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PROMISES TO KEEP

Using the Sustainable Development Goals to stand with **FEARLESS** women to end violence



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After three years of hard negotiations September 2015 will eventually mark the official agreement on a new global development framework - **the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. With a hard-fought goal on gender equality and women and girls' empowerment (so called SDG5), and a landmark **target on the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls (VAWG)**,¹ this new agenda presents an important opportunity for women and girls. Yet the realisation of these goals will require strong political leadership, accountability for implementation and adequate resources.

In June 2015, on the back of negotiations surrounding the goals, **ActionAid UK launched its new campaign and flagship report *FEARLESS: Standing with women and girls to end violence***.² Within this context, we called upon world leaders to embrace the SDGs as a strategic opportunity to recalibrate efforts to implement existing and new commitments on VAWG. This report further builds on this work, presenting **five priority actions** to catalyse successful implementation of the newly agreed target on VAWG.

Firstly, governments and the international community must upscale support and resourcing for **women's collective action**. 'Helping hand' approaches focused on empowerment of individual women and girls will not bring the structural change needed to address gender inequality and the injustice of VAWG.

Secondly, the development and implementation of comprehensive, well-resourced, and human rights based **laws and national action plans (NAPs)** is an urgent imperative. Elimination of all forms of VAWG in private and public spaces must become top-level and immediate government business.

Thirdly, the international community must build **adequate and principle-based financing architecture for resourcing SDG5**. Efforts towards the mobilisation of maximum available resources to implement laws, national action plans and other VAWG-related commitments must be at the centre of any strategy to ensure that women's rights are respected, protected and upheld in all corners of the globe.

Fourthly, ongoing monitoring of progress and **strong global accountability mechanisms** must take centre stage. States have a primary responsibility under international law to prevent and respond to VAWG and it is imperative that they fulfil their obligations.

Finally, **corporates must be accountable for their part in ending VAWG** as an integral part of the agenda to prevent and respond to violence.

While important in their own right, all priority actions should be implemented in full and holistically under the overarching, long term goal of creating a world free from patriarchy and economic injustice, where VAWG can be stopped before it occurs.

Enough words, time for action. With the new post-2015 framework finally in place, it is now the time for governments and other development actors to step up and end violence against women and girls by 2030, and beyond.

PRIORITY ACTION 1
Support and resource women's collective action

- ✓ Respect, protect and uphold civil society and democratic space, the right to association expression and assembly.
- ✓ Grant legal recognition of the UN Declaration on the Human Rights Defenders at a national level, acknowledge specific risks and vulnerabilities faced by Women Human Rights Defenders, and strengthen mechanisms of protection.
- ✓ Establish dedicated funding instruments to support women's collective action.

PRIORITY ACTION 2
Develop and implement laws and national action plans to end VAWG

- ✓ Develop and implement comprehensive and holistic legislation based on due diligence principles and human rights standards and obligations; ratify global and regional women's rights and VAWG related conventions without any reservations.
- ✓ Develop, implement and review ambitious national action plans (NAPs) to end VAWG which: apply a comprehensive and human rights based approach and prioritise voices and concerns of women from marginalised groups; prioritise multi-sectoral coordination in a structured process to deliver gender responsive public services to respond to and prevent VAWG at all stages; cost NAPs and finance their implementation, where financing gaps exist donors should step forward and fill them.

PRIORITY ACTION 3
Step up financing for gender equality and elimination of VAWG

- ✓ Resource the implementation by mobilising unprecedented levels of resources from all sources and at all levels. In particular donors should: establish well-resourced financing instruments to support women's collective action; step up to fill financing gaps for the implementation of laws and NAPs; resource UN Women and their Trust Fund to end VAWG; start a process towards establishing a new global acceleration instrument or mechanism on VAWG, and track aid in support of tackling VAWG.
- ✓ Address structural injustices in financing for development, for example by tackling harmful tax rules and behaviours to increase corporate tax revenues in developing countries to help realise women's rights.

PRIORITY ACTION 4
Strengthen international accountability for the SDGs and elimination of VAWG

- ✓ Take stock of progress and challenges by establishing a new periodic global report on the state of progress in eliminating all forms of VAWG.
- ✓ Invest in data collection on all forms of VAWG involving women's rights organisations and movements at all stages; when capacity and funding is lacking, donors should step up and support national statistical offices in developing countries.
- ✓ Establish an enforceable, comprehensive and participatory review and follow-up mechanisms on the implementation of the SDGs.

PRIORITY ACTION 5
Hold corporate actors accountable for their part in ending VAWG

- ✓ Constructively engage with the inter-governmental working group of the Human Rights Council to develop a legally binding instrument on transnational corporations.
- ✓ Support a proposal for the new ILO Convention on gender-based violence in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

September 2015 will see the formal adoption of a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – a universal framework designed to guide global development priorities for the next generation.

Following tireless advocacy and campaigning by feminists and women's rights organisations (WROs), a stand-alone goal on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (SDG5), and a target on the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls (VAWG) in public and private spheres (target 5.2) looks certain to be part of this agenda.³ This is welcome progress since the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which neglected to address VAWG and other issues fundamental to the fulfillment of women's rights.

It is also an important addition to the existing catalogue of global, regional and national commitments – foremost the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979)⁴ and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA, 1995)⁵ – which set out governments' responsibilities for respecting, protecting and upholding women's rights, including preventing and responding to VAWG (see Timeline on page 13).

The inclusion of a specific target on VAWG in the SDGs framework is vital because, despite these international agreements, globally 35% of women continue to experience violence throughout their lifetime,⁶ be it through intimate partner violence, harmful traditional practices, sexual violence (including rape), in the home,

on the streets, at school, and many other places, in peace or in conflict situations.

ActionAid's June 2015 report *FEARLESS: Standing with women and girls to end violence*, highlighted this enduring global outrage and discussed the underlying causes and drivers of abuse.⁷ It also demonstrated how women and girls are at the forefront of fighting for their rights. Yet long-standing and emerging threats and challenges mean that their voices are being increasingly muted. In fact, despite the welcome attention to gender equality and VAWG in the SDGs, the fragile progress made on these issues in the last decades risks being rolled back if not vigorously defended and sustained.

DEALING WITH CHALLENGES OLD AND NEW

For women and girls, violence is the most extreme form of discrimination because it is deeply embedded in patriarchal norms. Gender inequality manifested, among other issues, in the assertion of male authority over women in different spheres of their lives, is closely associated with levels of intimate partner violence across countries.⁹ In our analysis of VAWG in 70 developing countries, we found that the more gender unequal a country is, as defined by the Gender Inequality Index (GII), the bigger the prevalence of VAWG altogether (see Graph 1 opposite).¹⁰ VAWG is also exacerbated by other multiple forms of oppression based on, for example, women's class, caste, ethnicity, religion, age, disability status or sexual orientation.

WHAT ARE THE 'SDGs'?

The 'SDGs', the Sustainable Development Goals, are 17 goals and 169 targets addressing a wide spectrum of issues - from ending poverty and reducing inequality, to taking action to combat climate change and reverse environmental degradation – which UN Member States set for themselves to be achieved by 2030. Unlike it has been the case with the MDGs, gender equality has been mainstreamed throughout the whole framework, and is specifically addressed by **the SDG Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls**.

