



Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls in Uganda

A Policy Brief to Support Decision Makers

Violence against women (VAW) is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world, affecting at least 1 in 3 women, with high reported cases particularly in Africa. Available data suggests that up to 45% of ever married/partnered Ugandan women have experienced violence from an intimate partner.¹ Fortunately, learning from research and programming shows that violence is preventable, and women can live free from violence. This can be achieved with a strong commitment from policy makers, explicit policy and legislation and collaboration with the women's movement. This is because success depends on dedicated leadership and foresight from policy makers.

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This policy brief is intended to support policy makers in effectively addressing VAW. First, we provide a brief overview of relevant policy commitments and evidence of successful programming to prevent VAW. Next, we review the specific context in Uganda, highlighting gaps to address and strengths to build on. Finally, we conclude with urgent actions that are necessary for meeting the country's national commitments to prevent violence against women.

I. Addressing VAW in Africa

Scope and Relevance of the Issue

In Africa, physical violence against women is particularly high, with nearly half of countries reporting a prevalence of over 40%. The most common form of VAW is intimate partner violence (IPV) by a former or current partner in Sub-Saharan Africa with a prevalence of 33%¹.

The violence that women face presents a major barrier to the realisation of full and equal rights and has severe emotional, physical, sexual, and economic consequences. VAW also has a large financial toll on societies and overall national development, as women who experience violence are unable to fully participate in their places of work, in community, and families.

While many factors may exacerbate violence (such as poverty and alcohol use), **gender inequality is the root cause of violence against women** as reflected in the definition in Box 1.

Existing Frameworks and Commitments to

Box 1. Definition of VAW

Violence against women "is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men." *United Nations Declaration of the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women.*

Prevent VAW

Over the past two decades, there has been **extraordinary growth in international, regional and national efforts** to address **VAW in Africa**. By linking to these important frameworks, policy makers can enhance their leadership, credibility and impact.

International Commitments

Through **Sustainable Development Goal 5**—which is aimed at achieving² gender equality and empowering all women and girls—the United Nations (UN) set a new global framework for progress in eliminating VAW. In addition, bi-lateral organisations, private foundations, and international resourcing initiatives have scaled up investments in programmes and research aimed at VAW prevention.

Regional Commitments

Across Africa, there has been a rise in the implementation of regional policy commitments to ending VAW. This is exemplified in the **Maputo Protocol**, which expands definitions of VAW to include economic violence and recognises violence in the family, at work, in the community and during conflict situations.

National Commitments

Due to increased activism and funding, many countries have formalised their responsibility to prevent VAW in national policies and legislation. As of 2017, 53% of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have explicit laws against domestic violence. These national commitments further evidence the important role of policymakers as agents of change. See next page for Uganda's national commitments.

Types of VAW Programming

VAW programming includes a variety of prevention and response efforts.

Prevention efforts transform the root causes that lead to VAW in the first place. Response efforts

secure services, resources, and support for VAW survivors. Prevention and response interventions require different approaches. Both are essential for eliminating violence against women and supporting survivors to access justice and heal; as noted above, this brief is focused on the prevention of violence.

VAW prevention programming can be carried out at different levels-- individual, interpersonal, community and society (figure 1). **This 'socio-ecological' model recognises the critical contribution of policy and legislation change for VAW prevention.**

- Communication and advocacy focused on authorities
- Promotion of changes in policy and legislation
- Police activities/enforcement of existing laws and regulation

- Communication and advocacy campaigns
- Community-wide mobilisation and social norm change
- Activities and engagement with common-interest groups
- Workplace and private sector interventions

- Critical awareness of gender roles
- Parenting interventions
- Curriculum-based activities at school
- Extra-curricular activities for children and adolescents

- Economic and income generation programs
- Social empowerment, skills building, and consciousness raising
- Counselling
- Bystander interventions

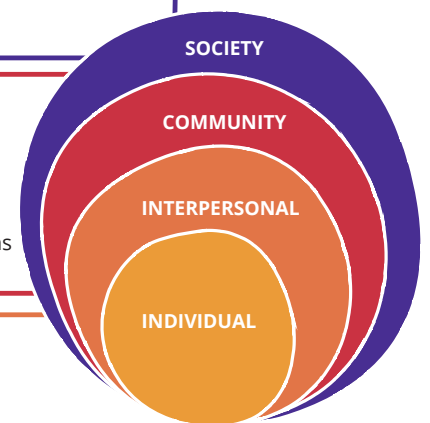


Figure 1.

