

REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Working title: Enhancing prevention of violence against women and girls in Southern Africa – turning evidence into action

CONCEPT NOTE

I. BACKGROUND

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a form of discrimination which impairs the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Its health, social and economic impacts extend to children, families, communities and society as whole. It is also an obstacle to national development and poverty reduction goals. This is evidenced by the recent inclusion of VAWG within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, more specifically the Goal 5 on gender equality. Moreover, SDG 16 calls for a significant reduction of all forms of violence.

Despite the significant efforts at global, regional and national levels, rates of violence against women and girls remain high: 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual assault¹.

Many challenges still persist, including insufficient enforcement of legislation and lack of allocation of adequate resources to implement laws, policies and programmes; and insufficient monitoring and evaluation of their impact.

One of the key challenges, however, is the persistence of attitudes, behaviours and harmful cultural and traditional practices that perpetuate negative stereotypes, discrimination and gender inequality, all of which are root causes of VAW, and addressing this challenge lies in the core of prevention work.

Societal acceptance of domestic violence against women is widespread in developing countries, with 36 per cent of people believing it is justified in certain situations. Recent studies show that overall the acceptance of domestic violence is in Sub-Saharan Africa with 38 per cent of the population justifying it. Moreover, in Southern Africa women are more likely to

¹ World Health Organization, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council (2013). *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*

justify the behaviour than men². The widespread justification of domestic violence by women in highly patriarchal societies suggests women have internalised the idea that a husband who physically punishes his wife or verbally reprimands her has exercised a right that serves her interest. They perceive this behaviour as legitimate disciplining, rather than an act of violence.

While progress has been made, mainly on improving justice and service responses for survivors/victims of gender-based violence, there has been relatively less work done towards preventing violence before it occurs by addressing gender inequality and discrimination, as well as harmful gender stereotypes and social norms, as its root causes³.

In international comparison, the prevalence of VAWG in Southern Africa is high. Between half and two thirds of all women in countries within the region confirm ever having experienced violence (physical and/or emotional), with domestic violence against a partner being the most commonly cited form of violence.

The political environment in the region and the timing are favourable for generating an open dialogue about this topic. Across Africa, combating VAWG has already been enshrined for a number of years following the adoption of the Maputo Protocol. At regional level, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) adopted the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development in 2008. In 2016, the Protocol was revised in line with the SDGs. In 2018, SADC developed the Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for Addressing Gender Based Violence that provides for an effective and coordinated approach to addressing GBV in the Region and emphasizes the need to strengthen effective GBV prevention and mitigation programmes in the region.

Though almost all SADC countries have adopted gender equality as part of their national development plans and/or have adopted corresponding independent gender equality and GBV policies and action plans, major challenges persist in relation to their implementation. Most of the Member States face similar challenges with regards to weak coordination and capacities in VAWG prevention.

Against this background, the German Federal Ministry of Development and Economic Cooperation (BMZ) through its implementing agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) through its programme "What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls" implemented by a consortium under the lead of the South African Medical Research Council (MRC), in partnership with the Gender Unit of the SADC Secretariat, are jointly organizing a **regional conference to promote turning evidence on effective programmes and approaches into policies and actions to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls**. The organization of the conference will be led by the GIZ-programme "*Partnerships for Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls in Southern Africa*" (PfP) with funding from PfP, the GIZ Sector Programme "*Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Rights*" and assorted sponsors.

² LynnMarie Sardinha, Héctor E. Nájera Catalán. Attitudes towards domestic violence in 49 low- and middle-income countries: A gendered analysis of prevalence and country-level correlates. *PLOS ONE*, 2018; 13 (10): e0206101 DOI: [10.1371/journal.pone.0206101](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0206101)

³ Sexual Violence Research Initiative: <http://www.svri.org/>

This event will provide a unique space, bringing together development partners, government officials and Parliamentarians, UN agencies, civil society organizations, global researchers, media and private sector representatives, as well as traditional and religious leaders to exchange experiences and explore ways to implement effective and promising practices to address VAWG in Southern Africa.