In particular, SDG5 ties member states with commitments to:

5.1. End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.

5.2. Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

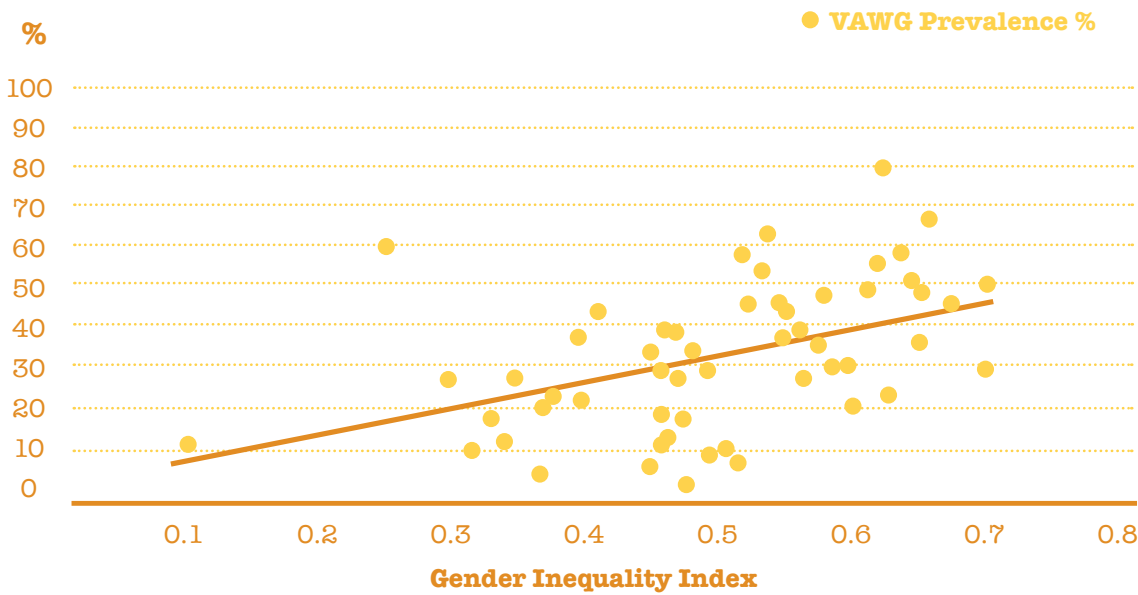
5.3. Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

5.4. Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

5.6. Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

5.7. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.⁸

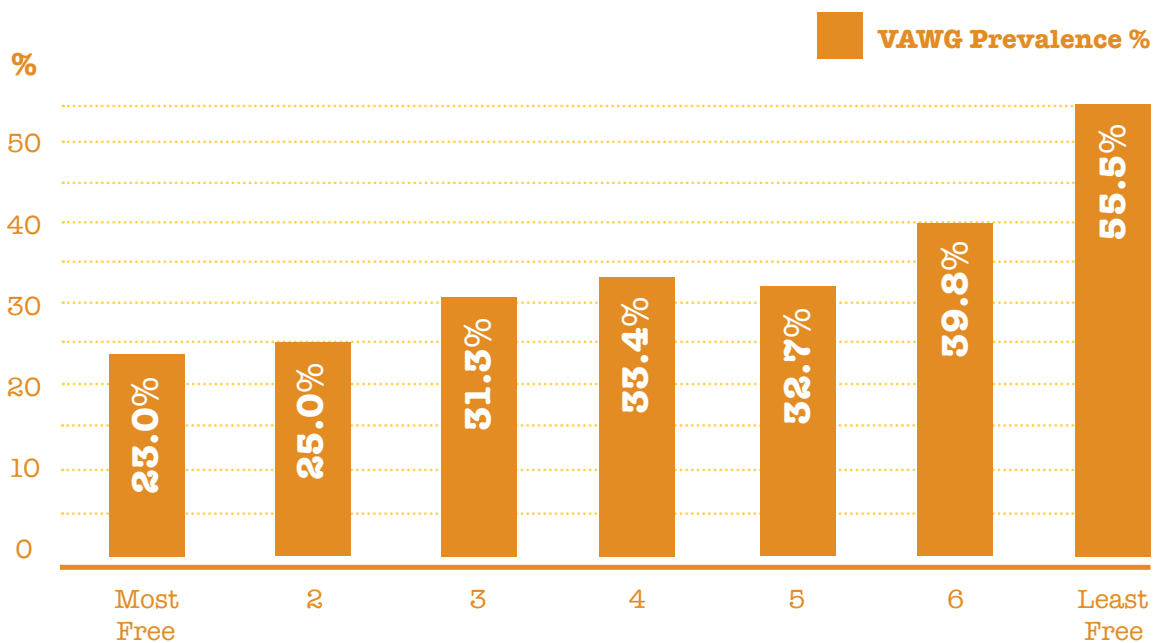
Graph 1: Relationship between VAWG prevalence in developing countries and Gender Inequality Index



Currently the alarming constraints being placed on democratic and civil society space by states and other powerful actors, along with rising religious fundamentalisms and internal conflict and wars, are all fuelling this most systematic human rights abuse.¹¹ The importance of an environment in which women's

rights activists can operate freely to challenge violence is illustrated in ActionAid's latest research. We found that women are twice as likely to experience violence in countries with weaker civil rights, than in those with stronger civil rights frameworks, while in general the state of civil rights in the world deteriorates.¹²

Graph 2: Average VAWG prevalence in developing countries by civil liberties and rights



Moreover, over the last decades, we have faced persistent lack of political will to turn hard fought commitments into reality. For example, while in many countries the normative frameworks to address at least some forms of violence now do exist, all too often laws are not being implemented, nor are they followed through with comprehensive and well-resourced national action plans to prevent and respond to VAWG.¹³ Disappointingly, current global spaces to hold governments accountable for delivering on their VAWG obligations are lacking teeth to enforce successful implementation.¹⁴ The lack of political will is also reflected in the fact that neither domestic resource mobilisation,¹⁵ nor Overseas Development Assistance (ODA),¹⁶ have been in any way proportionate to the scale of VAWG.

Finally, economic inequality endured by women everywhere but especially poor women in the global South, exacerbates the situation. Free trade and the rapid globalisation of markets crowds women into poorly-paid and insecure work,¹⁷ exposing them to the risk of violence in and around the workplace.¹⁸ It also undermines their voice and bargaining power at home and in wider society, making it harder for them to leave or to challenge the abuse. Despite the fact that all too often their footprint has been detrimental to women – with regard to both their economic rights and bodily integrity – there are currently no binding international instruments to hold transnational corporations accountable if and when human rights violations occur.¹⁹

Meanwhile governments in the global South lose precious billions to corporate tax dodging and avoidance,²⁰ money which could be used to fund vital services to prevent and respond to VAWG many times over. The Third International Conference on Financing for Development in June in 2015 could have taken action to redress these structural injustices and, importantly, agree on the on the ambitious financing framework for the new SDGs. But its outcomes fell far short to live up to the challenges old and new.²¹

ENOUGH WORDS – TIME FOR PRIORITY ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE VAWG

We are now at a critical juncture. The ambition of the post-2015 agenda is extraordinary. With 17 goals and 169 targets covering a wide spectrum of issues, the SDGs have the potential to confront enduring and emerging global challenges, including the scourge of VAWG. But this cannot happen without strong political leadership, accountability for implementation and adequate resources. Critically, implementation of the SDGs must be driven by voices and priorities of women themselves.

ActionAid's report *FEARLESS: Standing with women and girls to end violence*²² called upon all governments, donors and the international community to embrace the SDGs as an opportunity to galvanise political will to implement long-standing and new commitments on VAWG. Within this context, we outlined an agenda for change through the following key recommendations: ensuring leadership, implementation and accountability; prioritising women's voice and participation; and ensuring the necessary financing to end VAWG.