Evidence of Programme Impact

A growing body of evidence, largely from Sub-Saharan Africa, shows that VAW is preventable.

Rigorous research demonstrates that prevention is possible within a relatively short period of time (i.e., a few years) when there is sufficient investment in **financial and human resources**, and, ideally, **leadership from national women's organisations**.


Studies also highlight which specific approaches are most impactful. Some initiatives are ineffective on their own, such as awareness-raising and training. However, **programmes that combine multiple strategies have proven to be highly effective in preventing violence**—for instance combining awareness raising with skill-building and community mobilisation. **The most successful approaches engage both women and men to critically reflect on gender inequality and power.** Research demonstrates this holistic approach is more effective than initiatives targeting specific groups (such as “men only” or “women only” programming).



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Examples of Successful Programmes

There are several evidence-based programmes across Africa that have already been effective in reducing VAW. These include:



- Engaging with Faith Groups to prevent VAW in Conflict Affected Communities¹**
(Tearfund and Heal Africa, Democratic Republic of the Congo): achieved a 58% reduction in women's experiences of IPV, and a 20% reduction in experiences of sexual violence from a non-partner.
- COMBAT²**
(The Gender Centre, Ghana): achieved a 50% reduction in past year physical partner violence, and a 55% reduction in past year sexual partner violence.
- SASA!³**
(Raising Voices and CEDOVIP, Uganda): achieved 52% reduction in the risk of IPV against women in *SASA!* communities in Kampala after 3 years.
- The Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity⁴**
(IMAGE) (Small Enterprise Foundation and Rural AIDS and Development Action Research, South Africa): achieved a 55% lower risk of physical or sexual violence from a sexual partner for women engaged in the programme.

By supporting programmes that replicate or adapt evidenced-based models, policy makers can maximise the likelihood of achieving real impact and transformation.

1 Engaging with Faith Groups to prevent VAW in Conflict Affected Communities.
2 COMBAT
3 SASA!
4 Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity

II. Current landscape in Uganda

a. Scope of the issue: Prevalence, risks and implications

VAW remains an issue of concern for women in both private and public life. According to the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (2016), more than half (56%) of women in Uganda aged 15-49 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. Among ever-married women 46% have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence by their current or most recent spouse/partner and 46% of ever married women say that they are afraid of their current or most recent spouse/partner “some” or “most” of the time.⁵

A 2017 study conducted by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development revealed that “social and cultural perceptions, norms and practices of all communities that reinforce unequal power relations at household and societal level” are the driving factors of VAW.⁶ This aligns with global data that shows prevention of VAW requires a multi-pronged approach that seeks to address the deep-rooted structural power imbalances between women and men as well as contributing factors (e.g., HIV and AIDS, alcohol/substance abuse, low quality education, poverty, misconceptions in religious texts and cultural practices etc.) that exacerbate circumstances leading to violence.

b. Strengths to build on

The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda provides for strong legal foundation for the National Policy on Elimination of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Uganda. It mandates the state to fulfil all fundamental rights for all Ugandans and further instructs the government to enact laws to curb all human rights violation including GBV. Uganda is also a signatory to regional and global agreements (SDGs, Maputo Protocol, CEDAW, UDHR etc.) that require action to uphold women’s rights, including the fundamental right to live free from violence.

Nationally the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) 2010 and The National Policy on the Elimination of Gender Based Violence in Uganda (NGBV) 2019, are the most instructive legal and policy frameworks on VAW. These policy measures are supported by a 5-year National Action Plan that provides a framework to prevent and respond to GBV, spelling out the roles of various state and non-state actors, the strategic actions that need to be undertaken, and monitoring mechanisms at the national and local levels.

Programmatically, the civil society in Uganda is a global leader in innovating evidence-based programming such as *SASA!*⁷, *SHARE*⁸, the *Good School Toolkit*⁹, and *Parenting for Respectability*¹⁰.



