

Tackling Violence against Women and Girls in the International Context

The UK Government has shown strong leadership on tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) overseas, demonstrated by a number of new policy and financial commitments across the UK's international departments, as well as the appointment of Lynne Featherstone MP as the UK's Ministerial Champion for international VAWG. More recently, the expansion of the Department for International Development's (DFID) programming on VAWG, reinforced by efforts to build the capacity of country offices to design and deliver programmes that are effective in addressing VAWG, have strengthened implementation of policy commitments. This has been matched by a commitment to increase the attention given to VAWG by other governments and in international spaces, in particular through efforts to ensure positive outcomes at the 57th UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2013. While welcoming these significant advancements, Womankind believes there are a number of areas where DFID's response to VAWG can be strengthened.

The UK government should:

- a) Increase the focus of DFID's programming on addressing root causes of VAWG – principally gender inequality and discriminatory social norms – in line with DFID's *Theory of Change on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls* and related guidance.
- b) Increase support for southern women's rights organisations, recognising the unique and essential role they play in tackling VAWG.
- c) Institutionalise VAWG more strongly across all areas of DFID's work and strengthen DFID's coordination and leadership role on VAWG across the UK's international departments.
- d) Continue to raise the profile of VAWG internationally, including promoting the inclusion of a target on ending VAWG as part of a dedicated standalone goal on gender equality within the post-2015 framework.

Background information

a) Tackling the root causes of VAWG

VAWG is widely recognised as a manifestation of unequal power relations between women and men – as being caused by, and reinforcing, gender inequality. This is formally acknowledged by a range of international and regional legal and policy frameworks. Eliminating VAWG cannot therefore be achieved without improving the status of women through economic, political and social empowerment of women and girls.

This is explicitly recognised in DFID's *Theory of Change for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls*, which shows that interventions to empower women and girls are a prerequisite for effective violence prevention and response. The *Theory of Change* also identifies social norms that condone VAWG and support male dominance and as a major barrier to effective VAWG prevention and response – for example, norms on the acceptability of wife beating.

The announcement that DFID's new VAWG Research and Innovation Fund will include a focus on prevention strategies is an opportunity to increase support for tackling social norms and women's empowerment. **However, DFID's mapping of its existing VAWG programmes shows that a relatively small proportion of DFID's programmes address social norms and women's empowerment.** Womankind recommends that a greater proportion of DFID's programming and funding for tackling VAWG should focus explicitly on tackling these root causes.

b) The unique and essential role of women's rights organisations in tackling VAWG

Women's rights organisations have pioneered effective models for tackling VAWG. For example Womankind's partner in Ethiopia, KMG, developed an effective approach for ending female genital

mutilation (FGM) which has led to the abandonment of the annual public FGM ritual in the Kembatta and a reduction from 97% to just 5% in people who said they would have their daughters cut. Research in 70 countries by Htun and Weldon *The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective 1975–2005*, found that the mobilisation of women's rights organisations and movements is more important for combating violence against women than the wealth of nations, left-wing political parties, or the number of women politicians. However, despite their enormous added value, many women's rights organisations have not had the resources needed to take innovative models to scale. This is due to underfunding of women's rights organisations globally, and tiny amounts of money for work on VAWG, in particular a shortage of funding which commits beyond an annual cycle. Support for women's rights organisations is one of the seven key principles underlying DFID's *Theory of Change on Tackling VAWG*. However it is not clear how effectively DFID is implementing this principle into practice.

The OECD's reporting system contains a purpose code 'Women's equality organisations and institutions' which tracks support to women's organisations and ministries. **In 2011, UK aid activities reported under this purpose code amounted to just USD 16.41 million compared with USD 118.6 million in the Netherlands, USD 82.15 million in Norway, USD 58.49 million in Spain, USD 50.52 million in Sweden and USD 24.13 in Denmark.** Moreover, although the information is difficult to access, Womankind's research suggests that very few southern-based women's rights organisations are direct recipients of DFID's centralised funds. Womankind recommends increasing support for southern women's rights organisations, recognising the unique and essential role they play in tackling VAWG.

c) Strengthening capacity, coordination and leadership for the long-term

DFID's work on VAWG is ambitious but is currently siloed within DFID and institutionalisation across the organisation is weak. Womankind's experience suggests that the extent to which VAWG is prioritised by country offices depends on the individual commitment of country office staff rather than being embedded in a systematic way. DFID staff across the board should be expected to ensure their work contributes to tackling VAWG. Womankind has welcomed DFID's efforts to expand its capacity on VAWG; however, the focus has been on buying in external expertise rather than building capacity in-house. This is likely to be less effective in forging the longer term commitment and capacity of staff across the organisation to address VAWG. Womankind believes there could be stronger coordination across the three international departments (FCO, MoD, DFID) to ensure that work on VAWG is aligned and supports and reinforces each other.

d) The international agenda

The UK continues to be a powerful development champion internationally, with the influence to raise the profile of VAWG with governments overseas and in international spaces. We have welcomed the priority that the UK government placed on working in partnership with other governments to ensure the 57th Commission on the Status of Women has strong agreed conclusions that protect existing agreed human rights commitments. We hope this commitment will be sustained beyond the CSW meeting, **including through efforts to promote the inclusion of a specific target on ending violence against women and girls as part of a dedicated standalone goal on gender equality within the post-2015 framework.**

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