This follow-up report builds on this work, presenting five evidence-based priority actions to catalyse the successful implementation of the SDG5 target on the elimination of all forms of VAWG. These priority actions include:

- 1 Supporting and resourcing women's collective action**
- 2 Implementing laws and ambitious national action plans to end VAWG**
- 3 Stepping up financing for gender equality and elimination of VAWG**
- 4 Strengthening international accountability for the SDGs and elimination of VAWG**
- 5 Holding corporates accountable for their part in ending VAWG.**

While important in their own right, each priority action should be implemented under the overarching, long-term goal of preventing VAWG before it occurs. Therefore, to finally end all forms of VAWG, the wider social, political and economic context must be addressed to eliminate root causes of violence through structural transformation towards gender and economic justice. A broad agenda for achieving such transformation, leading to a world free from VAWG, is outlined on page 12.

PRIORITY ACTION 1: SUPPORT AND RESOURCE WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE ACTION

In spite of its prevalence worldwide, VAWG has rarely been raised as an issue – much less become a political priority – without sustained pressure from **women's rights movements and women's rights organisations (WROs)**.

Robust evidence confirms it. A study covering 70 countries across four decades found that the mobilisation of independent WROs was the single most important factor in ensuring that global commitments to ending VAWG are translated into meaningful,

enduring policies at the national level – more important than a country's wealth, the presence of left-wing parties or the number of women in politics.²³ This is because WROs and movements²⁴ are always in the front line, providing crucial services to survivors, bringing voices of marginalised women to the fore, and holding governments accountable for realising their commitments to end VAWG.

WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE ACTION LEADS THE WAY

- In 2013 a campaign by Nigeria's Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence against Women spurred the successful passage of the national Violence against Persons Bill. Among other issues, the new law included a more comprehensive definition of VAWG, stricter sentences and protection from further abuse through restraining orders, and a fund to support victims' rehabilitation.²⁵
- In the aftermath of the heinous rape of a young women student on a Delhi bus in 2012, the mass protests led by the feminist movement helped to secure wide-ranging reforms in India. For example, a special committee headed by a former Chief Justice was set up to review the law²⁶ and the new legislation passed in 2013 provides for much stricter punishments for sex crimes, also covering violations such as stalking, voyeurism and lewd expressions.²⁷
- The creation of UN Women in 2010, the only UN agency wholly dedicated to support gender equality and women's rights, was to a large extent possible due to efforts of members and supporters of the Gender Equality Architecture Reform Campaign led by the global women's movement and feminist organisations.²⁸

If states and other development actors are serious about ending VAWG, they must recognise the critical role played by women's rights organising and step up efforts to support women's collective action, at least, in the following three ways.

1) Protect democratic space and rights to organise

Shrinking space for civil society will continue to hinder progress in ending VAWG. As highlighted above, according to ActionAid research, women are twice

as likely to experience violence in countries with weaker civil rights, than in those with stronger civil rights frameworks. If governments are serious about eliminating VAWG, they must respect and protect democratic space, while upholding the rights to freedom of association, expression and assembly, as enshrined in the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights.^{29,30}

Moreover, they must enact laws that facilitate and support organising for human rights, including women's rights, and withdraw legislation which does the reverse, for example through excessively rigorous requirements for the legal registration of NGOs or restrictions to access international funding.

2) Recognise and protect women human rights defenders

The international community cannot claim to be pursuing the fight against gender inequality and VAWG without protecting **Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD)** – forefront activists who work to defend women's rights and/or the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) people from the injustices perpetrated by state and non-state actors, including religious fundamentalists and transnational corporations.³¹

As highlighted by the International Coalition on Women Human Rights Defenders ICWHRD, WHRDs are increasingly targeted with violent attacks because they seek to challenge the unjust status quo, and because they are women.³² In June 2015, a survey by ActionAid found that nearly two thirds of WHRDs reported deterioration in their security in the last two years.³³

Granting legal recognition to the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders at national level – the landmark document identifying states' obligations to protect and prevent violations against human rights defenders³⁴ – followed up by acknowledgment of the specific risks and vulnerabilities faced by WHRDs, would officially validate their work, strengthen mechanisms of protection, and send a strong signal that governments are serious about standing with women and girls to end violence.³⁵

3) Establish specific funding instruments to support women's rights organisations and movements

According to the Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID), in 2011 the average annual income of WROs globally was just US\$20,000.³⁶ Broad, long term financial support for women's collective action would be clear evidence of development actors' commitment to achieving SDG5 and eliminating VAWG from the start. But currently, among the donor community, only a very small group of agencies accounts for the majority of financial support for

WROs.³⁷ It is time for other donors to step up and bridge the funding gap for women's rights movements and organisations. The donor champions of SDG5 should therefore work to **establish adequately resourced, appropriate funding instruments to support women's collective action** necessary to realise the SDGs commitments on gender equality and the elimination of VAWG.

Such instruments – for example in the form of a SDG5 fund – should be additional to existing bilateral and multilateral assistance for supporting women's rights. Further, they should work with and through women's funds, the grant-makers with well-developed

infrastructure to reach and support activists at the grassroots.³⁸ The struggle for gender equality and elimination of VAWG is long and complex, hence it is crucial that new funding instruments allow WROs and movements to determine their own priorities and facilitate access to core and multi-year funding. The Dutch government's MDG3 and FLOW funds (see box on the left) provide powerful political and technical insights to resourcing women's rights. ActionAid strongly recommends that the donor community follow their example.

PRIORITY ACTION 2: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT LAWS AND NATIONAL ACTION PLANS TO END VAWG

FUNDING PIONEERS: MDG3 AND FLOW FUNDS

In 2008 the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation dedicated €70 million to an 'MDG3 Fund' – the single largest fund ever created for gender equality, targeting women's rights and civil society organisations in the history of development cooperation. A late extension to the MDG3 Fund took the total amount to €82 million to reduce VAWG, enhance women's economic independence, and increase women's participation in politics and public administration.³⁹ In 2012 the MDG3 Fund was renewed and renamed 'FLOW, Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women' with an increased budget of €93 million for the period 2016-2020.⁴⁰

Of a total of 45 projects awarded by the MDG3 Fund through the competitive grant-making process, 34 went to WROs or women's funds operating with a strong rights-based approach.⁴¹ According to research by the Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID), initiatives supported by the MDG3 Fund reached over 65.5 million women and girls in 165 countries, and strengthened 105,304 women's organisations – most of them small and grassroots based.⁴² Some 14 international norms, policies, and rights instruments to advance gender equality and women's rights have either been reformed or created through work supported by the fund. To name but a few, it financed the final stage influencing work on the new ILO Convention on the Rights of Domestic Workers (2011), and supported the work to bring number of cases to the International Criminal Court.⁴³

Both the MDG3 Fund and FLOW funds were pivotal in filling the gap in funding for women's rights movements and organisations. ActionAid calls upon other bilateral and multilateral donor agencies to increase quality, clearly ring-fenced funding for gender equality and women's collective action on VAWG.

States must prevent, address and respond to all forms of VAWG through completing the unfinished business of developing the right legislation, and then ensuring its full and effective implementation. Laws together with national action plans (NAPs) – nationally tailored strategies to prevent and respond to VAWG in the medium and long term – are key strategies to trigger the successful implementation of the standing commitments and new promises of the SDGs on gender equality and elimination of VAWG.

