Transforming social norms to prevent violence against women and girls

Synthesis of the Wikigender online discussion

The 2013 theme for the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is on the Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. In this context, Wikigender[1] hosted an online discussion on "Transforming social norms to prevent violence against women and girls" from 4-13 February 2013. The discussion was organised by Wikigender, Breakthrough, End Violence Against Women (EVAW), Partners for Prevention (P4P, a UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV Asia-Pacific Regional Joint Programme for Gender-based Violence Prevention), Womankind Worldwide and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. The purpose of this online discussion was to bring together a range of perspectives and 'on the ground' experience on how we can transform social norms to prevent violence against women.

A total of 70 insightful and expert comments were posted. Participants in the discussion agreed that tackling underlying social norms to prevent violence against women was a top priority, while pointing out the challenges and opportunities. The main outcomes from the discussion were:

◆ The media plays a role in perpetuating negative attitudes but can be harnessed as a powerful tool for change;

◆ Defining the role of men and boys in challenging violence and shifting attitudes is a key element in fostering progress;

◆ Education should be at the core of a prevention strategy;

◆ Laws prohibiting violence against women are insufficient, inadequate, not respected or poorly enforced but change is possible at the community level;

◆ Community level change can happen by targeting discriminatory cultural and religious practices;

◆ Making sure that women are economically empowered is an essential prerequisite in the fight against domestic violence or other forms of violence;

◆ The need for co-operation between all stakeholders to tackle violence against women and girls is essential;

◆ Improving data and evidence on this topic is critical.

The comments answered the following questions:

◆ **Key issues**: What type of social norms and attitudes contribute to violence against women? What are the entry points for changing social norms and attitudes that support violence against women? What are the challenges for changing social norms that support violence against women?

◆ **Examples, case-studies**: In your area/region, what are examples of successful policies, initiatives, campaigns and programmes that tackle social norms related to violence against women and girls? Are there approaches that are more effective than others in changing attitudes? How can we harness the power of new technologies and the media? What role does men and boys' involvement play?

◆ **Action required**: What actions should governments, donors, international organisations and civil society take to transform social norms to prevent violence against women and girls? What type of data should be collected to monitor changes in social norms?

Main findings

Discussion responses have been broken down into the following eight key entry points for change.

The role of the media

The discussion highlighted the importance of the media as a lever of change. It was discussed that women are often portrayed in the media as less important than men. This is explicitly played out in the portrayal of women in public life or their employment status. The media often further reinforces this negative perception.

Making the media more gender sensitive would be a key step forward in fostering gender equality. Another way would be to increase and diversify female role models in the media and also rethink the representation of girls in television shows. One participant emphasised the fact that if progress is to be made, we should pay attention to how interactions between women and men are portrayed in ad campaigns, films, newspapers and television. It is important that women are shown as empowered – intellectually, emotionally and physically.

In the United Kingdom, "women's groups have worked together to launch a website where people can share their experiences about sexist media and gather evidence to use it to lobby for change."

More information:
http://www.everydaymediasexism.org.uk/

Holly at EVAW

Social media is another powerful way to reach a vast audience on the issue and should be used more systematically as an advocacy tool (whether it is YouTube, Facebook, Podcasts, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.). For example, the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) produced a video on YouTube called "We are Man" – targeting young men and encouraging them to take a positive bystander approach to sexual harassment. If we all have access to the Internet, preferably free Internet – we can all benefit from the numerous online awareness and prevention campaigns.

Finally, both the mainstream and social media should carefully pick their language and preferably use gender-neutral language. For example, using terms such as "police officer" instead of "police man" or "council member" instead of "council man" may seem like a small change, but it actually focuses on the function and role as opposed to the gender of the person.

"We work to enable men and boys embrace their role as advocates against girl's and women's vulnerability. Our work is anchored on transforming possible abusers to steadfast partners."

Wanjala Wafula,
Coexist initiative

Men and boys as advocates for change

Another prominent message that came out of the discussion was the role of men and boys in challenging violence and shifting attitudes. We need to understand how masculinities are created and replicated and transform them with government policies, media strategies and conducive environments in workplaces or schools. A few participants mentioned education on the topic from an early age as a prevention strategy. It is important to start young to promote non-violent masculinities. Another participant said that we should accentuate and reinforce the positives of healthy forms of masculinity, such as better mental health outcomes for men and healthier communities as a whole (not just 'reduction of violence against women').

