



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

---

**Experts' seminar on innovative approaches  
to combating violence against women  
Dushanbe, 20-22 October 2008**

**Concluding remarks  
by Jamila Seftaoui - OSCE Senior Adviser on Gender Issues  
October 22, 2008**

Over the last 2 ½ days, a number of good and effective practices have been presented from a variety of countries.

We have also had the chance to discuss the aspects of these initiatives that we have found particularly innovative and that could inspire us in some form in our own context.

From the discussions and presentations, common themes or approaches have emerged- these can also be characterized as **enabling factors** in developing responses to VAW.

There are at least seven factors that came to my mind and that I would like to share with you as an analytical synopsis of our working sessions:

1. Address VAW as a Universal Problem: We saw that VAW does not make an exception in front of any society, of any country: from the Nord or from the South, from the West or from the East. It is crucial to underline the universality of the problem. And as such, universal tools are required to address VAW and internationally-recognized human rights standards are the best entry point. These are universal principals that cut across all cultures, ethnicities, religions etc. There should be no excuse for any society to tolerate VAW in the name of a specific culture or any other specificity. Women have a right to a life free from violence and there are no exceptions to or derogations from this right.

- Using a human rights framework can nullify the argument that VAW is a private matter.
- All States have obligations to protect citizens' human rights and to provide remedies when rights are violated.

Good examples:

- The Council of Europe campaign- "Stop Domestic Violence Against Women"- framed DV as a violation of the human rights of European women and confirmed to member states that they have a positive obligation to take a variety of measures to address this problem.
- In Spain, we heard that there is respect for the rule of law and the application of laws, therefore the law on gender violence is another effective tool to protect the rights of Spanish women.

2. Importance of evidence, research: Interventions on VAW should be based as far as possible on evidence based data and statistics about the prevalence, causes, scope and consequences of the problem.

- States should collect official data and undertake research on VAW.
- NGOs can be sources of information that helps inform the government.

Good examples:

- In Tajikistan, government agencies have access to data collected by NGO-run crisis centres (using a unified database) that can help in development of policies.
- In France, government-led public awareness campaigns were based on data collected by the State in 5 major studies. Campaign materials were based on real data used to end the culture of tolerance for VAW (to "shock" society with a picture of the true problem of VAW in the country).
- In France, they are also using a feasibility study to indicate the societal costs of VAW. The study examines not only direct costs (healthcare, policing, housing) but also human costs (lost productivity etc.)

3. Inter-institutional coordination: VAW requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach, including:

- Coordination between government and NGOs in a real synergy: Coordination between State and NGOs should be healthy and should lead cooperative efforts that enhance each other- not NGOs taking on the functions and discharging the State from its responsibilities to respond to VAW.
- Cross-sectoral coordination is essential for the diversity of information but also of action (i.e. ministerial coordination)
- Coordination across levels (local to national)

Good examples:

- Finland took a bottom up approach- they began at the municipal level. One organization led an initiative to enhance the capacities of a wide range of local institutions to prevent, recognize and intervene in cases of domestic violence. This work led to the creation of a multi-agency task force at the local level. Now, there is an inter-ministerial coordinating body at the national level and the Porvoo municipal experience has become a model that is recommended for cities across the country.

4. Funding/ budget/ressources: We saw examples of programs and initiatives that are supported by significant funds and others that had virtually no dedicated funding. This shows that while funding is an important and in some cases indeed an enabling factor, it should not be understood as a condition sine qua non, a precondition. Most efforts to combat VAW have started or are based on voluntary work. (This is though not a call for work without resources but an encouragement that progress can happen also without significant funds)

Good examples:

- In Finland, the local-level project to prevent domestic violence- “Full to the Brim”- had no specially delineated budget but was undertaken as part of the regular work of a number of local agencies and NGOs.
- In Austria, the city of Vienna currently provides € 4 millions to support shelters for women. But the whole programme started 30 years ago with one shelter and 10 women, and almost no funds. NGOs have been lobbying and working for to reach this level of support.

5. Self criticism (vs. Outside criticism): It was noted that in some cases, governments are more receptive to constructive critique coming from

NGOs in the country. In other cases, international pressure from the outside was an important influence on how a country responds to VAW.

Good examples:

- In Russia, where the government is less receptive to criticism from international organizations, a commission of independent Russian NGO experts is playing a key role in monitoring how VAW is being addressed, in formulating recommendations to the government and in highlighting good practices at the regional or local level that could be replicated elsewhere in the country.
- In Finland and in Austria, international attention to how the country was addressing VAW (namely the concluding comments of the CEDAW Committee or the wide coverage of the death of 2 women in Austria) played an important role in spurring the government to take action.

6. Male Involvement in Addressing VAW: I think we all agree that one of the important enabling factors is to consider males as potential part of the solution. One aspect should though be kept in mind: the primary victims are women, their protection should be in the heart of any action with perpetrators.

Good example UK: It was important to see the use of male hotlines and programmes to combating VAW addressing males. It was also important to see the integrative approach including the partners of violent men in the whole process and keeping an eye on their safety and protection.

Finally,

7. Addressing VAW in a holistic perception: involving in the national programmes also the “other” victims, and specifically the future men, the Youth

Good examples:

- From Finland, we heard about special courses for young families, pre-nuptial education that addresses VAW.

- The excellent example from Scotland provided for a vivid illustration in this respect.

In conclusion,

Let me make two points to the central approach of this seminar: we have had an intensive dialog about what strategies and projects seem particularly effective and transferable.

Of course, it is not quite accurate to think that one strategy that is currently working in Scotland would work immediately in Tajikistan.

It is also not correct to think that each society, each country, each community should act in complete isolation from the developments in other parts of the world.

What we intended to offer is a diversity of examples on ongoing solutions in different parts of the world, under different conditions and with different actors.

Transferability or replicability of good, effective ideas is nothing more and nothing less than the process of learning. Learning starts with an own reflection on own problems taking into account own specific starting points, resources and desired goals.

It is our belief that in this reflection and learning processes, examples are helpful. Examples of measures that are effectively working, that are positive, are even more helpful.

It is in this spirit, that many of the useful practices we heard in the last 2 and half days, and many more other practices we are currently collecting, will form the content of a compilation that is being drafted now by the OSCE. This compilation, expected to be published in early 2009, should serve as a resource for all those who are working to improve the response to VAW. Therefore, participants should be open to providing feedback, be it in the form of more information to some of the practices presented in this seminar or to other approaches known to you and that you think they are worth sharing because they have proved to be effective.

We appreciate your cooperation on this and I hope to see many of you in the symposium we plan to have in Vienna in March/April 2009 on the

occasion of the publication of the compilation. This document will be published in Russian and English.

In Conclusion, I would like to extend my thanks to all of you who helped make this gathering an exciting, inspiring and forward looking event. My special thanks go to the Representatives of Tajikistan (Government and NGOs), to the representatives of our current and in-coming Chairmanships, to our office in Dushanbe, to the courageous translators and to my team (Hanne, Linda and Monica) who have worked hard for the smooth and timely organization of this event.

Before I give the floor for the official closing, I would like to close my intervention with a saying by Seneca, a greek philosopher:

It is not because things are difficult that we do not do them,  
It is because we do not do them that they are difficult!

So, let's do...

Thank you.