1) Develop and implement holistic and comprehensive laws on VAWG, in line with human rights standards and obligations

Legislation is critical to states assuming accountability for VAWG. It is also an effective prevention strategy and the evidence confirms that. As the analysis of domestic and household surveys have revealed: women, who live in countries with domestic violence legislation are 7% less likely to experience violence than in countries without such laws, while every additional year of legislation further reduces the prevalence of VAWG by about 2%.⁴⁴

Under international law, states are obliged to prevent and respond to VAWG and act with '**due diligence**' in this regard. Laws are critical tools through which key components of due diligence can be articulated and implementing measures applied.⁴⁵

Holistic and comprehensive laws encompass the states' duty to:

- **Prevent VAWG from happening in the first place** through targeting root and structural causes of abuse, for example, with gender equality campaigns, strengthening women's economic equality and rights, supporting women's movements and other actions.

- **Protect women from violence and further harm** by delivering quality, timely and accessible multi-sectoral gender responsive public services (see box on page 10) to keep women safe and free from VAWG in short, medium and long term.

- **Effectively prosecute and investigate incidents of VAWG** including through addressing survivors' fear of repercussions and stigma that may occur. Establishing women's confidence in police and judiciary, alongside applying special measures to reach out to women from marginalised groups, is fundamental.

- **Punish perpetrators and eradicate impunity**, including any 'justification' for VAWG, in a way that is just and commensurate with the scale of injustice.

- And **provide redress and reparations** to support rebuilding lives in a way that responds to the needs and priorities of survivors and is proportional to the harm suffered.⁴⁶

However, laws are unlikely to be a panacea, especially if their scope and/or coverage is inadequate and discordant with human rights standards and obligations.

At global level, some 75 countries have reservations with respect to specific articles in CEDAW⁴⁷ and as of August 2015, 29 out of 47 Council of Europe countries were yet to ratify the landmark European treaty on VAWG – the Istanbul Convention.⁴⁸

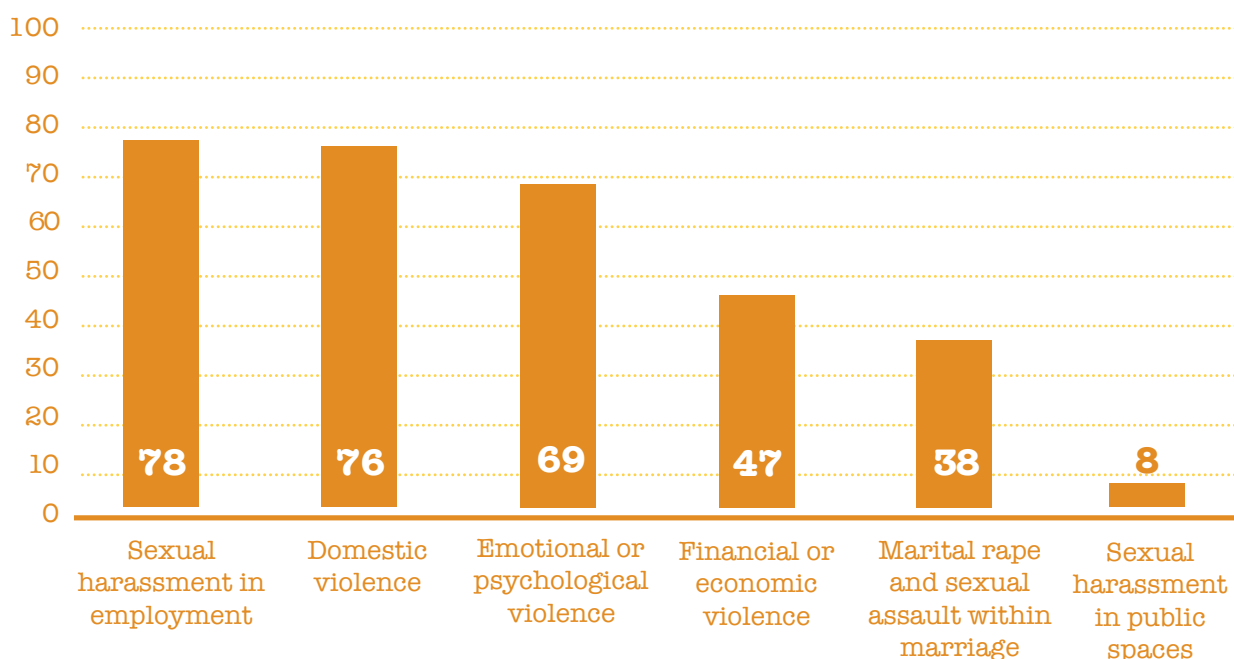
Nationally, much progress has been made in recognizing domestic violence as a crime, but many other forms of violence remain outside the law (see Graph 3 below). For example, only eight out of 100 countries in the World Bank 'Women Business and the Law' database have explicit legal provisions against sexual harassment in public spaces, and only 38 have criminalised marital rape and sexual violence within marriage.⁵⁰

Moreover, the link between VAWG and economic violence like, for instance, deprivation from land or inheritance rights, and denial of economic and financial compensation must also be addressed. Shockingly, 128 out of 143 countries covered in 'Women Business and the Law 2014' had at least one legal difference between women and men in the economic sphere and in 15 countries women still required husbands' permission to work.⁵¹

While it should be remembered that laws are means, not ends, to eliminating VAWG, the prevailing legal gaps must be closed and comprehensive and holistic legislation, based on human rights standards and obligations developed and applied. At global and regional level, governments must demonstrate their commitment to ending VAWG by ratifying CEDAW, the Istanbul Convention, and other crucial legally binding instruments, without any reservations.

Graph 3: Number of countries with laws addressing some of the specific forms of VAWG

Number of countries with laws addressing some of the specific forms of VAWG



Source: World Bank (2013) *Women, business and the law 2014: removing restrictions to enhance gender equality, key findings*. World Bank Group: Washington DC.

WHAT ARE GENDER RESPONSIVE PUBLIC SERVICES (GRPS)?

ActionAid understands GRPS as public services that take into account and address the practical and strategic needs and priorities of women and men. While practical needs arise from socially assigned gender roles, women's strategic needs are in response to their subordinate position in society – widespread prevalence of VAWG being one such phenomenon.

The full range of multi-sectoral services, which states are required to provide to respond and prevent VAWG, has been described in many reports and documents, including the UN Secretary-General's *In-depth study on all forms of violence against women*.⁵² These include, for example, police and justice services, shelters, legal aid,

healthcare services, psychosocial counselling and mental health care, long term assistance to ensure full recovery of the survivors, as well as preventative campaigns to address root causes of gender discrimination at all levels.⁵³

States' failure to deliver these services is widely recognised as a huge challenge in preventing and responding to VAWG.⁵⁴ For example, a lack of street lighting, water and sanitation or public transport, can exacerbate violence against women in public spaces.⁵⁵

Within the context of GRPS, meaningful engagement with women's groups throughout design, implementation and review phases is fundamental. Efficient and effective coordination and referral mechanisms, as well as political, fiscal and monetary reforms that enable and prioritise financing and provision of public services at all levels, is also crucial.

2) Develop and implement ambitious national action plans

Laws alone are not enough. Coordinated and sustained approach is necessary to build systems and institutions to ensure their successful enforcement. To this end **national action plans (NAPs)** provide 'roadmaps' for eliminating VAWG, allowing for the practical implementation of states' legislation and multi-sectoral coordination.⁵⁶

The CEDAW Committee urged states to develop and implement NAPs, a call that has subsequently been taken up by the UN Secretary General and other actors.⁵⁷ According to the UN, since 2010, countries in all regions have increasingly started adopting NAPs and strategies to address VAWG.⁵⁸ Some countries such as Cambodia have even embarked on second generation plans. The more comprehensive plans cover due diligence pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution, punishment and provision of redress/reparations, and within this context – focus on delivery of gender responsive services, along with the multi-sectoral coordination.⁵⁹

The agreement on the SDG's target on VAWG should serve as a catalyst to reinvigorate universal efforts around NAPs. Countries without NAPs should come forward and develop ambitious plans. In countries where NAPs already exist, governments should review progress and accelerate implementation. Donors also have a key role to play in supporting the development, costing and implementation of such plans through, for instance, sector policy dialogues, technical assistance, and aid.