Engaging male sport stars in our communities to promote and enact non-violence or asking male artists or athletes to deliver the message that "real men do not beat women" were other ideas. One participant said that in Kenya, women's civil society organisations have taken the lead in responses to violence against women, but men have not been involved. Also, engaging men and boys in refusing early marriage or other discriminations against women and girls was another important recommendation. And finally, working with male community leaders at local level has proven successful and should be further pursued.

> "Many Non-Governmental organizations (like "BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights" in Nigeria **http://www.baobabwomen.org**) has identified key roles that men and boys played in perpetuating these acts of violence against women and has been engaging them in their activism by changing the stereotyped belief/orientation towards women and girls. Making men and boys advocate for the rights of women will go a long way to address these issues. Organising workshops, forums, conferences, radio talk, social media to mention a few."
>
> Bilkis Olagoke-Adediran

Education and working with young people

An element that participants agreed on is putting education at the core of a prevention strategy. Results from a poll[2] we conducted on Wikigender asking "What is the most effective way to reduce violence against women in urban areas?" showed that 65.2% of the respondents agreed that the best strategy was "Educating men and boys".

Similarly, throughout the discussion many participants pointed to education as a key area where action should be targeted to successfully change mindsets – for men and boys, but also for women and girls. For example, one participant highlighted the fact that women and girls are often unaware of their rights or the laws passed by their government. Therefore, they should be educated on how to protect themselves and how to say "no" to discriminatory practices. In particular, the potential and values of the girl child should be further enhanced in schools so that they can become dynamic and participatory women.

> *"We all have a role to play, whether it's individuals calling out sexual harassment in the street when we see it, or funders supporting essential women's services, or schools working with young people to develop respectful and equal relationships."*
> **End Violence Against Women (EVAW)**

Another participant said that in the United States, sexual harassment is a widespread problem in schools – but there are many things they can do that work, from running workshops and seminars to putting information online. Ideas such as providing lesson plans about gender roles, consent and suggesting appropriate ways to joke or flirt were also communicated to the group. Further, creating a school climate that is appropriate for all sexual orientations is important. Ensuring that girls go to school in a girl-friendly learning environment was another point made by a participant, as education helps women realise their potential and tackle inequality at its roots. For example, by installing separate restrooms, by training teachers to be more inclusive or by addressing safety issues, schools will see an improvement in student quality of life. Ensuring that the parents have the financial means to send their daughters to school should therefore be a priority.

> *"We need to make everyone understand that violence is a problem that all of us have to work together to eliminate. It's not just "a few bad men," it's a structural and cultural change we need among us ALL."*
> **Breakthrough**

Participants agreed that since prejudicial attitudes towards women are formed at an early age, work with young people in schools and other settings is critical for shaping respectful behaviour. Referencing a recent poll in the UK, one participant was concerned that over 70% of participants said they witnessed routine sexual-name-calling against girls and, further, that 1 in 3 girls had experienced unwanted sexual touching at school. Another participant suggested that the issue of violence against women should be included in all school curriculums.

Thus an important message was that we need to start young to tackle attitudes and gender stereotypes. The younger the target age groups, the sooner the goal of promoting healthy forms of masculinity for boys can be achieved. This includes teaching young men and women the cornerstones of equality and respect and the skills needed to conduct healthy relationships through education in the home, at school and in the community. We need to educate boys and girls that violence is not "normal". We need to promote policies and programmes that foster healthy family environments, so that young people grow up free from violence.

2. See full analysis of the poll here: http://www.wikigender.org/index.php/Wikigender_Polls

Enforcement of laws and policies

Many participants pointed to the fact that laws were insufficient, inadequate, not respected or poorly enforced. For example, in the case of domestic violence, laws often do not have any impact. Citing the example of Rwanda, a comment reflected concern that despite adequate laws, women and girls' rights are still not respected. A participant said that many NGOs in Nigeria are becoming aware that current interventions are not sufficient. Better policies and bills need to be passed. A participant from Kenya stated that the biggest challenge in ending sexual violence was the gap between legal provisions and governmental commitments. Concrete action, in particular with regard to allocating financial support to address sexual violence, is needed. Further, all states should be charged to ratify, implement and domesticate laws that will address violence against women.

Comments reflected that in many countries, marital rape is not criminalised nor there are specific laws to efficiently address sexual harassment or domestic violence. Laws must be thoroughly enforced and complemented with a shift in attitudes and mindsets. In addition, one participant said that governments should mainstream policies to tackle violence against women across different areas including criminal justice, health, education, finance, social services and transport. Policies should focus more on the well-being of populations – including women unable to participate in decisions that affect their lives – than on spending government money towards increased militarisation.

