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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 the first name "Thoraya" being the most prominent part.

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 their own children. He reports that this has been an effective message in encouraging behaviour change among men in his community.

STARTING OFF RIGHT

RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

TARGETING MEN

ENTRY POINTS

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

POWER STRUCTURES

PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

VALUES VS. PRACTICE

ADOPT A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

When caring for survivors of domestic or sexual violence, aim to provide more than just a service. Instil the idea, among victims as well as communities, that a woman has the right to live free of violence. An abused women is entitled to quality medical care, counselling and legal services, as well as to employment and income if she is not working. Empowering women to claim their rights will help sustain efforts to combat violence.

In Colombia, project staff are drawing the connection between the rights related to one's own body—as the minimal space over which people can exercise their dignity—and rights in the larger civic and political sphere. They are encouraging people to become political actors: to claim their rights and work towards the rights of others. Workshops involving both women and men focus on conceptual and practical applications of people asserting their rights, establishing relationships and respecting others' rights as well as their own.

“In helping women take decisions about themselves, we found that the road map was the body, teaching them to recognize their body as their own. It started a process of self-affirmation and consciousness that began to change habits.”

Sexual & Reproductive Health Adviser, UNFPA-Colombia

ALLOW SPACE FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

A project should be flexible enough to accommodate the wishes of the community.

Rather than following a preconceived set of activities, project staff in Bangladesh listened to what the community wanted. The community itself decided what types of gatherings should be arranged, who should attend and what topics should be discussed, when and where the meetings should be held, and what the role of various groups should be. One outcome of serious community engagement is that people enjoy a sense of ownership. They feel that a project is theirs, and they are responsible for its success.

“We tried to form pressure groups within the community to discourage violence. Not only that, we also created opportunities for the community to plan their own programmes, and in that way the community began to own the project.”

National Programme Officer, UNFPA-Bangladesh

TARGET MEN, WHOSE PARTICIPATION IS KEY

Men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of violence suffered by women. Yet even at the institutional level, the fight against gender-based violence has been dominated by women. One way to gain greater involvement of men is to make them the focus of sensitization efforts and awareness campaigns. Another is to solicit partners from sectors that are typically male domains, including law enforcement, certain sports and the military. Encouraging influential male role models or celebrities to speak out on the issue is another strategy that can be used to garner support from the general male public.

In Turkey, the national football federation became a major partner in an advocacy campaign to stop violence against women. During the height of the football season, a captive audience of Turkish men sitting in front of their television sets watched as players donned t-shirts and paraded banners protesting violence against women.

“If you live in a male-chauvinist society, how will you change it if the people involved in doing so are all women?”

USE THE HEALTH SECTOR AS ONE ENTRY POINT

Though cultural, social and economic factors may all contribute to violence against women, positioning the problem as a public health priority has proved an effective strategy in addressing it. This approach can be justified in terms of the costs and consequences of violence to women's health, including lost work time inside or outside the home, medical bills, chronic, undiagnosed pain, forced pregnancies, sexually-transmitted infections, abortion and depression, not to mention the effects on other members of the family. One benefit of approaching the problem through the health system is that it puts the material and human resources of the health-care network at the service of women survivors.

In Mexico and Romania, pilot projects have successfully integrated the assessment and treatment of women victims of violence into reproductive health services. Health-care workers have been trained to identify signs of abuse, provide the necessary medical care, and refer women to other professionals who can provide psychological, legal and other services.

In Morocco as well, the health sector is becoming a key partner in implementing a national strategy to combat violence against women. Units for identifying and treating women survivors have been piloted in two of the largest hospitals in Casablanca and Rabat, and health workers are being trained.

FOLLOW LEGISLATIVE ACTION WITH ADVOCACY

An effective legal framework is a precondition for ending violence against women. It enables government to generate the policies and protocols needed to ensure a coordinated approach to solving the problem. Moreover, it gives legitimacy to a project and provides an incentive for local government involvement. But in many countries, from Mexico to Mauritania and from Turkey to Bangladesh, laws to protect women victims of violence are not enforced. The underlying attitude seems to be that the victims are somehow to blame, and the perpetrator should go unpunished. Awareness-raising, advocacy, follow-up on cases and other efforts are needed to end impunity for perpetrators.