These are some of the key elements for successful development and implementation of NAPs:

- NAPs should be **comprehensive and human-rights based**, recognising and addressing multiple forms and sites of VAWG, in line with the UN definition of violence.⁶⁰ The human rights based approach requires ensuring that **voices and concerns of women from marginalised groups** are represented in NAPs' development, review, budgeting and implementation.⁶¹
- NAPs must ensure **multi-sectoral coordination**, bringing together a range of actors (health and education workers, police, judiciary, urban planners, community leaders, civil society, and others) in a structured process to deliver gender responsive public services to respond to and prevent abuse.⁶² The development phase for the NAPs is a critical time, during which multi-sectoral structures could be set up, responsibilities clarified, accountability mechanisms agreed, and broad ownership and support for the plan secured. Moreover, the mid and long term, and cooperative nature of NAPs requires establishment of on-going multi-stakeholder governance and accountability structures for all stages of NAPs, beyond the initial consultations.⁶³
- Finally, **NAPs must be fully costed, followed by development of transparent and sustainable financing plans** to ensure their implementation through, either gender responsive budgeting to allocate domestically available funds, or mobilising international support (when and where appropriate) to secure their successful implementation.⁶⁴ Although the lack of systematic data remains a challenge, costing can be done in contexts where such data is non-existent and still bear positive results. In India, for example, a costing exercise, among other factors, spurred increased allocations for the implementation of the 'Protection

of Women from Domestic Violence Act'.⁶⁵ And in Afghanistan, following an estimate of the minimum funding required to deliver national laws and policies

to tackle VAWG commissioned by ActionAid, the Australian government committed US\$17.7 million to reduce VAWG in the country in 2013.⁶⁶

A safety audit walk in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to identify what makes public spaces feel safe or unsafe for women and girls.

PHOTO: Charles Fox/ ActionAid

CAMBODIA: NAP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AT ITS BEST – THOUGH CHALLENGES PERSIST

The development of Cambodia's second National Action Plan on Violence Against Women (NAPVAW, 2014-2018)⁶⁷ is a good example of the participatory process, and recognition of importance of multi-sectoral coordination.

Developed over nine months and with the support of UN Women, as well as Australian and German development agencies, the process entailed a comprehensive evaluation of Cambodia's first NAPVAW, along with 13 national and 10 provincial-level consultations. These brought together survivors, women's rights organisations and wider civil society, government ministries and community leaders. Particular efforts were made to reach out to marginalised groups.⁶⁸

In recognition of the need for a multi-sectoral approach, a Technical Working Group on Gender and Gender-Based Violence (TWGG-GBV) was established to oversee formulation of the plan. This comprised key line ministries, civil society organisations and major donors. The TWGG-GBV will also guide and monitor the Plan's implementation from 2014 to 2018.

"Although the Ministry of Women's Affairs leads efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women, the reality is that no one ministry, department or organisation can reduce violence against women alone," says Cambodia's Minister of Women's Affairs, Dr Ing Kantha Phavi.⁶⁹

Whether implementation of Cambodia's second NAPVAW lives up to the process of its development though, it remains to be seen. Disappointingly, the implementation cost of the plan has not yet been fully assessed and, so far, the Cambodian government has allocated a very small amount from its central budget to support it, in anticipation that donors will largely finance the policy. In addition, the extent of political will and buy-in beyond the Ministry of Women's Affairs remains unclear.

There is also the chilling effect of the new Law on Associations and NGOs approved by Cambodia's Senate in July 2015. This allows for any domestic or international NGO to be closed down where it is deemed to "jeopardise... public order or harm national unity, good culture and traditions of the Cambodian national society".⁷⁰ Holding the government to account for failures to implement the NAPVAW could be construed as such a challenge, potentially leading to self-censorship and negative repercussions for NGOs that dare to speak out.

OUR VISION: A WORLD FREE FROM VAWG

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES, TRANSFORMING SOCIETIES.

Addressing root causes

VAWG is a reflection of deeply entrenched power inequalities between women and men, exacerbated in situations where gender intersects with other identity-based discrimination, maintaining the culture of normalisation of VAWG and women's subordination. Challenging discriminatory social practices, laws, norms, behaviours and attitudes, therefore, must lie at the heart of all five priority actions to end VAWG – from working with women's rights movements and organisations, to holding corporates accountable for their part in ending VAWG. Confronting retrogressive politics, including religious fundamentalisms, which continue to use arguments based on culture, customs and 'traditional' values to justify discrimination and violence is an urgent imperative to prevent VAWG from happening in the first place, within and across all settings.

Supporting women's leadership and participation

Crucially, for violence against women to end, women's full, equal and meaningful leadership and participation in decision-making is essential. However, social norms coupled with discriminatory laws, gender blind budgets, as well as VAWG itself, all hamper women's participation in public life. Shockingly, at current rates of progress, women won't comprise half the world's leaders for another 120 years.⁷² It is now time to ensure that women meaningfully participate in all aspects of public life and, indeed, are in the driving seat of all priority actions pursued to respond and prevent VAWG.

Fixing structural injustices in the economy

On virtually every measure, women are more economically excluded than men. In particular, the globalisation of markets and the financial crisis brought about a new wave of economic exploitation, pushing women into even more precarious and high-risks jobs, triggering a rise in VAWG.⁷³ Moreover, the economic and political pressures put on many governments triggered cuts for public services, leaving women to subsidise them with unpaid care work, and losing access to others, such as shelters and access to justice, precisely when they need them the most.⁷⁴

Policies and practices geared towards economic justice must therefore become a key strategy to strengthen women's agency, as well as countries' capacity to prevent and respond to VAWG.

Fulfilling states' responsibility to implement all priority actions in full and holistically

Underpinned by the vision of wider transformation, ActionAid's five priority actions to kick off the implementation of the SDG's target on VAWG are not a 'pick and mix' approach. Under international laws states are obliged to prevent and respond to all forms of VAWG. Implementation of all five priority actions must therefore be done in full and in holistic manner to integrate measures to prevent and respond to VAWG, upon which elimination of violence must become governments' immediate and top level business.

"No form of interpersonal violence against women is devoid of structural violence – as in all places, such abuse is underpinned by beliefs about the perpetrator's right to harm another, based on societal notions of gender and rights"

Rashida Manjoo, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences."⁷¹

TIMELINE

Global and regional commitments to end violence against women and girls



Despite this impressive catalogue of agreements and summits, the translation of commitments into actions remains unacceptably slow. The international community must act now to change this.

PRIORITY ACTION 3: STEP UP FINANCING FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND ELIMINATION OF VAWG

At this critical time, the international community must do more to shape the financing agenda so it contributes to ending gender inequality and achieving real change on elimination of VAWG. In the lead up to 2030, how gender equality is being financed will be as important as the quantity of resources mobilised to implement SDG5. The time for countries to step up is now. They can do so in the following three ways:

1) Follow guiding principles for financing gender equality and eliminating VAWG

As shown above, successful strategies to eliminate VAWG are those with a multi-sectoral approach and which invest in gender responsive services around the key pillars, from prevention of VAWG to provision of redress and reparations. A financing strategy for

eliminating VAWG must therefore ensure that financing, in its quantity and quality, is adequate in responding to the different needs and priorities of specific groups of women, including those at risk of multiple discrimination and survivors of different forms of VAWG.