This calls for a shift in attitudes by authorities at the local level, such as police officers and judges. Several participants said that the police need to be as supportive as possible when it comes to violence against women cases. For example if a woman reports rape, it is important that the police officers take the reporting seriously and act upon it. Cases of domestic violence are often regarded by the police as a matter of the 'private sphere', which is wrong. Police officers should be trained to efficiently deal with these situations and enforce the law properly. There should be zero tolerance to violence against women, especially on the part of police officers, who are mandated to protect the rights of citizens and ensure their security. The same applies for an equal treatment of transgender people and women from ethnic minorities. In a recent

Wikigender poll[3], 13% of the respondents thought that having more police on the street was the most effective way to reduce violence against women in an urban context because of its immediate impact.

Finally, all participants agreed that law enforcement is not enough as culture has strong roots and takes time to change. So we need to also focus on changing stereotypes and beliefs at community level.

Shifting discriminatory cultural and religious practices

Some participants identified discriminatory and harmful practices, often justified on the basis of culture or religion, as a significant challenge. Examples included female genital mutilation, foot binding, male preference, early marriage, virginity tests, dowry deaths or female infanticide. One participant highlighted the idea of 'honour' in Afghanistan as a major driver of violence against women, as well as practices which restrict the mobility of women, often leading to hostility and harassment towards them. Another mentioned that women in some parts of China, Tibet and East Turkestan are subject to forced sterilisations, as part of a population programme.

Several participants agreed that the patriarchal nature of our societies was a clear hindrance to progress in reaching equality. Suggestions on this topic included fostering alternative role models which support women's participation in non-traditional professions; educating religious leaders on the rights of women; encouraging influential figures such as senior officials in the government sector to speak positively of women's empowerment and their roles in society.

> We all need to take ownership over the responsibility of shifting social norms – *"whether we are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, policy makers, bread-makers, home-makers, from Denmark, the DRC or the Dominican Republic. If we are going to continue to talk about violence against women as a problem of a few bad men, a handful of lax governments, or a couple of gender inequitable cultures (all arguments that emerged following the recent, widely-publicised gang rape in New Delhi), we might as well give up our efforts now, heat up the popcorn and throw on a bad Leonardo di Caprio film."*
>
> Xian Warner

A participant referred to outcomes of a recent survey on violence against women and culture. Some of the recommendations included: holding state

3. See full analysis of the poll here: http://www.wikigender.org/index.php/Wikigender_Polls

governments accountable to their human rights obligations, invoking progressive religious and cultural reinterpretations that argue for the compatibility between cultural and religious norms with the universal principles of human rights and gender equality, and building alliances and solidarity across cultures, race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, tradition, and nation. The comment emphasised that intersectional solidarity has the ability to bring about enough social momentum to reject the instrumentalisation of `culture' as a tool to abuse women in all contexts.

> "To date, over 5,500 communities in Senegal have declared abandonment of female genital cutting (FGC), an act of violence against women and girls rooted in social norms, after participating in Tostan's Community Empowerment Program (CEP) and leading community dialogue on human rights and health."
>
> Courtney Petersen (TOSTAN)

Women's economic empowerment

Participants said that making sure that women are economically empowered is an essential prerequisite in the fight against domestic violence or other forms of violence, as they are in a stronger position to negotiate decisions in the household, to report an act of violence, or to leave the home.

Widows were particularly highlighted in the discussion as they can be extremely vulnerable to violence. In some countries they do not have the same inheritance rights as men or they have to follow widowhood rites that are dictated by social norms. Participants also said that we need to ensure that women have access to employment so that they can be economically empowered and have the means to get out of a violent situation. Girls should also be given equal access to education so that they can be empowered from the very start.

> *"Realizing the economic and social rights of all members of society and reducing inequalities are therefore important elements of addressing violence against women and achieving the longer term sustainable development."*
>
> **Raymond Brandes**
> **(Partners for Prevention)**

Cooperation between stakeholders

Participants emphasised the need for cooperation between all stakeholders to tackle violence against women and girls. Actions should be comprehensive and coordinated at local, national, regional and global levels as well as individual, interpersonal, community, society and institutional levels. The development of effective practices to eliminate violence against women depends on the collaboration and coordination between governments, NGOs and the civil society.

Alliance-building between diverse groups using different strategies was mentioned as key. Examples included creating coalitions between governments and NGOs that draw on the experience and expertise of women's groups in designing and implementing programmes. Coordinated actions between women and men are also necessary to successfully transform masculinities. One participant said that change happens when support for that change is concentrated. For example, mobilising autonomous feminist movements has proven to have an enduring impact on policies to eliminate violence against women.

