

*Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families and on society as a whole.*

– United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

### **Gender-based Violence in Asia and the Pacific**

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most pervasive yet least recognized human-rights abuses in the world. GBV is present across all cultures and socio-economic divides. It exists in the private and public spheres, and occurs in times of peace and conflict. Globally, as many as one in every three women is beaten, coerced into sex, or abused in some way during her lifetime<sup>1</sup>. Most often, violence and abuse is perpetrated by a spouse or a male family member. The Asia-Pacific region has some of the highest reported levels of gender-based violence in the world. For example, Oxfam reports that one in every two women in South Asia faces violence in her home<sup>2</sup>. A 2005 WHO survey reported that over a third of the women in countries such as Bangladesh, Thailand and Samoa<sup>3</sup> have faced some form of violence in their lives. Despite decades of work to end violence and some significant advances in terms of public awareness, laws and policies there is no indication that aggregate levels of violence have decreased in the region. Thus, GBV continues unabated and often quietly condoned, impairing families, communities and societies in general.



### **Partners for Prevention: Working with Boys and Men to Prevent Gender-based Violence**

*Partners for Prevention* is a new UNDP, UNFPA, UNIFEM and UNV regional programme for Asia and the Pacific.

The programme started with a thorough two-year consultation process to explore how a regional programme could enhance existing work on gender-based violence, to promote women's empowerment

and address challenges that are beyond the reach of most local initiatives.

As a result of these consultations, *Partners for Prevention* has developed a strategy to focus on primary prevention - stopping violence before it starts – especially among boys and men, to facilitate cross border exchange and learning across the region, and to focus on changes at the institutional and policy levels. The essential partnerships behind *Partners for Prevention* are among those dedicated to women's empowerment and ending violence, policy makers, UN staff and civil society practitioners from the local to the regional levels.

### **Primary Prevention Involving Boys and Men**

Most responses to GBV focus on women's rights and empowerment, legal reform, protection and service provision. Whilst these interventions continue to be key priorities, *Partners for Prevention* complements these efforts by addressing root causes of GBV through primary prevention with boys and men. Primary prevention strives to create societies where gender-based violence is unacceptable to all. To achieve this goal, prevailing social norms, attitudes and behaviours – and how they perpetuate violence - must be examined.

*Partners for Prevention* focuses on involving boys and men in prevention because GBV is rooted in power relations among women, men, girls and boys. Men are overwhelmingly involved in all types of violence. They are the primary perpetrators of GBV, and often experience violence themselves. GBV is linked to dominant notions of "what it means to be a man" therefore preventing GBV can be enhanced by involving boys and men in ways that are sensitive to these notions and their experiences.

Often, boys and men are left out of violence prevention efforts. Yet, there is evidence that projects engaging boys and men in a sustained and gender sensitive manner can result in changing attitudes and behaviours. Thus, *Partners for Prevention* will build on the growing set of promising projects with boys and men to enhance GBV prevention overall.

### **One Regional Programme, Many Partners**

Key attributes of this programme are consolidation and coordination. *Partners for Prevention* will consolidate existing resources and produce knowledge utilising the diverse experience base of the participating UN

<sup>1</sup>In-depth Study on all Forms of Violence Against Women: Report of the Secretary-General: New York, United Nations, 2006

<sup>2</sup> Towards Ending Violence Against Women in South Asia: Oxfam International Briefing Paper # 66, August 2004

<sup>3</sup> WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women: Geneva, World Health Organization, 2005

organisations and their many partners. GBV prevention with boys and men will be rooted in existing work of the UN and its partners on the ground, not “added on” as a separate approach. *Partners for Prevention’s* regional scope also complements local initiatives by providing a platform to connect global learning to the local level.

A related strength of *Partners for Prevention* is the ability to work with both government and civil society partners to advocate for wider policy and institutional changes. By taking into account the broad policy context, the programme will help advocate for more comprehensive policy frameworks for GBV prevention that are responsive to local realities. Although this ability often lies outside the scope of local GBV initiatives, this “scaling up” is vital for longer term change.

### Programme Components

*Partners for Prevention* is organised around the following three areas of work:

#### **Communication for Social Change**

A communication for social change approach draws on multiple communication channels to involve communities in bringing about desired changes in attitudes and practices. To date, however, many practitioners are not familiar with what works for effective communication, and often mass media awareness campaigns on violence against women do not engage communities, nor their boys and men, in ways that inspire them to get involved and take action for change.

*Partners for Prevention* seeks to enhance the knowledge and skill base of local partners to engage in successful communication for behavioural and social change. *Partners for Prevention* will prioritise combining context specific messages with local outreach and community driven project interventions. The programme will support pilot initiatives modelling this approach in several communities across the region. In addition, the programme aims to promote the use of new information technologies and social networking channels such as instant messaging, Youtube and Facebook to reach out to and connect with youth.

#### **Capacity Development and Networking**

By leveraging existing networks of practitioners, civil society organisations, government counterparts and UN agencies – and by fostering new alliances - *Partners for Prevention* is facilitating a regional “Community of Practice” to share successes, programmatic insights and experiences across countries. To support the regional community, web-based community portal serves as a comprehensive networking and resource hub for all research, programming and training tools.

Through this community of practice, *Partners for Prevention* seeks to develop the capacity of many to involve boys and men in GBV prevention. The programme is assessing training needs and consolidating capacity development resources for government, UN and civil society partners. Together with these partners, a regional capacity development

strategy will be put into practice with focus on communication, advocacy, research, evaluation and other skills.

#### **Evidence-based Policy Advocacy**

The programme is consolidating existing research and commissioning new studies to strengthen the evidence



base for more comprehensive policy responses to GBV. The consolidated research will deepen our understanding of the underlying norms, attitudes and behaviours related to the use of GBV, and what we can do to transform them. At the same time, in partnership with a network of policy makers from the region, existing policy frameworks will be analysed to identify spaces where policy enhancements can be made to encourage more equality and less violence. Based on the resulting policy recommendations, a series of regional and country level initiatives will be launched to advocate for specific policy changes and reiterate the need to involve boys and men in comprehensive GBV prevention.

#### **Looking Ahead**

Stopping violence before it starts is a long term process. *Partners for Prevention* is thus designed to result in consolidated resources, strengthened networks and increased capacities which will far outlive the programme timeframe. The programme is also implementing a comprehensive impact evaluation to share learning on this approach with a broad set of practitioners. All programme outcomes – the networks, websites and knowledge products – will be created in collaboration with regional partners and full ownership of these products will be gradually migrated to them. Thus, in partnership with civil society, government and donors, the programme will contribute to sustained GBV prevention in the region.

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