Rather than being prescriptive, some of the key guiding principles proposed in the box below can assist states and development actors to apply women's rights standards to their own financing strategies, fitted for specific contexts and implementation sites of SDG5.

2) Fully resource the implementation of SDG5

Nevertheless, the volume of financing available will be equally important, and indeed unprecedented levels of resources from all sources – domestic, international, public and private – and from all actors will be needed to implement the gender goal and related targets of the new SDG5.⁷⁵

Foremost, **governments** will need to mobilise maximum available resources through progressive and just taxation to finance implementation of their commitments, including laws and national actions plans to end VAWG.

SOME OF THE KEY GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FINANCING GENDER EQUALITY AND THE ELIMINATION OF VAWG

Women's rights are human rights. This is non-negotiable and puts obligations on all donors, including non-state actors and all recipients to respect, protect and uphold all women's rights universally, indivisibly and inalienably, as enshrined in CEDAW and other obligations.

The financing envelope should reflect the scale of the problem. VAWG affects one in three women globally – available financing must be commensurate with the scale of the problem.

Quality makes all the difference. The persistent nature of gender inequality requires long term and flexible financing focused on addressing the root causes of violence, aiming for transformative long term change, not quick fixes and rushed results.

Be ambitious AND realistic. Interventions need to be fully costed with sufficient amounts allocated to deliver quality support.

Pursue a dual-track approach. Gender equality requires mobilisation of adequate dedicated resources, alongside mainstreaming of gender and VAWG-related issues into financial allocations for other sectors, such as health, education, peace building, economic development and others.

Women's leadership and participation is both the means and the end. Financing must prioritise women-led solutions to gender inequality and VAWG, and put women in the driver's seat throughout implementation.

Intersectional approach is essential. Resources must be focused and reach out to marginalised groups such as indigenous women, young and older women, women with disability, LGBTI people and others.

Transparency and accountability are fundamental. This applies to all financial flows including those channelled by non-state actors, including trans-national corporations.

Policy coherence for development is a key to success. Given the multi-dimensional and cross-cutting character of VAWG, actions to reduce gender inequality must not be contradicted by policy choices in the economy and on other fronts.

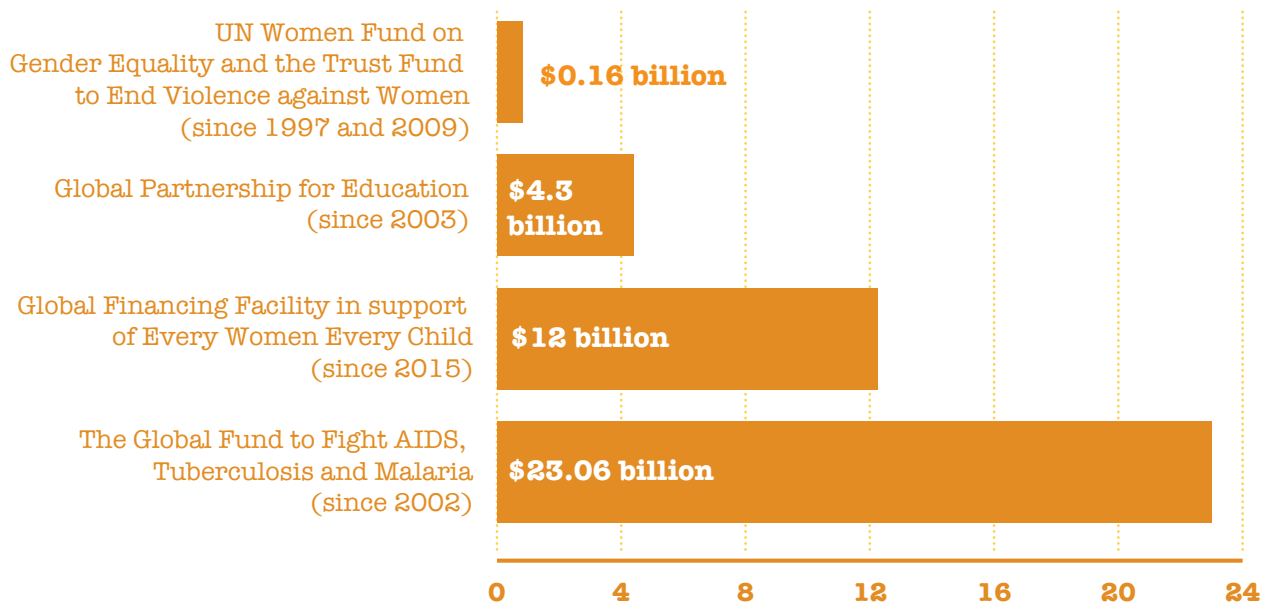
The private sector can play a role in directly financing philanthropic initiatives to combat VAWG. More importantly, however, companies (especially transnational corporations) paying their taxes in full, ensuring safe and decent working conditions and paying all workers, especially women, a living wage, would make a far bigger impact on achieving the SDGs and ending VAWG.

Civil society organisations that are serious about ending poverty and reducing inequality should also ensure that they focus their resources on achieving gender equality and women's rights between now and 2030, and beyond.

International aid will continue to play an important role on the road to 2030, and it is high time for **bilateral and multilateral donors** to scale up support for the good work on the elimination of VAWG currently underway by developing countries' governments, civil society, and UN agencies. They can do this by by:

- Establishing dedicated financing instruments – for example in the form of a SDG5 fund – for women's rights movements and organisations.
- Stepping up to fill financing gaps for the implementation of laws and NAPs, including funding multi-stakeholder participatory processes for their development, implementation and review.
- Increasing contributions to the UN Women Fund on Gender Equality⁷⁶ and the UN Women Trust Fund to End Violence against Women.⁷⁷
- Supporting and resourcing the severely underfunded UN Women – the only UN entity wholly dedicated to gender equality and women's rights.
- And tracking ODA in support of tackling VAWG by applying specific code for this purpose recently developed by the OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET)⁷⁸.

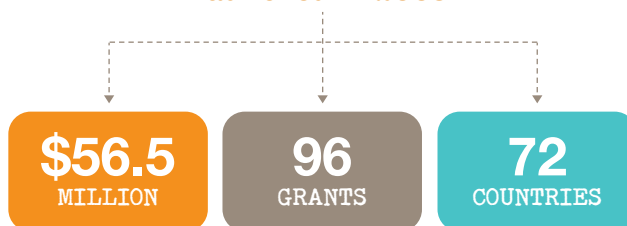
Graph 4: Global funds in US\$ billion addressing key development challenges⁷⁹