II. RATIONALE

The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has commissioned GIZ to implement together with its partners the **regional project Partnerships for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls in Southern Africa (PfP)**. This regional programme helps to implement the German Government's Marshall Plan with Africa, which underscores the key social, political and economic role played by women and girls. Preventing VAWG by strengthening multi-stakeholder alliances is listed by the BMZ as the third priority issue and strategic objective in its Development Policy Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016 – 2020 (GAP II). The objective of the project is therefore to strengthen the capacities of and improve cooperation between governmental, non-governmental and private sector stakeholders in preventing VAWG. The project's methodological approach is built around supporting the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships (SDG 17). Currently PfP is implemented at national level in three countries in the region: South Africa, Lesotho and Zambia.

At regional level, the project is collaborating with the **Southern Africa Development Community (SADC)**. In particular, GIZ partners with the Gender Unit of the SADC Secretariat, to disseminate and implement its regional strategies in terms of prevention of VAWG, which is a top priority under the SADC Gender Based Violence Strategy and its Framework of Action 2018-2030, approved by the SADC Ministers responsible for Gender Equality and Women's Affairs in Pretoria, South Africa in July 2018.

The SADC GBV Strategy states the following main objectives:

1. To promote **prevention** and early identification of GBV by addressing associated social, cultural and/or traditional, religious, political and economic factors.
2. To strengthen delivery of effective, accessible and responsive **protection, care and support services** to those affected by GBV.
3. To strengthen regional and national **capacity** to efficiently and effectively respond to gender-based violence.
4. To improve **information and knowledge management**, sharing of best practices and innovation on GBV for evidence-based policy and service planning and implementation.
5. To ensure efficient and effective management, **coordination and partnerships** building for the regional and national GBV response.

The regional conference on Prevention of Violence against Women will contribute to make progress in the priority areas listed above, especially with regards to the Objectives 1 and 4 by providing a regional platform to discuss and showcase good prevention efforts and share information on innovative approaches to prevention of VAWG.

What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls is an innovative global programme working in 13 countries across the world building the evidence base on What Works to prevent violence in low-middle income settings. DFID's £25 million initiative 'What Works to Prevent Violence' research and innovation programme, which launched in 2014, engages leading international experts to produce rigorous evidence on the most effective interventions to drive down rates of VAWG. The evidence being generated is a global public good, intended to help DFID, developing country governments and international partners everywhere to improve the effectiveness of their efforts to prevent VAWG.

'What Works to Prevent Violence' conducts **cutting-edge research** around the world that will substantially advance the evidence on what drives violence, what works to prevent violence, what makes interventions successful and how they can be replicated, adapted and scaled up. The programme also **supports innovation**: since prevention is a growing field, much new and promising work is being done. The Global Programme supports ground-breaking work through an innovation grant scheme, to support non-profits working in DFID priority countries to develop and test pioneering approaches to preventing violence against women and girls.

Given the magnitude and critical importance of VAWG for the present and the future of all countries in the region, the three organizations abovementioned –SADC, GIZ and DFID- have agreed to joint efforts to create spaces to promote the discussion about what works to effectively stop violence against women before it occurs. The ambitious task of preventing VAWG can only be undertaken by intensifying the cooperation amongst development partners, government institutions and implementing organizations, such as non-governmental organizations and foundations that have decades of valuable experience and expertise to contribute. The Regional Conference on Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls in Southern Africa represents the commitment of the organizers to build and enlarge the networks of relevant stakeholders in the sector, as well as to promote policy dialogue formats. For this reason, the regional conference is conceived as an open forum that will include a variety of actors with a clear commitment to assume greater responsibility for preventing violence against women, such as faith-based organizations, media and the private sector.

Our aim is to shape the prevention interventions based on existing evidence through joint action and to strengthen partnerships.

III. OBJECTIVES

Firstly, the conference will provide a platform to share and **discuss new evidence on the prevention of violence and explore how best to translate research findings into policy and practice**. The co-host agencies will bring together practitioners, policy makers and researchers to better understand how to prevent violence against women and girls. To this end, the presenters and key note speakers will share and discuss with the audience evidence and lessons learnt from prevention programmes as well as different strategies to promote the take-up of existing evidence by policy makers and practitioners to eliminate violence against women. The audience will receive practical information about what adaptation is needed for a particular prevention model to work and scaled-up. The participants will come together to discuss how research findings, produced by programmes like 'What Works' and PFP, amongst others, can be translated into action through policy and practice.

Furthermore, the organizers aim to **stimulate regional exchange (peer learning) and replication and scaling-up** of demonstrated successful interventions.