In Morocco, a law governing marriage and the family, known as *Al Mudawwana*, was amended to give women more equal rights with men. Changes in the law, which were highly controversial, are being accompanied by the training of justice officials to implement them and awareness campaigns to inform the local population about their rights.

In Bangladesh, a grass-roots approach to advocacy and awareness-raising was needed before new laws could be enforced. At the same time, sensitization efforts were targeted to policy makers and other opinion leaders.

“I thought it was my fault because I was wandering at night. I didn't want to tell my family because I was scared... they would think I was to blame, or that I was the one asking for it.”

TAP THE STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

When tackling culturally sensitive issues, such as violence against women, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) usually have a built-in advantage. They know the local culture, and their staff are often well-known and trusted by the community. Moreover, they tend to feel passionately about the issues they work on. This is especially important when undertaking the difficult job of changing deeply rooted perceptions and traditional practices and behaviours.

In many countries, including Kenya, Mauritania, Mexico and Morocco, NGOs were instrumental in breaking the silence surrounding gender-based violence and were the first organizations to offer services to victims. In Mauritania, four midwives led the fight against sexual violence. By visiting victims' homes, rather than addressing a large group (the method normally used by government institutions), the midwives have been able to establish a close relationship with those in need and get their message across.

ENGAGE LOCAL POWER STRUCTURES, INCLUDING FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Engaging local leaders and opinion makers and eliciting their support can provide access to a community that might otherwise be closed to outsiders.

In Mauritania, local imams, who are highly regarded in the community and consulted on important issues, are extremely influential. Early on, project directors sought the participation of religious leaders known to be progressive and flexible.

In Maasai communities of Kenya, a top priority was allaying the fears and misconceptions of male opinion leaders about ending the practice of female genital mutilation/cutting. Their advice was also solicited on how to bring about change.

In Colombia, working with a Catholic organization on reproductive health issues at first seemed counter-productive and risky. However, in a region with a strong Catholic tradition, a project centred around culture and rights could not distance itself from religious convictions and practices. Once project personnel came to terms with the fact that people understand and manage their sexuality from a set of cultural norms with deep religious roots, what at first seemed like a risk became an opportunity. Common ground—the inherent dignity of human beings—was established as the base from which two groups with different perspectives, UNFPA and a Catholic institution, could work together.

INVOLVE PEOPLE AT A PERSONAL LEVEL

In attempting to address violence against women, training people at all levels of society is essential. The purpose of such training is not only to impart information, but to encourage people to reflect upon the phenomenon itself, to delve into deeply held feelings and to challenge themselves.

The methodology adopted in Colombia relies on guided community dialogues that explore the subjective experience of individuals. The dialogues pose questions that prompt men and women to examine their daily practices and to identify problems and solutions within the context of their own culture. According to the project team, the real transformation begins when people begin to understand the consequences of what they are doing, how they are doing it, and why.

In training courses in Romania, a typical reaction to the subject of domestic violence was laughter—then denial. But over the course of several sessions, participants changed the way they were thinking about the issue—and the victim. Even local government authorities were engaged at an emotional level. The ability to relate to the problem of violence against women in a visceral way proved key.

“Everybody should feel what it’s like to be a victim, if even only for a minute.”

GABRIELA PINCA

Head of the Office of Crime Prevention,
Mures Police Department, Romania

SEPARATE THE VALUES UNDERLYING A HARMFUL PRACTICE FROM THE PRACTICE ITSELF

Traditional practices serve specific functions in a community. When a practice is eliminated, for whatever reason, there can be an erosion of cultural values and identity associated with it. This, in turn, creates insecurity within a community. Yet it is also possible to devise alternative practices that serve the same functions but without causing harm.

In many countries, including Kenya, female genital mutilation/cutting is the culmination of a traditional initiation rite that provides instruction on how to conduct oneself in womanhood. Alternative rites of passage, developed by a Kenyan NGO, respect the value of the tradition, and offer the same instruction, while rejecting the violence associated with it. Older Maasai women volunteer to act as godmothers to girls who are coming of age. Over the course of five days, and in seclusion, the girls are encouraged to ask questions about sexual and reproductive health and are empowered to make informed decisions about their lives. They are also taught what their community expects of them as adults. The NGO believes the teachings are important and should continue—without the mutilation.