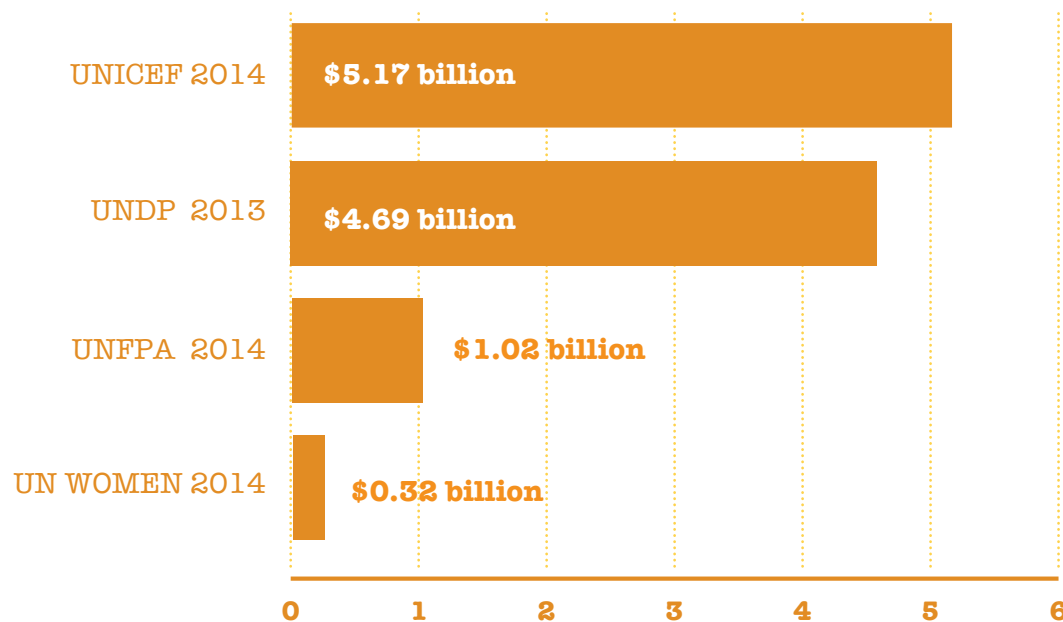
UN Women Trust Fund to End Violence against Women launched in 1997



UN Women Fund for Gender Equality launched in 2009



Graph 5: Total revenue in US\$ billion for some of the UN agencies, the latest available data.⁸⁰



Moreover, in order to recalibrate and fast-track efforts, governments, UN Women and civil society should come together to explore strategies for dedicated and scaled-up financing to eliminate all forms of VAWG. At present, except the commendable but small UN Women Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, no multilateral fund or mechanism dedicated wholly to the elimination of VAWG exists.

Establishing a new global acceleration instrument or mechanism to finance implementation of laws, policies and NAPs, through funding mobilised from all sources, and to provide direct support to governments, civil society and UN entities (where and when appropriate) could be one way to fill an important financing gap. Importantly, such a mechanism or fund would need to follow the aid effectiveness principles, and be shaped with women's rights advocates and organisations right from the start.

3) Address structural injustices in financing for development

Stepping up resourcing for gender equality and elimination of VAWG requires fixing the current system of financing for development, in particular boosting developing countries' ability to mobilise domestic resources through taxation.

Tax revenue pays for shelters for survivors of violence, healthcare, legal aid and other crucial gender responsive public services. It is the most sustainable and dependable source of financing development, including the elimination of VAWG.⁸¹ Developing countries rely

in particular on corporation tax as a greater proportion of their tax revenues but this is routinely hampered by transnational corporations.⁸² ActionAid estimates that developing countries sacrifice an astonishing US\$138 billion every year just through granting tax incentives to transnational corporations in a bid to attract investments.⁸³ Elsewhere the UNCTAD estimates that the amount of tax avoided in developing countries may be equal to nearly half of the amount of corporate income tax revenue collected.⁸⁴

These revenue losses hit women hardest as they are particularly reliant on tax-funded public services, with adequate funding for preventing VAWG becoming even more remote as governments allocate from fewer resources.

Ultimately systemic problems in international taxation can only be tackled by moving away from harmful tax competition to tax cooperation, which will require long term change at the national, regional and international level, as well as changes in corporate behaviour. One way to achieve and sustain such change could be by creating an autonomous **inter-governmental tax body based in the UN**, where interests of all governments could be represented equally. However, the governments at the Third Financing for Development in Conference in Addis Ababa in particular from the global North, failed to support it.⁸⁵ More political will, especially from rich countries such as the UK or US, to address tax dodging is necessary, and civil society's call to create a well-resourced inter-governmental body for tax cooperation, with gender expertise, at the United Nations must eventually be heard.⁸⁶

PRIORITY ACTION 4: STRENGTHEN INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE SDGs AND THE ELIMINATION OF VAWG

There is a critical global accountability gap for the elimination of VAWG.⁸⁷ While important in its own right, quadrennial reporting to the CEDAW Committee⁸⁸ and the annual sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) lack teeth and are increasingly dominated by conservative actors. The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women has highlighted limitations in their scope, and has issued a call for a universal legally binding instrument on VAWG.⁸⁹

Yet to close the accountability gap and effectively eliminate all forms of VAWG, first there is an urgent need to move on from voluntary frameworks to enforceable mechanisms that allow for a review of progress on the already existing VAWG commitments and the new promises of the SDGs. We suggest three approaches:

1) Take stock of progress and challenges in eliminating VAWG

While the CEDAW Committee and the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women⁹⁰ do a commendable job in bringing urgent issues to governments' attention, the 2006 UN Secretary-General's *In-depth study on all forms of violence against women* was the first and so far the only comprehensive global report on the progress and challenges to date.⁹¹ What we need now is an up-to-date global review on VAWG.

We are therefore calling upon the UN Secretary General to establish **a new periodic global report on the state of progress in eliminating all forms of VAWG**. A new accountability tool in its own right, such a report could feed into and support global follow-up and review on the SDGs' target on VAWG, as well as other relevant processes, such as the annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women and the quadrennial CEDAW reviews. Importantly, it could incentivise quality and timely data collection in countries and serve as a much needed international baseline on VAWG.

The monitoring report should be: championed by the UN Secretary General and published by UN Women; be periodic (for example, published every three years); assess prevalence rates of VAWG as well as progress on states' action to prevent, protect, investigate, punish and provide redress for VAWG; elevate political commitments to eliminate VAWG; and outline priority

actions en route to 2030. Crucially, findings of such report should be discussed with governments at the highest level.

It will be important to build on the experience of the 2006 *In-depth study*, as well as the High-level Review of the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (see box below), alongside similar work

GOOD PRACTICE: HIGH LEVEL REVIEW ON THE UNSCR 1325

In 2015, the Security Council launched a High-level Review to assess progress at the global, regional and national levels in implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), the first one calling for women's engagement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.⁹²

In preparation for the review, the UN Secretary-General commissioned a global study on the implementation of the resolution.⁹³ Led by Radhika Coomaraswamy, former Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, the study is expected to highlight best practices as well as existing and emerging challenges. The results will be included in the Secretary-General's annual report to the Security Council in October 2015.⁹⁴

Importantly, a high-level advisory group composed of prominent members of the women's rights community has been appointed to guide development of the study and provide feedback on the policy recommendations.⁹⁵ Extensive consultations, including with women's rights organisations, country visits, a civil society survey and other components will also feed into the report.

In addition, and in order to address financing gaps, a Women Peace and Security Financing Discussion Group (FDG) composed by donors, conflict-affected Member States, United Nations agencies and civil society was created in June 2014. Consequently, the FDG decided to establish a Global Acceleration Instrument on Women, Peace and Security – a time-bound, multi-stakeholder financing mechanism dedicated wholly to accelerating the implementation of UNSCR 1325.⁹⁶ To be administered by UN Women, the fund is expected to take off in 2015 and aims to mobilise US\$100 million for the first five years of its operation.⁹⁷

Both the global study and acceleration instrument could be closely replicated to strengthen international action and accountability on VAWG.

in the other sectors – such as the *Education For All Global Monitoring Report* published by UNESCO every year to assess the global progress towards realising the right to quality education for all.⁹⁸

2) Establish an enforceable, comprehensive and participatory SDGs review and follow up mechanisms

The High Level Political Forum (HLPF), under the auspices of the UN General Assembly, has emerged as a key global accountability space to review the implementation of the SDGs.⁹⁹ Yet its ways of working at the time of writing remain unclear. Although HLPF reviews will be voluntary, it is clear that governments should also prioritise **regular follow-up at the global level**, building on strong regional and national level reviews.

