for many women's rights organisations in Myanmar, Thuzar Tin's most pressing challenge is that they are chronically underfunded. Relying on a group of volunteers, she runs trainings and counselling sessions from her own home.

She told us: "Everyone here is passionate about this work, but we need funds to survive."

ActionAid is calling on the UK government to increase the share of funding going to women's rights organisations like Thuzar Tin's, so that their vital work can continue to change the lives of even more women.

1. Source: UN Office on Drugs and Crime – Global Study on Homicide 2013 (see: http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf)
2. Standing with Fearless women and girls to end violence: http://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/fearless-standing_with_women_and_girls_to_end_violence_actionaiduk.pdf
3. WHO (2014) 'Violence against women, intimate partner and sexual violence against women', Fact sheet N°239, (last updated November 2014). Available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>. Accessed August 2015.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Source: UN Office on Drugs and Crime – Global Study on Homicide 2013 (see: http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf)
7. Promises To Keep: https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/promises_to_keep_-_using_the_sustainable_development_goals_to_stand_with_fearless_women_to_end_violence.pdf
8. To see what works to end violence against women and girls see, for example, resources by WhatWorks - A Global Programme to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls available at <http://www.whatworks.co.za/>
9. Srilata Batliwala (2013), Women Moving Mountains. Collective impact of the Dutch MDG3 Fund. Association for Women's Rights in Development. <http://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Women%20Moving%20Mountains.pdf>
10. <http://www.awid.org/publications/watering-leaves-starving-roots>
11. The OECD DAC data on aid is support of gender equality and women's empowerment, annual donors' chart 2013-2014
12. <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/documentupload/Aid%20in%20Support%20of%20Gender%20Equality%20and%20Women's%20Empowerment%20-%20>

- Donor%20Charts.pdf. ActionAid recognises that further funds may be made available to women's rights organisations via multilateral or general civil society funds, however, it was not possible to determine this amount via the OECD-DAC database, the only globally comparable source of aid statistics
13. The figure is based on the investment in women's rights organisations made by Netherlands in their FLOW1 Fund (2012-2015). To see what 70 million can achieve go check: Srilata Batliwala (2013), Women Moving Mountains. Collective impact of the Dutch MDG3 Fund. Association for Women's Rights in Development. <http://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Women%20Moving%20Mountains.pdf>
 14. UN Women (2012) 'Handbook for national action plans on violence against women', United Nations: New York. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2012/7/HandbookNationalActionPlansOnVAW-en%20pdf.pdf>. Accessed August 2015.
 15. UN Women: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/SGstudyvaw.htm>
 16. http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Gender/GenderAtWork_web.pdf
 17. For a more detailed analysis of the cost of inequality in women's work, please see Close the Gap: http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/close_the_gap_final_21.01.2015_0.pdf
 18. United Nations Economic and Social Council http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2015/3
 19. Gender and Development Network (2015) 'Why the UK National Action plan on business and human rights must integrate and prioritise gender equality and women's human rights', http://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/5665b7ef69492ed58501622f/1449506799634/GADN+BHR+paper+for+UN+Global+Forum+Nov+15_FINAL.pdf
 20. See, for example: AWID (2015) 'FD3: Continued joined actions and collective power remain key'. Available at: <http://www.awid.org/news-andanalysis/ffd3-continued-joined-actions-and-collective-power-remain-key>. Accessed August 2015.

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