“We appreciate the significance of some of our traditions, and we included these in the programme.”

AGNES PAREYIO

Founder, Tasaru Rescue Centre, Kenya

BUILDING IN SUSTAINABILITY

WOMEN'S OPTIONS

CAPACITY-BUILDING

MULTISECTORAL ALLIANCES

UNITY, NOT DIVISIVENESS

DATA-GATHERING

CHANGE FROM WITHIN

YOUTH & EDUCATION

EXPAND WOMEN'S OPTIONS

In many countries, women who choose to leave an abusive relationship face intense social stigma. But another reason they feel trapped in a dangerous situation is that they have, in fact, few options. Without some means of earning an income, the choices available to such women are limited. Women's empowerment and the development of their capabilities are closely related to their economic self-sufficiency.

In Ghana, Mauritania and Sierra Leone, women choosing to leave violent relationships are given training and counselling to help them regain their self-esteem and become more self-reliant. In some cases, they are provided with seed money and technical assistance to start small businesses. As a result, they are becoming productive members of their communities and overcoming the stigma to which they might otherwise be subjected.

BUILD INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Initiating and building support for action to combat violence against women is only half the battle. Ensuring that these efforts will be sustained requires capacity-building at national and local levels.

In Colombia, for example, project activities initially focused on strengthening government institutions responsible for implementing national policies on sexual and reproductive health. However, their continuation depended on direct empowerment and training of people in social organizations and in communities.

In Mexico, a comprehensive model for preventing and responding to domestic and sexual violence is attempting to link health services with legal assistance and community-based initiatives. To date, over 5,000 health-care workers have received training. In Morocco, building the capacity of health and justice systems is being carried out simultaneously. This includes training of staff in 70 courts around the country to correctly apply recent changes in Moroccan law relating to marriage, divorce and the custody of children.

“As a doctor, I used to evaluate the woman, examine the woman and forget about her. Now I care about the person. I put myself in her place and inquire about other aspects of her life. I am more subjective, I go beyond my duties.”

FORGE ALLIANCES ACROSS SECTORS

Violence against women is a complex problem with medical, psychological, educational, social, cultural, economic, legal and human rights dimensions. To effectively care for survivors—and to stop the inter-generational cycle of violence—all of these dimensions need to be addressed.

In Morocco, a broad base of support for combating violence against women has been achieved through partnerships among both governmental and non-governmental groups. These include the ministries of health, justice and religious affairs, political parties, human rights organizations and other NGOs, as well as international donors.

In Romania, an inter-ministerial working group on domestic violence was created at the national level, composed of representatives of the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, the National Authority for the Child and Adoption, the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education and Research, and the National Authority for People with Disabilities. At the local level, multi-disciplinary teams were brought together and continue to function in an advisory capacity. The teams include representatives of local ministries, district councils, universities and advocacy groups.

SEEK TO UNIFY, NOT DIVIDE

Never assume that a particular individual or group will be opposed to certain ideas before engaging them in discussion. Often they can be won over, once they understand the real objective of an intervention and its benefit to the community. Moreover, opportunities to reconcile seemingly opposing views may emerge through dialogue.

In Bangladesh, the same religious leaders who were at first opposed to a project later turned into staunch advocates, once they understood the rationale behind it.

In Morocco, conservative political and religious groups were specifically targeted for sensitization on a national strategy to combat violence against women. Direct confrontation with groups known to oppose equal rights for women was avoided. However, ties with these groups were never severed so that the door would remain open to possible dialogue.

DEVELOP A SYSTEM OF DATA-GATHERING

Introducing a system to document incidents and patterns of violence against women is important not only for defining and quantifying the problem, but for tracking and monitoring cases.

In districts of Romania, an integrated information system has been piloted for reporting, screening and referring cases of domestic violence, with the objective of launching it nationwide. The process of creating the system helped clarify the notion, even among NGOs working in that field, of what it means to be a victim of domestic violence and how it is diagnosed. Though the information obtained remains strictly confidential, it provides a means for professional follow-up on cases. Documentation of results can also be a key to continued funding.

