



OUR VOICE

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS A BARRIER TO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

THE ISSUE

One in three women globally will be subject to gender-based violence in her lifetime.¹ Regional rates of violence against women and girls are high, with prevalence rates in the Pacific, in particular in some parts of Papua New Guinea, the highest in the world.²

At the same time, women remain significantly under-represented at all levels of political decision-making. The current worldwide average of women's participation in national parliaments is 24%.³ The percentage of women in Pacific parliaments is 7.5% (2018), the lowest in the world.⁴

Over the last few years, violence against women in politics (VAWP) has received increased, and much needed, attention. It was the subject of a landmark study conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 2016⁵, and a supplementary IPU study published in 2018 on violence against women in European parliaments.⁶

In 2016, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) launched its #NotTheCost Campaign to stop VAWP.⁷ Significantly, VAWP was also the focus of the Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women which was presented to the UN General Assembly in October 2018.⁸

Acknowledging the intersection between violence against women and women's leadership is crucial.

Increasing women's voice and leadership involves redistributions of power and resources which is often met with resistance including violence against women.⁹ This violence targets women because of their gender and can take many forms including intimidation, sexual harassment, online violence and physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence. It more frequently occurs in both public and private spaces simultaneously.¹⁰

These gendered acts of violence are used to deter, restrict and undermine the participation of women in political activism and decision making at all levels.¹¹ Apart from being a gross violation of women's rights, violence obstructs women's access to leadership roles and ability to participate in, and influence, political processes. In fact, threat levels against women in politics appear to increase the more women are visible and influential in terms of policy-making.¹²

'Women in politics are targets not only because of their political activism but by the very fact that they are women who are politically active.'¹³

At the root of VAWP are harmful gender stereotypes and a belief that women and men are not equal. Gender stereotypes are rigid, over-simplified and usually prejudiced views of the abilities and attributes of men and women purely based on their gender. Gender stereotyping leads to harmful practices like the violence seen against women in politics around the world.



Agnes Titus (NCfR) leading the Bougainville Women's Rights Forum, Siwai Bougainville. Photographer: Harjono Djoyobisono

The under-representation of women in political leadership also impacts on the ability of governments to respond to and prevent violence against women. Research demonstrates that having more women in government can lead to issues which are vital for women, such as ending violence against women, being put on the political agenda and addressed through policy and legal reform.¹⁴

IPU survey¹⁵ shows that VAWP is present across the globe¹⁶:

- 81.8% of women parliamentarians have experienced psychological violence including humiliating sexist remarks.
- 20% experienced physical harm.¹⁷
- 44.4% have received threats of death, rape, beatings or abduction.¹⁸
- Only 21.1% of parliaments have policies or procedures for sexual harassment against parliamentarians.¹⁹

Women can be specifically targeted for violence and intimidation while running for election, supporting women candidates or simply exercising their right to vote. For example, in the last election in Papua New Guinea, women human rights defenders in Jiwaka Province who supported female candidates were threatened and there were even instances of their houses being burnt down.²⁰

Similar instances of intimidation were reported in the 2012 elections across PNG, with research noting that women were more likely than men to report either having experienced intimidation or having been prevented from voting. This included female voters being assaulted at polling stations or being threatened with retaliation if they did not vote for particular candidates.²¹ Women also experience violence within political parties – a National Democratic Institute survey in four countries found that 44% of female respondents had experienced high rates of violence within their political parties.²²

Research also suggests that female politicians are subjected to significantly more abuse online than their male counterparts. For example, Hilary Clinton received almost twice as many abusive tweets than Bernie Sanders. Three-quarters of this abuse was by men.²³

While threats and manifestations of VAWP are by no means the only barrier to women's participation in leadership, the consequences of these actions are deep, long-lasting, and spread beyond the individual.²⁴ Fear of violence can preclude women from entering political life²⁵ or deter women from running for a second political term.²⁶

Young women's political aspirations can also be significantly dampened by witnessing negative treatment of those already in leadership.²⁷ A survey in Australia revealed that 60 percent of women aged 18 to 21 and 80 percent of women over 31 said they were less likely to run for office after seeing the negative media treatment of female politicians.²⁸ The political integrity of institutions and sustainable peace is also undermined.²⁹

Women have the right to participate safely, freely and fully in political processes and to influence decisions that affect their lives.