> "On February 14, "One Billion Rising" encourages women and men to leave work, leave school, interrupt the day, dance, and demand an end to the violence!"
>
> More information:
> **http://www.onebillionrising.org**
>
> Michele Tuccio

We need to build effective institutions, cooperate from bottom-up and top-down, use all available networks efficiently and foster mutual learning across different contexts. Preventing violence against women cannot be done without actively involving all actors, including the public sector, businesses, civil society and citizens. We need a continuous multi-stakeholder process of innovation, learning and adapting.

Improving data and evidence

Several participants pointed out the lack of reliable data, insufficient data collection methods and the need for better administrative data collection practices. For example in Kenya, while there is progress in collecting data at the institutional level, there is a lack of data on sexual violence at community level. What is needed is an extensive gender-disaggregated data collection and data sharing process. Another participant pointed to the fact that the lack of data on transgender people and victims of discrimination in the workplace hinders progress in making their rights respected through the legislation process.

Another participant highlighted the lack of formal evaluations of interventions to tackle violence against women and the need to publicly report more of these evaluations. This knowledge-sharing process provides access to information on successful strategies and informs us whether they can be used and/or scaled up in other contexts. For example, the same participant mentioned a 2007 World Health Organisation (WHO) report where 15 intervention programmes with men and boys in addressing gender-based violence were assessed – the most effective programmes were the "transformative" ones (as opposed to the gender-neutral" or "gender-sensitive" ones) and the ones operating on multiple levels (from individual to societal). Out of the 15 studies, only 4 were considered "effective": these interventions were based around community outreach/mobilisation and group education.

"There is more violence against women in those countries and areas that have experienced a war (...) Post-war traumas need to be focused and cured."
Kirsi Nickels

One participant argued that to further build the evidence base, we need to develop a research agenda on domestic and family violence. It is essential that we all work to build a solid evidence base that we can present to policy makers, so that they formulate relevant policies that reflect all gender expressions, at both local and national levels.

Conclusion

The discussion allowed a rich exchange of views, examples of successful programmes and initiatives, recommendations on how discriminatory social norms can be transformed to prevent violence against women and girls. In this report we attempted to highlight the main themes and solutions reflecting participant views.

The discussion brought together perspectives from all corners of the world, including: Afghanistan, Bolivia, China, Finland, France, Ghana, India, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, the United Kingdom, the United States and many more. Participants included international organisations, policy analysts, gender experts, development practitioners, international and local NGOs and civil society. From 4-13 February 2013, Wikigender had 17,420 unique visitors. The site had 23,580 unique page views, of which 1,817 related to the online discussion page.

The outcomes of this discussion will be presented on 4 March 2013 during the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at a side event on "Transforming social norms to prevent violence against women". The event will be co-hosted by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the South African Ministry of Women, Children and People with Disabilities (DWCPD) and the OECD Development Centre.

The next Wikigender online discussion will take place in April 2013 and will focus on adolescent girls.

Stay tuned via Wikigender:
http://www.wikigender.org/index.php/Online_Discussions

Resources shared by the participants

MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

◆ Jane PSA video: http://www.seejane.org/resources/seejanepsa.php

◆ We Are Man video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYhaodUPqSU

◆ Everydaymediasexism is a website where people can share their experiences about a sexist media and gather evidence to use to lobby for change: http://www.everydaymediasexism.org.uk

◆ The story of Rafea, the second wife of a Bedouin husband, is selected to attend the Barefoot College in India that takes uneducated middle-aged women from poor communities and trains them to become solar engineers: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ON_NQ1HnRYs&feature=youtu.be

◆ The story of Shabana Basij-Rasikh, who was born in Kabul, where under the Taliban, she had to dress as a boy to escort her older sister to a secret school, with dire consequences if they were caught: http://on.ted.com/Shabana

CAMPAIGNS

◆ ThisisABUSE is an ongoing campaign by the Westminster Government to tackle sexual, physical and emotional abuse in teenage relationships: http://thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk/home

◆ One Billion Rising: http://www.onebillionrising.org

◆ One Billion Rising in the UK
The Labour party has responded to the EVAW campaign for compulsory sex and relationships education and made this a key plank of the One Billion Rising campaign in the UK: http://obruk.wordpress.com/category/our-campaigns/safe-growing-up-our-campaigns

◆ Schools Safe 4 Girls campaign
The campaign calls for schools in England to take action to address all forms of violence against women and girls and calls for the Westminster Government to make sex and relationships education statutory: http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/education

◆ Request To The United Nations Commission On The Status Of Women: To Examine, At Their 57th Session, China's Violence Against Women. To read more and sign the petition: http://www.change.org/petitions/request-to-the-united-nations-commission-on-the-status-of-women-to-examine-at-their-57th-session-china-s-violence-against-women