ENCOURAGE CHANGE FROM WITHIN

The objective of a project should not be to impose a new value system or way of operating on a community. Rather, it should offer people an opportunity to think critically about what they are doing and why, thereby fostering change from within.

In Ghana, an NGO is involved in freeing girls and young women who have been forced into ritual slavery as atonement for their families' sins. Once enslaved in local shrines, the girls are typically exploited and beaten if they try to escape; they are also denied food, health care and education. The NGO avoids direct condemnation of this traditional practice, known as the *trokosi* system. Rather, it seeks to convince shrine priests to transform the requirements for atonement. The transformation takes place because the priests are made aware of the harm they are inflicting on the young women. As a result, a number of priests are accepting income-generating commodities, such as corn mills, fishing nets or, in rare cases, money, as sacrificial gifts from families, in lieu of their daughters.

“Our strategy is very simple: It is to educate the practitioners to give up the practice themselves. We believe that a change that emanates from within will be more permanent.”

REVEREND PIMPONG

Executive Director, International Needs-Ghana

REACH YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH EDUCATION

The goal of any programme addressing violence against women is moving from a curative to a preventive approach. This entails a profound shift in the beliefs, stereotypes and attitudes related to the social value of men and women and in the power dynamics between them—within families, communities and society. In promoting such cultural and social shifts, experience shows that working with children and adolescents is often most effective. Ideally this should begin in the early years, with education rooted in a gender- and rights-based approach.

In Romania, numerous programmes, including workshops in high schools, encourage such changes. Games, psychodramas and other activities helped young people recognize that domestic violence is not a normal aspect of healthy family life, and to come to terms with it in their own lives. Many high schoolers subsequently showed up at project-run crisis centres. Prevention programmes can begin as early as the first grade, and encompass domestic and other forms of violence, including discrimination.

Enrolling girls in school is also a way of protecting them from violence, assuming that a safe environment has been created. In Kenya, boarding schools are providing sanctuary to girls seeking to escape female genital mutilation/cutting. In Ghana, changing the mindset of girls and young women who have spent a good part of their lives in ritual slavery is

proving to be a challenge. Nevertheless, educating young children, especially girls, is the most effective way of eventually ending the *trokosi* system.

CARING FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

THE 'WHOLE' PERSON

SAFETY NETS

CONFIDENTIALITY

SERVICE PROVIDERS

CONSIDER THE WHOLE PERSON

A survivor of violence has multiple needs, which begin with but extend well beyond medical care. Frequently she requires assistance in finding shelter and legal aid, and a set of new skills through which she can become economically self-reliant and break free of an abusive relationship. Restoring a woman's sense of self-worth through counselling is all-important, since women commonly share a sense of shame and guilt after violent abuse. A recent survey in Mexico, for example, found that 59 per cent of women believe they are somehow responsible for sexual violence, regardless of their relationship with the perpetrator.

Accumulated aggression towards women victims of violence is demonstrated at many levels. For women seeking help, this often manifests as endless bureaucratic procedures or other obstacles they are unable to face. Each component of a project should promote a woman's general well-being.

In Sierra Leone, girls and women who have been traumatized by war, through abduction, abuse, exploitation or violence at the hands of warring factions, are offered counselling and psychosocial support. Many of them have resorted to commercial sex as a means of survival. Training in practical skills, supplemented by classes in reading, writing and arithmetic, offer these young women the possibility of alternative livelihoods. They are also coached in life skills, such as effective communication, to better negotiate the challenges of adulthood. Basic survival is not

neglected: The project provides a daily meal for those in need and free treatment for sexually transmitted infections and simple ailments. After graduation, the young women receive start-up kits to launch their own businesses.

“There was so much need to reach out to the girls, to empower them and give them hope. We realized that they needed food, counselling, clothes, skills and much more.”

JULIANA KONTEH

Director, Women in Crisis Movement, Sierra Leone

PREVENT SURVIVORS FROM 'FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS'

The creation of a social safety net—that is, a network of partner organizations that understand the problem of violence and can reach out to women in need—is critical in addressing the issue. Typically, the police, child protection agencies, emergency and medical personnel, school psychologists and forensic institutes are on the front lines in helping identify and refer cases. In Mures district in Romania, project personnel forged partnerships with and trained staff from 16 local institutions, which were fundamental to the success of the project.