This right is enshrined in international frameworks such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 5 and 16), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and UN General Assembly Resolution 66/130 on Women and Political Participation.

'To exercise our right [to lead] we have two big barriers – one is violence and the other is financial. This is not just an issue for Cambodian women but for all women in the world. How can we address this together?'

– Ros Sopheap, Gender and Development for Cambodia

This brief is focused on women's leadership in political spaces. However, women leaders and emerging women leaders also face violence in economic, social and community spaces, simply because they are women.



Lway Moe Kham (Ta'ang Women's Organisation) and Julia Marip and Boe Cho (Women's League of Burma) at the WAVE Inception Workshop.

WHAT ACTION IS NEEDED?³⁰

INCREASING VISIBILITY OF VAWP

VAWP must be named as a human rights violation and as a key barrier to women's participation in leadership and decision-making. Anonymous surveys of parliamentarians' experiences with gendered violence as well as public debates in parliament can help to increase awareness. It is also important to recognise that VAWP is not confined to the national level. It affects women involved in political activities at the local level (including local councillors, election officials, and human rights defenders) - where there is likely to be less access to support and complaint mechanisms. VAWP is also not restricted to any one region. It is a global issue requiring global attention.

LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Legislation, which prohibits and criminalises VAWP including harassment, online violence against women and other forms of gender-based violence, is critical. This may require adopting new legislation or incorporating provisions into existing legislation. The law should clearly define an act of VAWP (at all levels of governance), as well the available mechanisms for making a complaint and specific penalties for perpetrators.³¹

ADDRESSING THE UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

The equal representation and full participation of women in governance and political processes is critical for addressing VAWP. In this respect, legislation is needed to guarantee women's full participation in decision making at all levels which

must include, where necessary, the introduction of temporary special measures (TSMs) such as quotas, reserved seats and targets. Of the 47 countries in the world with 30% or more women's participation in national parliaments, 41 countries (85%) use at least one form of quota system.³² Alongside TSMs a broader comprehensive approach, including strategies to address discriminatory social norms, is critical.³³

TACKLING INSTITUTIONAL CULTURES

Guidelines, codes of conduct and response protocols for parliaments, electoral bodies, political parties and local governance mechanisms are important tools for addressing institutional cultures which reinforce or condone violence against women. This should include zero tolerance for elected political representatives who commit acts of violence against women as well as an explicit policy on sexual harassment. Training should also be delivered to parliamentarians, political party members, election officials, duty bearers at all levels and the media, in order to promote awareness about the roles they can play in responding to and preventing VAWP.³⁴

Given acts of violence can target women as party members, voters, activists, candidates and holders of elected office from the local to the international level, each national government may need to designate multiple departments with responsibility for providing support and avenues for reporting and monitoring. This support should be provided in partnership with specialist service providers focused on violence against women prevention and response.

END THE CULTURE OF IMPUNITY

Providing training to police may enable them to recognise acts of VAWP and to report and prosecute these crimes. Training should also be conducted for judges and legal professionals to raise awareness about VAWP. Cases of VAWP can also be brought to independent regional and international mechanisms such as the CEDAW Committee.³⁵ Alongside these efforts, safe spaces must be created for women to report their experiences of violence, to access support including long term psychological support and to access justice.

PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR WOMEN

Local women's organisations understand the challenges facing women, which shape their leadership opportunities and can provide support to women throughout their leadership journeys.³⁶ These organisations should be supported and resourced. Specialist service providers are also essential to provide support to respond to VAWP and to develop prevention strategies in each local context. Creating safe spaces for solidarity among women in politics is also important. Support models that have proved effective include mentoring, coaching and women's parliamentary caucuses.³⁷

PROGRAMMING ACTIONS

UNDP and UN Women have recently introduced tools and a programming guide on actions to mitigate and prevent violence against women in elections which provide helpful guidance when designing approaches to preventing VAWP.³⁸ Measures suggested include; integrating electoral observation and violence monitoring tools, legal reform at the national level, electoral arrangements, establishing a political party code of conduct and raising awareness.

