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INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

**Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against
women and girls**

**PRIMARY PREVENTION OF ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**

A different world is possible

by

**MARAI LARASI
Co-chair
End Violence against Women Coalition
Director
IMKAAN
United Kingdom**

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a fundamental violation of human rights and one that has implications within a range of human rights frameworks. It is widespread and it is costly. In practical terms there are obvious economic costs to the state with respect to criminal justice interventions, health responses and reduced productivity. But there are also the human costs associated with injuries, loss of life, loss of confidence, experiences of trauma and inability to thrive.

VAWG occurs within, and contributes to, a wider context of structural gender inequality and as such it is too often normalised. It is a phenomenon which impacts individual women, families, communities and our whole societies. In the UK alone, VAWG affects up to three million women each year; and across the globe, women and girls experience varying levels of sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, sexual bullying, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, rape (including 'corrective' rape), forced marriage, sexual exploitation, exploitation through the 'sex industry', trafficking and violence in the name of 'honour'.

The picture is not a positive one, but progress *has* been made around responding to VAWG. From shelters and rape crisis services to community based advocacy projects, services have been developed, generally by women activists, which support safety and recovery while often providing access to other packages of support. Progress has also been made at a policy and strategic level, with many States developing legislation and in some cases policy frameworks to address the problem of VAWG.

Yet, while the emphasis has necessarily been on ensuring that survivors are able to access appropriate support, very little progress has been made with respect to preventing VAWG from happening in the first place. In practice we often engage with VAWG as if it is inevitable, a fact of life, something that has always happened and will always happen. VAWG, like other issues which have equalities implications, is often treated as if it is somehow a by-product of human existence. But violence against women and girls is *not* inevitable. There is growing consensus that it can be prevented. This is not just an abstract theoretical notion, it *is* possible to stop women and girls from being sexually exploited, raped, forced into marriage, genitally mutilated, assaulted in their homes and attacked in the name of 'honour'. We know it is possible because in countries that are far afield and varied in their populations and cultural contexts, women activists, community workers, teachers, health practitioners, and others, have developed and delivered programmes of work that have transformed attitudes and reduced female genital mutilation, sexual bullying etc

The End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) holds the position that prevention *must* be a fundamental aspect of any work around VAWG. In June 2011 EVAW published '*A Different World is Possible*', a call for long-term and targeted action to prevent violence against women and girls. The report provides a blueprint which focusses on primary prevention i.e. approaches which aim to prevent violence before it occurs. Although focussed on the UK, the report is easily adaptable to other contexts; particularly as it takes into account international frameworks such as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), UN Resolution on Prevention, Beijing Platform for Action, and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In producing the paper, EVAW was acutely aware that there are a number of ongoing challenges faced by institutions and practitioners in taking prevention work forward. In identifying some of the challenges and gaps, we see opportunities for them to be addressed through partnership, strong leadership and investment in, and commitment to, systematic approaches to prevention of VAWG. While these challenges are based on our experiences in the UK, we are confident that the themes are fairly consistent, irrespective of the State context.

Key Challenges

Lack of systematic approach to prevention

Across the world, governments are increasingly declaring commitments to challenging VAWG in general, or at least specific areas such as domestic violence. In many cases, the only indication of a centralised commitment to prevention, is an awareness raising campaign using posters, leaflets, the internet and television, in an attempt to influence and change attitudes.

Despite these welcome developments, there is a major disconnect between this position and any political structures which emphasise 'localism' and promote self-direction in education, health, criminal justice and local government priorities. Where schools, for example, operate autonomously with no requirement to deliver on programmes outside of a limited and rigid academic framework, issues such as violence against women and girls are left to the interest and resources within individual schools. In practice, this means that VAWG is either excluded from the curriculum completely, or tagged on to activities in an occasional lesson, 'drop-down' days and assemblies. This also means that local VAWG services, who have developed / adapted prevention programmes, and who are often poorly funded, are only able to get the work into schools when there is interest from the school's leadership.

This is of particular concern as schools are important sites in the development of attitudes and behaviours. Where schools fail to address VAWG, problematic attitudes can go unchallenged, abusive behaviours can go unchecked, and the environment can become unsafe for girls and young women. There is a growing body of research which highlights how educational settings can reinforce and condone gender inequality with negative consequences for both girls and boys.

EVAW continues to call on the UK government, and would also urge other States, to ensure universal delivery of a 'whole school approach' i.e. one which integrates VAWG into the curriculum, into the entire learning environment and the wider community. The 'whole school approach' supports leadership and development across the school and embeds gender equality and a zero tolerance of VAWG into its everyday operations.

Lack of funding for prevention work

VAWG work is severely under-resourced. Where resources are available they are necessarily focussed on much-needed services for survivors. EVAW's position calls for

investment in prevention work which does not negatively impact on funding of services for survivors.

Investment in prevention work makes economic sense. In the UK, the average cost of a murder investigation is over £1, 000, 000. Given that over one hundred women in the UK are killed every year, by a current or former partner, the cost to the public purse is enormous. Globally the costs to States in terms of other areas such as health and housing takes the figures into the several billions.