In establishing such partnerships, the NGO managing the project consistently took a proactive stance. It made initial contacts with potential allies, followed up with them and maintained the communication process through regular meetings and monthly progress reports. To ensure that agreements would be honoured, the NGO initiated the practice of writing up detailed 'partnership protocols' for each of the 16 institutions with which it formed a relationship, outlining specific roles and responsibilities.

Paradoxically, the neighbourhood police, who were previously regarded with distrust by the community, have become the Mures Crisis Centre's most important allies. In a recent year, 20 per cent of the centre's clients were referred by the neighbourhood police. Local law enforcement officers are also playing an important role in prevention, by checking in on the homes of former victims.

"The key to our success is networking with other institutions. On our own we can do nothing."

ELENA MICHEU

Head psychologist at the Mures Crisis Centre, Romania

PRESERVE CONFIDENTIALITY

The shame and social stigma attached to domestic and sexual violence keep it hidden from view. A sense of trust—and strict confidentiality—must be established before survivors will be willing to acknowledge the violence that has occurred and to access services.

Reluctance on the part of domestic violence victims in Romania to deal with the local police was attributed to the fact that their cases would suddenly move from a private to a public sphere. However, as service providers were trained in the importance of confidentiality, and victims gained trust, this reluctance to seek help diminished. A system for safeguarding information about clients was built into a management information system used to track cases. Similarly, the locations of shelters are kept secret to ensure the safety and security of those seeking refuge.

In Mauritania, preserving confidentiality means that lawyers come to the crisis centre instead of victims going to them. The centre is also open to community members seeking treatment for simple ailments. This tends to reduce the stigma that would otherwise be associated with the centre if it were caring for rape survivors exclusively.

PROTECT THE WELL-BEING OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

Working on a daily basis with victims of abuse can be emotionally and physically draining. Service providers must therefore give priority to safeguarding their own energy as well as that of colleagues. Moreover, staff may also need to confront issues of abuse that they are struggling with personally.

“You can’t expect great performance or brilliant ideas from staff who may be dealing with their own issues of domestic violence.”

GAINING SUPPORT THROUGH ADVOCACY

AWARENESS-RAISING

POPULAR CULTURE

THE MEDIA

LOCAL ACTIVISTS

BE CREATIVE IN RAISING AWARENESS

A wide variety of innovative approaches can capture public attention. Candlelight vigils, workshops in local schools, and television and radio programmes using strongly symbolic language and images are among the ways that project personnel reached tens of thousands of people in Romania. Typically, the campaigns were tied to local holidays or festivals or to international campaigns, such as 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence. In one such campaign, 2,000 flowers, each containing a message about non-violence, were handed out to men on street corners by well-known female personalities, including heads of local ministries, actors and doctors.

Another campaign, called 'This hand will never hurt you', was launched on Valentine's Day. It asked young men and women at a local club to each trace an outline of their hand on a piece of paper and then write a love message on the inside of the hand. The campaign was subsequently expanded to reach political and cultural figures through events at city hall, the police department, courts of law, political party headquarters, high schools and other public venues.

Active involvement by the private sector can lend added professionalism and resources to awareness-raising efforts. In Turkey, UNFPA teamed up with a private media company in launching a public information campaign, and also garnered pro-bono support from advertising agencies, public relations firms and other companies to hone and disseminate its message.

RELY ON POPULAR CULTURE AND LOCAL ARTISTS

Local music, dance, drama and storytelling can be lively forms of entertainment and education, irrespective of an audience's age, sex or economic status. In many countries, radio and television melodramas that rely on strong emotional responses have been extraordinarily effective in raising questions and fostering dialogue that can lead to attitude and behaviour change.

In Turkey, 'infomercials' on violence against women featuring national celebrities have been shown on television and in cinemas across the country. In Bangladesh, songs and theatrical performances written by local poets, field workers and schoolteachers have explored the problems caused by child marriage, dowry and wife abuse. In Sierra Leone, commercial sex workers that have found alternative livelihoods have formed drama groups and are sensitizing people to the dangers of HIV. In Mauritania, an annual music festival aims to reduce the stigma associated with sexual violence.