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE BASE

Data on VAWP is lacking.³⁹ There is a need for the development of indicators and data collection to provide evidence on the prevalence, form and impact of VAWP, including at the local level. This data collection could be incorporated into existing databases and surveys in relation to violence against women and SDG reporting. Research, such as that conducted by IPU, should also be expanded and resourced.⁴⁰ Good practice in relation to laws and policies, parliamentary response mechanisms and research should be tracked and shared across countries.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA OUR VOICE PARTNERS Action to mitigate and prevent violence against women during elections

In October 2018, Our Voice Papua New Guinea (PNG) partners – Voice for Change, Eastern Highlands Family Voice, Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation, Wide Bay Conservation Association, and Bougainville Women's Federation made a submission to the review of electoral laws being conducted by the PNG Constitutional and Law Reform Commission.

This submission, in addition to advocating for the introduction of Temporary Special Measures to increase women's political representation, also recommends that the PNG Government consider measures to mitigate and prevent violence against women during elections including:

- Measuring the incidence of violence against women in elections in all areas of PNG.
- The PNG Electoral Commission should ensure that all staff are trained on violence against women in elections and that this forms part of monitoring and risk assessments. Protection should also be provided to female candidates if required.
- Working with political parties on this issue through measures such as updating party regulations to include the prevention and mitigation of violence against women in elections and ensuring compliance with codes of conduct.
- Prevention of violence against women in elections should form part of voter outreach education and training aimed at raising public awareness and changing attitudes towards the acceptability of violence.
- Gender segregated polling stations should be introduced at the next election together with female police officers deployed at these polling stations to mitigate against violence and family voting pressures, particularly in the Highlands of PNG.
- Broader reforms such as the implementation of the PNG National Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Plan and resourcing for implementation of provincial GBV plans are also essential. These plans should also be referenced in the election and political parties' codes of conduct.

For the full submission see:

<https://iwda.org.au/resource/review-of-electoral-laws-submission-our-voice-png-partners/>

OUR WORK: WHAT ARE WAVE PARTNERS DOING?

WAVE supports women-led action to prevent and respond to violence against women. This is to ensure women can live a life free of fear and have the necessary support and opportunities to lead.

PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN AS LEADERS

Following research conducted in Fiji by the Fiji Women's Forum and IWDA on perceptions of women as leaders, further research into this area is underway in Timor Leste, Cambodia and Solomon Islands. This work is critical to understanding the environment that allows space for VAWP, and informing strategies to shift these discriminatory social norms.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS RESEARCH

WAVE's Women's Leadership Pathways (WLP) research project works with women identified as leaders or aspiring leaders in a multitude of spheres, to collect evidence and build understanding of these women's journeys and the factors that enable or hinder them, including violence. This research helps to illuminate women's experiences and why, despite significant and real barriers, they pursue leadership positions.⁴¹

SUPPORTING THE WORK OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS IN THE PACIFIC AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

WAVE supports women's rights organisations who are leading community prevention initiatives and provide direct support to women survivors of violence including crisis response, counselling and support to access justice and the court system. Prevention initiatives include community awareness raising activities, public campaigns on ending violence against women, and the work of women's human rights defender networks.

RAISING OUR VOICE

WAVE partners are also using their voices to advocate for legal and policy frameworks in relation to violence against women such as amendments to the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims in Cambodia, the National Prevention of Violence Against Women Bill in Myanmar and the Gender-based Violence Strategy and Action Plan in Jiwaka Province, Papua New Guinea.

Under the Our Voice campaign, WAVE partners are also coming together to demand the increased representation and effective participation of women in decision-making at local levels across Asia and the Pacific by 2020. As part of the 16 days of Activism, Our Voice partners are raising their voices together to shine a spotlight on violence against women as a barrier to women's leadership.



Participants in the March for the Leadership Forum, Bougainville
Photographer: Harjono Djoyobisono

WAVE is a ground-breaking women's leadership program that brings together and supports individual women, organisations, and movements in Asia and the Pacific region to increase the representation of women in diverse leadership positions.

WAVE is funded by the Government of the Netherlands and supports 18 women's rights organisations in five countries with the resources, skills and networks they need to amplify their collective voice and create a more enabling environment for women's leadership.

To find out more:

www.iwda.org.au/wave/

www.iwda.org.au/wave/our-voice

facebook.com/WAVEWomen/

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