5 Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and ICF. (2018) Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2016, p.313.

6 The National Policy on the Elimination of Gender Based Violence in Uganda (2016), by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, p.7. Available at: <http://ngbvd.mglsd.go.ug/docs/2838GBV%20POLICY%2031st%2007%202019%20Final..pdf>

7 *SASA!* <https://raisingvoices.org/sasa/>

8 *SHARE*


9 *Good School Toolkit*

10 *Parenting For Respectability*

Gaps to address

Several gaps still exist in policy and practice that need addressing with the most urgency to prevent VAW more effectively in Uganda:

- **Weak implementation of laws/policies.** The many progressive laws in Uganda that could transform the VAW landscape and enable women to live free from violence require action from decision-makers, particularly in setting up effective mechanisms to facilitate implementation.
- **Poor budgeting and resourcing.** There is inadequate financing by the Government of Uganda to the local governments which then contributes to inadequate funds allocated for mobilization, empowerment and monitoring at local government level. For instance, the local governments saw a budget cut from Ush 46.10 B in the 2018/19 FY to Ush 43.36B in the 2019/20 FY and a 27% cut to gender equality and women empowerment in the same period.¹¹ In 2018, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) only allocated 1% of their budget to the Department for Gender and Women Affairs which at the time only had 11 staff, with an even smaller percentage of this being allocated specifically to VAW prevention.¹²
- **Limited gender-power analysis of VAW.** Ideas about how to address VAW still largely shy away from dismantling and redistributing power, and instead focus on fixing the symptoms of power imbalances such as poverty, lack of access to education, and criminalizing harmful cultural norms, among others.
- **Weak data collection and reporting mechanisms.** Despite the MGLSD developing a GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS), only a fraction of districts local governments have been trained and are using it. This GBVIMS is also not harmonized across all line ministries' data collection systems such as the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS) and Ministry of Health (MoH). This lack of harmonization has made it difficult to identify trends and effectively inform budgets, policies and laws.⁶
- **Rigid and outdated institutional standard operating procedures (SOPs).** Progressive legal and policy frameworks in the country should be complimented with progressive institutional culture and procedures. For instance, the police department and judiciary have not adapted their institutional procedures to reflect the changes made in policy.



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11 Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group. (2019). EVERY SHILLING COUNTS: Citizen Perspectives on the National Budget Framework Paper For FY2019/20. Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group. <https://www.csbag.org/download/every-shilling-counts-2019/?wpdmdl=292&refresh=607d51691cad61618825577>

12 Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) Strengthening National and Local Coordination, Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence. (2018) Policy brief by the Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention. Available at: <https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:ec57224a-d061-44b8-a447-8befb1e0a7e6>

III. Recommended Actions

a) Political will and coordination – Strengthening laws and policies

- **Amend** the Employment (Sexual Harassment) Regulations, 2012.
- **Operationalise** the Domestic Violence Act 2010 and the Penal Code Amendment Act, 2007.
- **Prioritise inter-agency/inter-ministerial** joint planning and cooperation to address VAW.
- **Invest time and resources to upskill decision-makers**, creating a core group of leaders across ministries, Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS), funders, etc. who are well informed about violence against women and can lead strategic policy and legislative initiatives and the transformation of institutional standard operating procedures in Uganda's institutions.
- **Prioritise bridging the gap between legislation and strengthening accountability mechanisms** which would then establish the government's commitment to addressing women's needs and to achieving gender equality.
- **Ensure adequate funding for resourcing and operationalising the National Plan of Action on Preventing Violence against Women and the National policy framework.** Similarly, funds meant for mobilization should be directed to the community-based service departments within local government where the mandate of community mobilization lies.

b) Collaboration with the Women's Movement

- **Ensure that the women's movement**—which has been leading advocacy for ending violence against women, providing evidence, language, tools, and strategies that now permeate human rights discourse and practice—has a seat at the table in national level decision-making for VAW in Uganda.
- **Support the movement's continued growth**, vibrancy, and leadership on women's human rights.



As a decision-maker in Uganda, you have a tremendous opportunity to take actions that address violence against women in our country. We look forward to supporting your leadership, collaboration, and action.

For more information reach out to Center for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP) at info@cedovip.org.