INVOLVE THE MEDIA

Personal accounts of violence against women give a human face to the problem and are particularly effective in conveying the message that such violence is unacceptable. In many countries, the media are keen to cover such stories, partly because of the sensational nature of the topic. In Romania, special radio and television programmes on the subject were produced, along with newspaper and magazine articles. This type of coverage not only helped raise awareness of the problem and the fact that help is available, but served as an incentive among local politicians to do something about it.

In Turkey, the country's largest-circulation newspaper initiated a campaign to fight violence against women, only to recognize later that it was a major contributor to the sexist attitudes that perpetuate it. The newspaper now evaluates every article from a gender perspective and has instituted related training for its journalists.

“I did not know that when I was writing my news story I was actually perpetuating societal views that reinforce violence against women.”

Journalist in a media training workshop in Turkey

HARNESS THE ENERGY OF LOCAL ACTIVISTS

In many traditional societies, strong, charismatic individuals can help overcome resistance and help a project succeed.

In Kenya, eradicating female genital mutilation/cutting has been the mission of Agnes Pareyio, who, for years before the project started, travelled by foot to Maasai villages with a wooden model of the female reproductive system in hand, preaching the dangers of the practice. To put political clout behind her cause, she ran for deputy mayor in her district—and won. In 2005, she was named ‘Person of the Year’ by the United Nations in Kenya.

In Mauritania, a single individual—Zeinebou Mint Taleb Moussa—was largely responsible for calling public attention to sexual violence. Her modest personality, combined with her status as an experienced midwife, helped her gain support not only from local people but also government officials. According to one ministry official, “Zeinabou elicits a lot of respect in the community. She gathered around her imams, other religious leaders, lawyers, magistrates, doctors, police officers, psychiatrists and midwives—people who would otherwise be difficult to bring together. But they all came because of her personality and were later convinced that a problem existed.” Many of these high-profile individuals subsequently lobbied the Government to acknowledge the problem of sexual violence and to introduce strategies to combat it.

“When you want to understand issues in a given society, you need to be strong, know your target and what you want to achieve, and listen to the community....”

ZEINEBOU MINT TALEB MOUSSA

Founder and President of the Mauritanian Association for Mother and Child Health

BANGLADESH

COLOMBIA

GHANA

KENYA

MAURITANIA

MEXICO

MOROCCO

ROMANIA

SIERRA LEONE

TURKEY

THE PROJECTS

BANGLADESH

Child marriage and the giving and receiving of dowries are major factors in the continuation of domestic violence in Bangladesh. Laws have been passed that criminalize both practices, but they are difficult to enforce, especially in rural areas where custom and tradition tend to govern social life. An advocacy project supported by UNFPA has worked from the grass roots to change the cultural beliefs and practices through which violence against women persists. A host of community groups, made up of civic and political leaders, imams, village elders, schoolteachers, mothers-in-law, young people and others are challenging age-old practices, and proving that culture is anything but static.

COLOMBIA

Magdalena Medio, the most heavily militarized area of Colombia, is known as a region of death. But for many it has become a region of hope, due to a Development and Peace Programme run by Jesuit priests. An offshoot of the programme, supported by UNFPA, is improving reproductive health and addressing violence against women using a rights-based approach. Through an intensive process of community dialogue that explores the connection between the rights related to one's own body and other civil and political rights, the project is fostering personal and cultural transformation in a region where fear, conflict and machismo prevail.

GHANA

The persistence of the *trokosi* system in Ghana—the ritual sacrifice of young girls to enforced servitude as atonement for a family's sins—is one demonstration of the power of tradition in Ghana to deny women their rights. The lack of domestic violence legislation is also hindering a comprehensive and coordinated approach to the problem. UNFPA's strategy in addressing gender-based violence in Ghana is to support existing programmes, many of which are working effectively at the grass-roots level. Still needed are effective awareness campaigns that target the media, legislators and other decision makers and spread the message of zero tolerance for violence against women.

