



Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls in Zambia

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 reported cases in Africa being particularly high. Available data indicates that 47% of ever-married Zambian women aged 15-49 years have experienced physical, emotional or sexual violence from their current or most recent intimate partner. However, **learning from research and programming shows that violence is preventable**. With a strong commitment from policy makers, explicit policy and legislation and collaboration with the women's movement, women can live free from violence. Success depends on dedicated leadership and foresight from policy makers.



Learning from research and programming shows that violence is preventable.

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 Zambia, highlighting gaps to address and strengths to build on. Finally, we conclude with several urgent actions that are necessary for meeting our 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 violence is intimate partner violence (IPV) by a current or former partner with Sub-Saharan Africa at a 33% prevalence rate of lifetime physical/sexual violence.¹

The violence that women face presents a major barrier to the realization of full and equal rights and has severe emotional, physical, sexual, and economic consequences.


VAW also has a large financial toll on societies overall, as women who experience violence are unable to fully participate in their places of work, communities, 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.

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.*



Existing Frameworks and Commitments to 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 achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls—the UN set a new global framework for progress in eliminating VAW. In addition, bi-lateral organizations, private foundations, and international resourcing initiatives have scaled up investments in programs 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 by the **SADC Protocol on Gender and Development** and the Maputo **Protocol**, which expands definitions of VAW to include economic violence and recognizes violence in the family, at work, in the community and in conflict.

National Commitments

Due to increased activism and funding, many countries have formalized 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.

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 recognizes the critical contribution of policy and legislation change for VAW prevention.

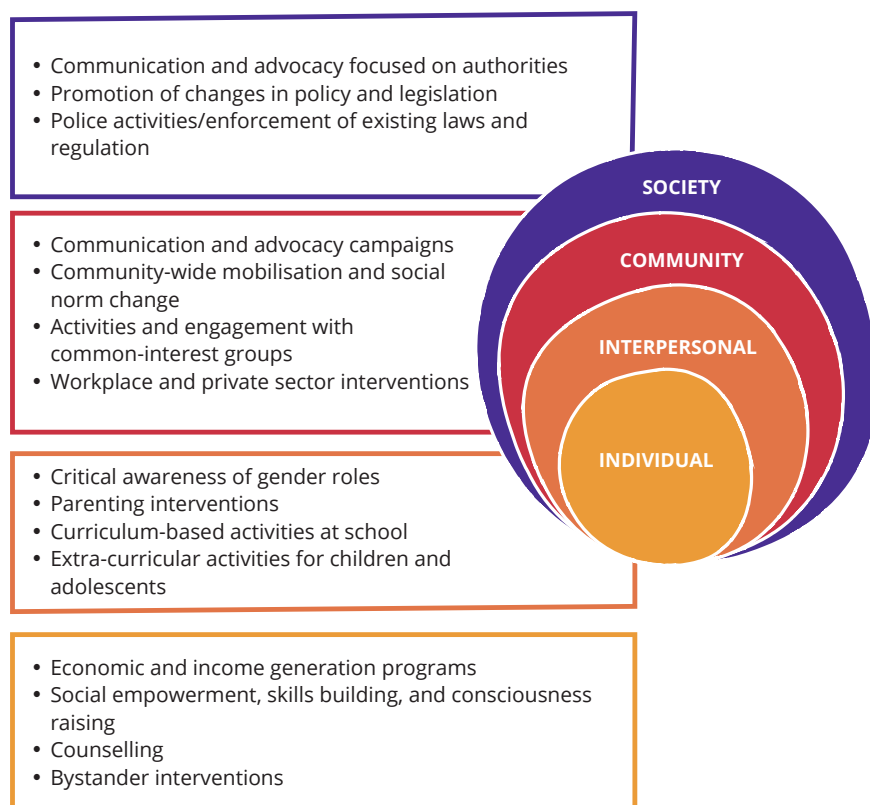


Figure 1

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 organizations**.

Studies also highlight which specific approaches are most impactful. Some initiatives are ineffective on their own, such as awareness-raising and training. However, **programs that combine multiple strategies have proven to be highly effective in preventing violence**—for

instance combining awareness raising with skill-building and community mobilization. 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).



The most successful approaches engage both women and men to critically reflect on gender inequality and power



Examples of Successful Programmes

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

1. **Engaging with Faith Groups to prevent VAWG in Conflict Affected Communities**¹ (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.
2. **COMBAT**² (The Gender Centre, Ghana): achieved a 50% reduction in past year physical partner violence, and a 55% reduction in past year sexual partner violence.
3. **SASA!**³ (Raising Voices, Uganda): achieved 52% reduction in the risk of IPV against women in **SASA!** communities after 3 years.
4. The **Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity** (IMAGE)⁴ (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 VAWG in Conflict Affected Communities

² COMBAT

³ SASA!

