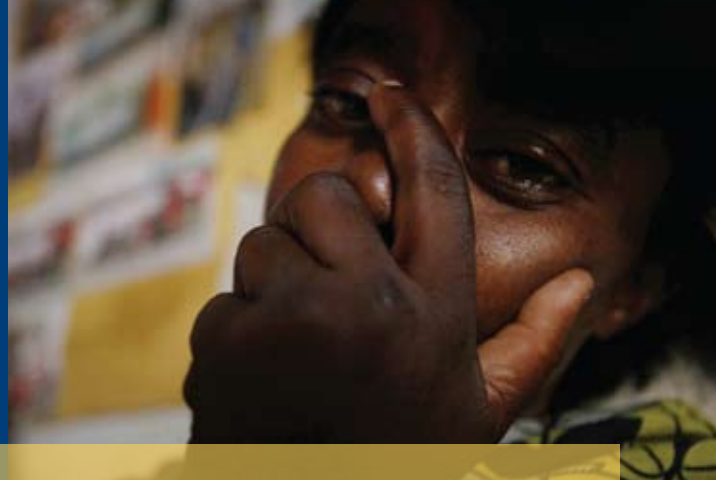




Bringing an End to Gender-Based Violence



Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread but least recognized human rights abuses in the world. Such violence, also called gender based violence (GBV), can include physical, sexual and psychological abuse of women and girls in the home and school; harmful cultural practices such as child marriage; and widespread sexual violence and exploitation of women and girls during and after conflict.

Globally, one out of three women will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime, with rates reaching 70 percent in some countries.¹ Women and girls are vulnerable to GBV because of social norms and beliefs that reinforce women and girls' subordinate status in many societies.

GBV has extensive health and social consequences for individuals, families and communities. It reduces women's and girls' contributions to development, inflicts costs on national economies, and therefore undermines poverty reduction efforts.

As part of its commitment to international development and to the empowerment of women and girls worldwide, CARE recommends that the United States Government and Congress:

- Pass the International Violence Against Women Act (IVAWA)
- Pass the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act
- Support the effective implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1820 and 1888 on sexual violence in conflict

Issue in Brief

Gender-based violence is a leading cause of women's and girls' death and incapacity globally. In addition to facing physical and

psychological trauma and injury, women and girls who suffer violence are at a higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. They may also face unintended pregnancies, adverse pregnancy outcomes and chronic health problems. Survivors of sexual violence often suffer rejection and further victimization from partners, family and community members due to the shame and stigma associated with such violations.

Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and harassment in and around school settings. A 2002 South African study found that a third of men who raped girls under the age of 15 were teachers.² The risk of school-related violence and exploitation often deters parents from sending their daughters to school and is a reason that girls already enrolled drop out. Abuse, intimidation or coercion may undermine girls' ability to perform well in school, limiting their opportunities for a higher education and good income.

Despite its high prevalence and severity, GBV is under-reported, even in countries where such violence is prohibited by law. This is because social attitudes often condone violence against women, and stigmatize and blame the survivor. Many countries also lack adequate health and counseling services for survivors and strong mechanisms for protection and legal redress. As a result, violence against women often goes unreported and few survivors receive assistance.

“Women and girls who experience rape and sexual violence are punished three times: once by the violence itself, second by the community if they dare complain and a third time when they see the culprit walking the street.”

– CARE Health Worker in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

CARE in Action

CARE recognizes that violence is at the heart of women's and girls disempowerment and marginalization. CARE is implementing projects in more than 20 countries that focus on reducing and mitigating GBV. In all cases, CARE builds on local systems and structures to ensure that solutions to GBV are community-driven and address the underlying causes of violence.

In Burundi for example, CARE has used village savings and loan groups as a mechanism for increasing women's access to economic resources, as well as a forum for social support and sensitization around issues of violence, gender and discrimination in the community. In El Salvador, CARE is working to increase awareness among students, families and government about a new legal code of conduct for teachers, and is also building capacity for the effective implementation of the law. In three countries in the Balkans, CARE works with high school-age youth, especially young men, to promote attitudes and behaviors that discourage violent behavior against women and peers.

A Story of Change in Burundi

"Last year, CARE organized discussions with groups of the men and women separately. I took part in the men's group. The discussion focused on the sharing of the decision making within the household, and was facilitated by a man of my generation, a farmer who had come from a nearby hill of our township. He related his life story, a story that perfectly resembled my own, except that he had changed his behavior and was now making decisions together with his wife. His history touched me very deeply and confirmed to me that my behavior was based on traditional customs; I also realized that my violent actions towards my wife were useless and did not make her respect me or my position as a man. This was the moment when I realized that I was a victim of ignorance based on stereotypes and lies, and it was then that I decided I had to change my behavior. Currently there are twelve men in my community who are telling their stories before others, and whose wives also testify that their husbands have in fact changed for the better. Together we are committed to lead this struggle, especially for the transformation of our community, the ceasing of harmful customary practices that are based on injustice and not valuing others".

– Community Member in Burundi

US and International Support

The global prevalence of GBV requires a strong response. CARE urges the United States and other nations to integrate efforts to prevent and respond to GBV across their foreign assistance programs in health, governance, education, economic growth, humanitarian assistance and security. Such assistance must be sustained over time, as the cycle of violence against women and girls can only be broken through long-term, multi-level action to empower women and girls and change community norms that perpetuate violence.

Congress can solidify the United States' commitment to combating violence against women and girls by supporting the passage of the International Violence against Women Act (IVAWA), during the 111th Congress. This landmark legislation – which draws on the experience of CARE and other groups working on the issue – would establish a comprehensive strategy to address violence against women and girls globally, and integrate GBV prevention and response efforts across U.S. foreign assistance programs.

Members of Congress can also support efforts to protect girls from violence by supporting the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act, which would ensure that this harmful practice is recognized as a human rights violation and also that U.S. foreign assistance includes child marriage prevention programs.

At a multilateral level, the United States has supported efforts to address GBV by sponsoring United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1820 and 1888, which aim to enhance global action to address sexual violence in armed conflict. CARE urges the United States to use its leadership role as a member of the Security Council to ensure effective implementation of these resolutions.

¹ World Health Organization (WHO), Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women, 2005.

² "Born to high risk: violence against girls in Africa". African Child Policy Forum, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2006.



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