KENYA

Though proud of her Maasai heritage, Agnes Pareyio knew that certain traditional practices in Kenya needed to change. For years she travelled on foot from village to village, with a wooden model of the female reproductive system in hand, explaining the dangers of female genital mutilation/cutting to anyone who would listen. In Maasai culture, genital cutting is an initiation into adulthood. It is also considered a prerequisite for becoming a bride, which occurs, on average, at the tender age of 14. With support from UNFPA and V-Day, Ms. Pareyio and her colleagues created a safe house for girls attempting to escape this fate, and enrolled them in school. A network of like-minded organizations, alternative rites of passage and awareness-raising in the community are helping to ensure that Maasai girls in the future will have a wider range of options.

MAURITANIA

Prior to 2003, survivors of rape in Mauritania were thrown in jail while the perpetrators went free. Correcting that gross injustice—and getting society to recognize the problem of rape at all—began with the grass-roots efforts of four Mauritanian midwives, who could no longer ignore the stories they were hearing from their clients. With UNFPA support, the first statistics on sexual violence in Mauritania were collected, and a centre was established to respond to the multiple needs of survivors. Breaking the taboos surrounding the discussion of rape was the first step in addressing the problem. Local imams lent their support to the effort, convincing government officials, judges, the police and members of the community that protecting women and easing the suffering of those who are most vulnerable was a religious obligation.

MEXICO

Starting in 1999, a series of initiatives were undertaken in the health sector to address family and sexual violence in Mexico. This included the development, in 2004, of a comprehensive model to prevent and respond to such violence, which links health services with legal assistance and community-based initiatives in 12 states and the Federal District. Today, thousands more women survivors of violence in Mexico are receiving help, due to the collaborative efforts of civil society organizations, government institutions and international agencies, including UNFPA. But much more work remains to be done to meet the demand and to break down the cultural barriers that keep sexual violence hidden and women in subservient roles.

MOROCCO

A progressive political environment in Morocco has ushered in a number of victories for women, including landmark reforms to *Al Mudawwana*, a legal code that governs family life. Another victory is widespread acceptance of a national strategy to combat violence against women. The strategy came about after years of advocacy and consensus-building, supported by UNFPA and civil society organizations, following a national debate on the role of women and men that had once polarized Moroccan society. Ensuring that the strategy makes a difference will require continued awareness-raising about women's rights, and building the capacity of the health and justice institutions that are charged with implementing it around the country.

ROMANIA

Domestic violence in Romania was brought to national attention by the results of a 1999 survey, which found that the incidence of physical abuse reported by women there was higher than in other Eastern European countries. UNFPA is supporting efforts from the grass roots to the highest levels of Government to raise awareness of the problem, promote legislative and institutional reforms to combat it, and set up demonstration projects of what works. One key to the success of these projects is establishing partnerships among district health authorities, local administrations, neighbourhood police, NGOs and the media. Another is helping people explore their own attitudes about domestic violence through training and innovative awareness campaigns.

SIERRA LEONE

Rape, abduction and sexual slavery are part of the brutal legacy of Sierra Leone's decade-long civil war, which left over half the country's population displaced and destitute. As a matter of survival, both during and after the war, women (as well as men) have been forced into commercial sex, which leaves them vulnerable to HIV infection and other, potentially fatal, problems. In response, a faith-based organization supported by UNFPA is helping girls and young women affected by the war to regain their health and dignity, and is giving them the tools to generate alternative livelihoods. One key to success is responding to their needs in a holistic way. Another is involving partners—as well as the host community—in sensitization and training activities, and providing free education to their children.

TURKEY

As in many countries, laws protecting women's rights in Turkey have had little impact due to the lack of political will and public inertia. A study on the incidence of 'honour' killings was a wake-up call to government officials and others to do something about it. An advocacy campaign initiated by UNFPA and involving government decision-makers, NGOs, the private sector and Turkish celebrities proved remarkably successful in focusing public attention and shaping a national dialogue on violence against women. Its targeting of Turkish men was a key to its success. Among other superstars who embraced the campaign were the country's major league football players, who spread the message—'Stop violence against women!'—during half-time and in film spots on television and in cinemas across the country.

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect. UNFPA—because everyone counts