NGOS, SUCCESS STORIES AND TOOLS

◆ BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights: http://www.baobabwomen.org

◆ Acts Generation: http://saynotoviolence.org/user/1297

◆ The International Rescue Committee: http://www.rescue.org

◆ TOSTAN: How Human Rights Education Helps Communities Address Violence Against Women and Girls (23 november 2012): http://tostan.org/web/module/events/pressID/270/interior.asp

◆ PREVENT: A Framework for Action to Prevent Gender-based Violence (Partners for Prevention): http://www.partners4prevention.org/sites/default/files/documents/prevent_framework_v5a.pdf

◆ The Leveson Inquiry (originally set up to look at illegal practices by the British press): http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk

◆ Preventing Violence Against Women: Key Facts: http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/preventing-violence-against-women

WIKIGENDER SHARED LINKS

◆ Link to online discussion on Engaging Men and Boys to Transform Discriminatory Social Norms: http://www.wikigender.org/index.php/Engaging_Men_and_Boys_to_Transform_Discriminatory_Social_Norms_Online_Discussion

◆ Link to poll responses to:
What, in your view, is the most effective way to reduce violence against women in urban areas? http://www.wikigender.org/index.php/Wikigender_Polls#What.2C_in_your_view.2C_is_the_most_effective_way_to_reduce_violence_against_women_in_urban_areas.3F

REPORTS

◆ Engaging men and boys in changing gender-based inequity in health: Evidence from programme interventions (World Health Organization, 2007): http://www.who.int/gender/documents/Engaging_men_boys.pdf

◆ A Different World is Possible: Promising practices to prevent violence against women and girls (EVAW, 2011) http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/resources/20/promising_practices_report_.pdf

◆ No Justice in Justifications: Violence Against Women in the Name of Culture, Religion and Tradition (Shaina Grieff, 2010)
http://violenceisnotourculture.org/content/no-justice-justifications-violence-against-women-name-culture-religion-and-tradition

◆ "Just the Women" is a monitoring report called which showed the prejudicial way that women continue to be treated in the media and we called for media reform to address this issue
http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/resources/51/just-the-women

◆ Crossing the Line (The American Association of University Women, 2011)
http://www.aauw.org/research/crossing-the-line

ARTICLES

◆ Ten Things to End Rape Culture (The Nation, 4 February 2013)
http://www.thenation.com/article/172643/ten-things-end-rape-culture#

◆ Culture and Violation of Women's Human Rights: The Yoruba Case Study By Bilkis Olagoke-Adediran (Ola-Ade's note, 11 April 2012)
http://olaade.blogspot.fr/2012/04/culture-and-violation-of-womens-human.html

◆ Searching for Gender Equality: to combat violence against women, mobilize feminist groups (Corinna Wu, Winter 2013)
http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/searching_for_gender_equality?utm_source=Enews13_02_07&utm_medium=email&utm_content=3&utm_campaign=wu

◆ Looking for icons to transform social norms (Debraj Ray, 28 January 2013)
http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/tfxsKrvQvVvSoBISsUqxeM/Looking-for-icons-to-transform-social-norms.html

◆ American Woman Gives Domestic Abuse A Face, And Voice, In China (NPR, 7 February 2013)
http://www.npr.org/2013/02/07/171316582/american-woman-gives-domestic-abuse-a-face-and-voice-in-china

PAPERS

◆ Role of men and boys in eliminating Gender based violence in Kenya (Wanjala Wafula)
http://www.wikigender.org/images//7/7f/Role_of_men_and_boys.pdf

◆ Rejecting 'cultural' justifications for violence against women: Strategies for women's rights advocates (Research Programme Consortium on 'Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts: Gender, Poverty and Democratisation from the Inside Out' (WEMC))
http://www.wluml.org/ar/node/7210

◆ What Works to Prevent Partner Violence? An Evidence Overview (Lori L. Heis, December 2011)
This document reviews the empirical evidence of what works in low- and middle-income countries to prevent violence against women by their husbands and other male partners.
http://www.oecd.org/derec/49872444.pdf

◆ Stop Violence: Responding to Violence Against Women in Melanesia and East Timor (AusAID)
http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pages/7821_6079_155_5278_287.aspx

For more details on any of these examples and to read all contributions to the online discussion, please see the online discussion page on Wikigender: http://bit.ly/WC5v4h

For past Wikigender online discussions please visit: http://wikigender.org/index.php/Online_Discussions. Any questions, suggestions of online discussions? Email us at contact@wikigender.org

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