In addition, this event will **contribute to the building of partnerships** and synergies for action across different sectors and disciplines. The conference will provide to the participants the opportunity to learn, connect, and reflect, as regional partners working together prevent to violence against women and girls.

In sum, the **objectives** of the *Regional Conference on Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls in Southern Africa* are:

- Inform evidence-based legislation, policy and programming in the field of violence prevention in Southern Africa through sharing new evidence and learning on what works to prevent violence
- Identify the gaps in data that need to be addressed for improved violence prevention policies and interventions
- Promote regional coalitions and partnerships that support cross-learning and coordinated, scaled up action
- Build consensus around priorities for action consistent with those identified through the SADC GBV Strategy, and how to progress these.

Key topics that could be used as a basis for work streams during the conference will include, for example:

- Prevention of violence in the Education Sector
- Transforming harmful gendered social norms and attitudes, including the role of media and creative industries in preventing gender-based violence
- Contextualization of prevention interventions: adaptation of interventions to different contexts and population groups
- Social and economic costs of violence and cost-effectiveness of violence prevention interventions
- Economic empowerment combined with social empowerment/gender transformative approaches
- Engaging business and the private sector in violence prevention
- Capacity development for GBV prevention
- Strategies for scaling-up GBV prevention efforts

The different thematic work streams will be “hosted” by different organisations with a special interest and/or expertise in this field. The list above is not exhaustive and might be adapted to include or reformulate the work streams, according to knowledge gaps that are key for the policy process.

The **conference output** will be a publication containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations directed at policy makers and practitioners in SADC Member States and other stakeholders. This report will document the content of the presentations and debates on the different topics. The publication will be widely disseminated in the SADC Region and beyond to provide evidence and lessons learnt on prevention of violence, including information on good practices and how best to translate research findings into policy and practice.

IV. CONFERENCE FORMAT

The conference will consist of a combination of methods to offer valuable information and knowledge about the topics, combined with an engaging approach to acquiring new concepts. Each day will include plenary sessions in a panel format where progress, good practices and new approaches in prevention of VAWG will be shared by the panel members, followed by an open dialogue.

The conference will start with a high-level opening panel, followed by thematic panel sessions where leading experts on VAWG engage in an open discussion, as well as working group sessions and workshops to enable ample opportunities for the sharing of experiences.

V. PARTICIPANTS

The conference will bring together parliamentarians, and representatives of key line ministries in the SADC region leading on coordination and implementation of national legal and policy frameworks.

Regional and international experts on violence prevention and representatives of development partners and UN agencies will also be invited to advise on targeted interventions and approaches to efficiently prevent and combat gender-based violence.

The organizers will convey a heterogeneous group of participants composed among others by:

- **Practitioners** will be exposed to a range of resources developed from research to support their work in delivering evidence-based interventions.
- **Researchers** will have the opportunity to exchange with internationally recognized expert peer researchers in the field of violence prevention that are engaged in either ongoing or recently completed research projects on violence against women and children. Participants will be able to get a picture of the current violence against women research landscape and highlight areas for further research.
- **Government officials** will gain access to resources that translate the research evidence, to support policy-makers in delivering evidence-based policy decisions.

- **Media and creative industries representatives** are key players in prevention work. By participating in this event, they will gain insights on accurate reporting around domestic, family and sexual violence, they will receive expert advice and get access to renown experts in the field that can be available for interviews.

Civil society organizations, faith-based institutions, foundations, media and private sector representatives as well as academia and key researchers in the field of prevention of VAWG will also be called to participate in this event. This diverse group of practitioners and entities will better leverage their comparative advantages to enrich the conversation about the creation of more coherent and effective prevention interventions.

Selected organizations and private companies will be able to join the event as sponsors, as well as potential stakeholders in violence prevention. The logo of those entities supporting the conference will be displayed in the promotional print outs and social media.

VI. LOGISTICS

The Regional Programme Partnerships for Prevention of Violence in Southern Africa (PfP), funded by the German Government and implemented by GIZ, in partnership with DFID, The Medical Research Council (MRC) and the SADC Gender Unit, will host the meeting and is responsible for the organizational and logistical arrangements with the collaboration of the partners and sponsors.

The conference venue is Johannesburg in South Africa and the dates are 4-5 December 2019. The envisaged number of participants will be approximately 100-150 people. The working languages of the conference will be English, with simultaneous interpretation for French and Portuguese. A logistics note will be shared.