Yet some of the costs associated with doing prevention work are significantly lower. For example, one school programme led by the Ashiana Project in London, which has worked to prevent forced marriage, cost only £31, 000, and has resulted in 95% of girls feeling more confident about forming healthy relationships. The programme has also prevented a number of forced marriages from taking place, while delivering a range of other positive outcomes for students and staff. Programmes such as this one, are usually funded on a short term basis with no mechanism to ensure the project's sustainability.

Work which is short term and fragmented can make a difference, but is limited in its reach. A systematic approach to developing and delivering prevention work is essential in order to deliver widespread, long-term and meaningful changes. It is also important that the expertise that has been developed with respect to VAWG is fully utilised in prevention work. However this must be adequately resourced and the work must be embedded into long-term budget planning, in order to ensure its sustainability.

Lack of investment in research and monitoring

The lack of focus on prevention has been mirrored by a lack of investment in evaluating what really works in terms of prevention. Most of the evidence has been collected from high income countries, and in particular the USA. As a result, there is no well-developed international body of evidence about which programmes are most effective, in which context, and why. This in turn creates challenges for providers and commissioners who are unable to refer to a broad range of good practice models. However, the World Health Organisation in its document *'Preventing Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Against Women'* highlights the effectiveness vs ineffectiveness of the main approaches to prevention. In its own work, EVAW has highlighted examples of *promising practice*, in order to demonstrate the range of innovative work that is taking place in the UK. While this is valuable, it is also limited in its scope and is not a substitute for longer term pieces of evaluation work.

It is essential that investment in prevention work is matched with research, monitoring and evaluation. This will support the ongoing development of good practice while providing evidence about the range and quality of different approaches. For example, one key funder of VAWG work in the UK has recently invested in evaluation of its funded grassroots prevention projects. This approach to funding is one which could be easily transferred to a statutory context allowing States to demonstrate how they are fulfilling their international

obligations to prevent VAWG, while promoting the ongoing development of effective practice.

Shifting Landscapes

In many States, the 'conducive context' in which VAWG occurs has become increasingly complex and layered. Attitudes which condone gender inequality and VAWG are routinely promoted through music, films, videos, talk shows, reality television etc. In addition, with the emergence of new technologies, social networking tools and increasingly problematic media messages, practitioners and policy makers face new challenges with respect to preventing VAWG. Practitioners working with young people are often acutely aware that they are entering new territories with respect to how new technologies are being used in the sexualisation and sexual exploitation of girls and young women.

Work to prevent VAWG must be linked to work which addresses the sexualisation of women and girls in the media and popular culture. It is essential that governments develop approaches which engage entertainment and media industries including those responsible for social networking sites such as Facebook. Where factors such as religion and 'culture' are used as a basis for VAWG, States should also seek to address this. For, while school are key actors in preventing VAWG, wider cultural shifts are also required.

Note on Promising Practices

Across the globe, there are a number of examples of innovative prevention projects with some of the most cutting edge programmes being developed in low and middle income countries. For example, Uganda-based *Raising Voices*, has been widely recognised as a leader in primary prevention work, using a multi-layered approach which includes *raising awareness* and *action integration* to ensure effective community mobilisation; while programmes such as *Bell Bajao (Ring the Bell)* in India and *Promundo* in Brazil have led the way in creatively engaging men and boys in preventing VAWG and promoting gender equality.

EVAW's *Promising Practice* paper highlighted a number of UK based examples of primary prevention work. Examples include the work of *NIA* and the *STAR* project, schools based programmes focussed on shifting young people's attitudes to gender and to VAWG. Both projects worked with large numbers of pupils including, in the case of *NIA*, young people in Pupil Referral Units who had been excluded from mainstream education. Key themes in both programmes include partnership with schools, engaging education staff and ensuring a gendered perspective. Although the projects had different structures and different ways of working, it is clear that the expertise of the VAWG sector, placed within an educational setting was essential. This is reflected throughout all the examples of promising practice, reinforcing the importance of partnership, leadership and the valuing of specific areas of expertise.

Final Word

As previously highlighted violence against women and girls has serious consequences for all our societies. While it is essential that we continue to protect and support survivors of gender violence, it is also important that we begin to move towards preventing this violence from happening in the first place. It is not sufficient to run occasional awareness-raising campaigns. It is not sufficient to expect schools to 'get their own house in order'. It is not sufficient to continue to treat violence against women and girls as an inevitability; and it is not sufficient to continue to fail generation after generation of women and girls within a context of 'the norm'

The WHO in 'Preventing Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Against Women' states, *'Given the lifetime prevalence of intimate partner and sexual violence....the hundreds of millions of women worldwide in need of services would outstrip the capacity of even the best-resourced countries. A problem on this scale requires a major focus on primary prevention.'*

As States ask whether, particularly in challenging economic times, they can afford to invest in preventing VAWG; as women activists, we ask, given the scale of the costs to women, to society and to the public purse, can we afford not to?