Such follow-ups must give space to and support civil society and women's rights organisations to engage meaningfully and freely, i.e. submit their independent reports and assessments to the HLPF, participate in all inter-governmental negotiations, and be able to hold governments to account.¹⁰⁰ Crucially, it will be important to build on and link these reviews with already existing accountability mechanisms on gender equality and elimination of VAWG, including: the global report on the state of progress in eliminating all forms of VAWG, as proposed above; the Commission on the Status of Women; CEDAW Committee reviews; and the Economic and Social Council Forum on Financing for Development – a newly agreed annual follow-up on the outcomes of the Third Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa.¹⁰¹

Actions taken by governments on the post-2015 agenda will likely be concentrated on the aspects where reporting is required – so the strength of **indicators** yet to be agreed is fundamental. When the UN Statistical Commission decides on the global indicator framework to monitor the SDGs in March 2016, it must do so on the basis of how change can occur, rather than just technical capacities and existence of data.¹⁰²

Importantly, the indicator(s) for the SDG target on VAWG should be measurable; capture progress on reduction of violence in both public and private spaces; focus on marginalised groups including LGBTI – despite the disappointing exclusion of this group in the final SDGs outcome document – and, crucially, reflect priorities of women, such as a change in discriminatory social norms.

3) Invest in data collection on all forms of VAWG

The data gaps around all aspects of VAWG are huge,¹⁰³ just like the disaggregation with respect to different groups experiencing the abuse (for example LGBTI people, Women Human Rights Defenders, indigenous

women, and others). **Investment in robust and comprehensive and disaggregated data collection**, therefore, will be necessary, alongside development of good methodologies and reporting.

The proposed universal take-up of national action plans, along with the periodic global state of progress report on VAWG and HLPF review could trigger governments, donors and UN agencies to collect and publish data in a high-quality and timely manner. Such data is vital to strengthening the understanding of what works to prevent and respond to VAWG in different contexts, to developing effective policies in this regard, and monitoring and being accountable for progress.¹⁰⁴ Donors and other multilateral organisations will have an important role to play in strengthening the capacity of national statistical offices in developing countries in this regard. Fundamentally, women's rights organisations and movements must be engaged in data collection processes through all phases and from the start.

PRIORITY ACTION 5: HOLD CORPORATE ACTORS ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR PART IN ENDING VAWG

Finally, poverty, discrimination in the labour market, and the lack of protective mechanisms all make women easy targets for violent abuse in the workplace, meanwhile undermining their economic rights. This leaves them at greater risk of violence at home, in the streets, and other places.¹⁰⁵ The state is the primary duty-bearer for guaranteeing women and girls' right to live a life free from violence. Therefore, states must also hold companies accountable for ensuring that their practices neither encourage nor contribute to VAWG.

To this end, states and other actors should:

1) Develop a legally binding instrument on transnational corporations

Transnational corporations (TNCs) are increasingly major employers of women around the world, either directly or, more often, through their supply chains. While women undoubtedly value the opportunity to engage in paid work, lack of effective regulation has led to TNCs being complicit in acts of abuse against women workers, community members, or Women Human Rights Defenders, to name but a few.

At worst, corporations are directly culpable in perpetrating violence. This includes the staggering death toll of young women garment workers in the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh in 2013,¹⁰⁶ spotlighted by ActionAid exposure to harmful pesticides

for women in supply chains of European supermarkets in India and Kenya,¹⁰⁷ or people being forcibly displaced from their homes to make way for mining or large-scale agricultural investments in many developing countries.¹⁰⁸

Corporate responsibility to respect human rights is clearly articulated in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, along with the overarching state duty to protect against such violations and ensure access to effective remedy.¹⁰⁹

Encouragingly, in 2014 the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution presented by Ecuador and South Africa to start developing a **legally binding international instrument on transnational corporations**.¹¹⁰ With the support of 20 countries and opposition from 14 (mostly rich economies including the UK), the Council decided to “establish an open-ended intergovernmental working group with the mandate to elaborate an international legally binding instrument on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with respect to human rights.”¹¹¹ Disappointingly, the Third Financing for Development conference in Addis Ababa failed to even acknowledge this process, let alone support it.¹¹²

The UN Human Rights Council’s efforts need stronger recognition and political momentum to be successful. All governments, if they are serious about eliminating all forms of VAWG, must constructively engage with work of the intergovernmental working group to develop a legally binding instrument on transnational corporations. Now is the time for a bold new approach to corporate responsibility, including for elimination of VAWG.

2) Support the proposal for the new ILO Convention on gender-based violence in the workplace

Given that almost half of women experience sexual harassment at work, along with other forms of verbal, psychological, and physical violence, it is encouraging that a **new International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on gender-based violence in the workplace** is currently in discussion. This could provide a global standard on protection and response, outlining clear responsibilities of employers, governments and trade unions.¹¹³

Although existing ILO Conventions cover some aspects of VAWG, there is no single document explicitly dedicated to the whole scope of the problem.¹¹⁴ Proposed by trade unions, the initiative has so far met opposition from the employers group and a significant number of governments. In November 2015 the ILO Governing Body is expected to decide whether to put drafting of the Convention on the agenda of the forthcoming ILO Conference.¹¹⁶ It is imperative that it moves forward with such a recommendation.

CONCLUSION: ENDING VAWG THROUGH THE SDGs

The SDGs provide a critical opportunity to galvanise the international community into action for the next 15 years. While there are some shortcomings within the new agenda – no meaningful commitment to end corporate tax dodging or weak accountability mechanisms to name but a few – it could, nevertheless, go a long way towards ending poverty and reducing inequality, including gender inequality and the elimination of violence against women and girls.

Most encouragingly, the SDGs go much further than the Millennium Development Goals. The new agenda is universal and will apply to both rich and poor countries. Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs bring together the social, economic and sustainable aspects of development. Moreover, the process of developing the SDGs has been participatory and inclusive to an unprecedented extent. Civil society, including women’s rights and feminist organisations, as part of the Women Major Group¹¹⁷ and other networks, has contributed immensely to ensuring that the new agenda recognises human rights and women’s rights.

Indeed, the 17 SDGs goals and their 169 targets provide powerful ammunition for gender equality advocates to call for a world with women’s leadership, free from all forms of VAWG, recognition and redistribution of women’s unpaid care work, and other issues of fundamental importance for gender equality and elimination of VAWG.

By contrast, the parallel but complementary financing for development process, which concluded with the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action (AAAA), lacks actionable deliverables to tackle systemic injustices within global economic and financial policies, to positively affect sustainable development and women’s human rights.¹¹⁸ These issues, along with the fight against shrinking civil society space, curbing the power of religious fundamentalists and patriarchal conservative agendas, will remain fundamental for the successful implementation of the SDGs.

Given that the current course of development is so off track and gender inequality and VAWG remain pervasive, **the international community must galvanise the necessary political will and resources behind the above five priority actions to implement the SDGs in full.** We cannot afford to miss this opportunity. If we do, women and girls will continue paying with their bodies, their choices, their opportunities and their lives for generations to come.

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Front cover:
Women dance to celebrate the birth of baby girls in their community, during the Beti Utsav celebration in Bhalswa, New Delhi.

PHOTO: Poulomi Basu/ ACTIONAID

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