⁴ Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity

II. Current Landscape in Zambia

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

Violence against women continues to be on the rise in Zambia. The Zambia Demographic Health Survey (2018) indicates that 47% of ever married women have experienced some form of violence from an intimate partner—with physical violence being the most common reported by 37%, followed by emotional violence (31%) and sexual violence (15%). Acceptability of violence against women in certain circumstances appears to be widespread with 46% of women and 26% of men agreeing that a husband is justified in beating his wife in some situations (e.g., if she burns the food, neglects the children, refuses to have sex, etc.).²



47% of ever married women in Zambia have experienced intimate partner violence.

A USAID study revealed that “traditional and social norms that teach women to accept and tolerate physical violence and teach men that it is normal to beat his wife” and “male domination that promotes unbalanced power relations” are key drivers of VAW in Zambia.⁵ This aligns with findings across numerous contexts emphasizing that preventing VAW requires transforming deep rooted power imbalances between women and men as well as addressing other contributing factors (e.g., HIV and AIDS, alcohol/substance abuse, low quality education, poverty, etc.) that lead to violence.⁶

b. Strengths to build on

Zambia is a signatory of regional and global agreements (SDGs, Maputo Protocol, SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, CEDAW, etc.) requiring action to uphold women’s rights, including the fundamental right to live free from violence.

Nationally, Anti Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Act of 2011 includes female genital mutilation in its definition of violence and establishes a framework for responding to VAW through the creation of shelters and an ‘anti-GBV Fund,’ among other provisions.⁷ More recently, Zambia enacted the 2015 Gender Equity and Equality Act, which establishes a clear policy mandate for addressing the beliefs, norms and practices that underlie inequality between women and men.⁸



Preventing VAW requires transforming deep rooted power imbalances between women and men.

The Non-Governmental Gender Organizations’ Coordinating Council (NGOCC) coordinates the various women’s rights organizations (WROs) in the country and has been influential in achieving several of the key legislative actions described above. The presence of a vibrant women’s movement in the country is a key strength to build on.

5 Samuels, F. Ndubani, P. Walker, D and Simbaya, J. (2015) Baseline Study: Stamping Out and Preventing Gender Based Violence (STOP GBV) in Zambia, p.4 and 5. Available at: <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9759.pdf>

6 Jewkes, R., Willan, S., Heise, L., Washington, L., Shai, N., Kerr-Wilson, A, Christofides, N. (2020) Effective design and implementation elements in interventions to prevent violence against women and girls. What Works To Prevent VAWG?, Pretoria. Available at: <https://www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/373-intervention-report19-02-20/file>

7 The Anti-Gender-Based Violence Act (FGM), UN Women Global Database on Violence Against Women, Available at: <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/countries/africa/zambia/2011/the-antigender-based-violence-act-fgm>

8 See: Gender Equity and Equality Act, 2015, Zambia. Available at: <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/zam177905.pdf>

Gaps to Address

A number of gaps still exist in policy and practice that are currently hampering efforts to prevent VAW in Zambia:

- Lack of specific penalties for perpetrators of VAW. The Anti GBV Act No 1 of 2011 does not establish clear penalties for perpetrators of violence. Instead, such penalties are outlined in the Penal Code, which does not recognize the full range of GBV offences. The Act cannot be used on its own but has to be used in conjunction with the Penal Code, Criminal Procedures Code and other laws.
- Weak implementation and oversight of the Anti GBV Act. This is a significant gap that results in weak coordination among duty bearers and other stakeholders working to end VAW.
- Lack of balance between response and prevention programming. Services are essential, and so are prevention programs that change gender inequality as the root cause of violence.
- Poor Coordination and funding of GBV programming. The many Government Department/ Ministries addressing GBV causes confusion to stakeholders and impedes accountability.

III. Recommended Actions

Political will and coordination – strengthening laws and policies

- Amend the Penal Code with the aim of harmonising its penalties with the provisions and definitions included in the Anti GBV Act No. 1 of 2011.
- Allocate at least 50% of the funding for VAW towards prevention initiatives (as described above), this would support more robust implementation of the 2015 Gender Equity and Equality Act.
- Increase budget allocation for VAW prevention and service providers to support more holistic and multi-sectoral response.
- Establish—and direct resources towards—a mechanism to oversee and coordinate the implementation of the Anti GBV Act of 2011.
- Streamline GBV programs in a single Government Department or Ministry; this group could play a national coordinating role.

Collaboration with the Women's Movement

- Ensure that the women's movement, which has been leading advocacy for ending violence against women, has a seat at the table in national level decision-making for VAW in Zambia.
- Partner with women's organisations that support community activism to change harmful social norms and support help seeking among women experiencing violence.



As a decision-maker in Zambia, 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 Young Women Christian Association at ywca.ug@gmail.com.

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