

A. Subregional Overview

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1. Introduction

The report attempts to compile a subregional overview of violence against women. The report has been prepared as a working paper for the subregional ESCAP Expert Group Meeting on Eliminating Violence Against Women held at Dhaka, Bangladesh from 14 to 16 December, 1997 (see Annex for recommendations adopted at the Expert Group Meeting). The report is based on secondary sources that include country reports of participating countries, information compiled by different organizations and discussions with relevant persons.

The report focuses on domestic violence and other violence in the community and workplaces such as: wife beating, incest, dowry murder, foeticide and infanticide, rape, sexual harassment, prostitution and trafficking in women. It also reports major interventions and identifies future course of action. In focusing on the prevailing situation of violence, the report gives an overview highlighting the trends and issues relating to violence in the respective countries. An attempt has been made to emphasize common features. The review finds an increasing trend to violence and commonalities in the nature of violence in the subregion of South Asia. With regard to interventions, major actions so far undertaken in different countries have been analyzed. In all the

countries, the government as well as NGOs, women's organizations and media have been involved in addressing the issue of violence against women. Actions to reduce violence against women have been expanded in recent years.

Actions taken by the government and NGOs in the respective countries in the subregion are to some extent similar in nature. A review of interventions shows that the success of the attempts designed to reduce violence has been limited and the implications of the limited success very grave. However, interventions by NGOs and governments have generated knowledge about the causes and consequences and the need to combat violence against women.

In view of the prevailing situation of violence, an action plan for the future has been suggested. The plan identifies a few major actions in the context of the subregional dimension of the issue.

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2. Regional Situation of Violence: An Overview

In recent years, violence against women has emerged as a grave social problem of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries. The problem is neither new nor unique to this region. Indeed, many types of violence against women prevail all over the world. However the problem has had little social recognition and legal redress because patriarchal values, traditions, norms, even laws discriminate against women and condone male violence against women. Women are subjected to physical, sexual, mental abuses and tortures in all social structures, in all the countries. While actions to combat violence are being taken by the national

governments and NGOs, there is a need for regional action as well to eliminate such violence as trafficking which is being conducted by organized gangs operating across borders.

(a) Major trends

There are some commonalities in the scenario regarding violence against women in the SAARC countries. The major trends are:

(i) *Increase in incidence* — All the countries except the Maldives experienced a notable increase in recent years in all types of violence against women.

(ii) *Lack of statistics* — Though the volume of newspaper reports has increased, dependable statistics on violence against women are currently not available in any of the countries.

(iii) *Increase in social awareness* — Increased reporting and awareness raising, and campaigns undertaken by women's organizations have raised social awareness about the serious dimension of the problem and need for vigorous action to eliminate it. Actions designed to prevent violence and to provide support services to the victims have been undertaken by both government and non-government organizations.

(iv) *Need for concerted action* — All types of violence need concerted action at the local and national level. Some, especially trafficking, need concerted and combined effort at the regional level.

(v) *Problem of definition and recognition* — Women's organizations use a very broad definition including all violation of women's basic rights on the basis of gender. However, the legal definition is still narrow. Therefore, many types of violence are neither legally recognized nor punished.

(b) Types of violence

The major types of violence which are committed against women may be categorized in two groups according to where and by whom it is committed: violence within the home and violence outside the home. The other major categorization by mode is: physical violence, sexual violence, and emotional/psychological violence.

The types of violence commonly committed against women are:

(i) *Domestic violence* — All the countries report an alarming increase in various types of violence committed by family members against women. The major types are:

- a. Beating/physical abuse of married women by husbands and in-laws — This type of violence, which occurs widely in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, is one of those which is under-reported because patriarchal norms promoting unequal gender relations in the family prevail in all these countries. A husband's right to abuse his wife is recognized by family and society. The in-laws often aid and abet the husband in beating, abusing and torturing his wife, especially in multi-

generational, joint families.

- b. Verbal abuse, mental torture/deprivation of food and other resources — This also occurs very widely, especially in lower income rural families. In the Maldives, for example, while other types of violence are reported to be low, this type of violence does occur. It has serious consequence for pregnant women.
- c. Incest — Though this is known to occur in all the countries, it is extremely difficult to ascertain the dimension because of non-reporting. The majority of the victims are minor-aged girls who are sexually abused by elder male kin. In Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, women's rights and human rights organizations have recently focused on this type of violence.

(ii) *Acid-throwing, burning* — This type of violence is increasing in all the countries. Family members do this in cases of family quarrels over non-payment of dowry or disobedience, disrespect shown to husbands or other in-laws in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Often these are reported as accidents or suicide. Young unmarried girls are often the target of frustrated suitors (Bangladesh). Stringent laws have been enacted recently in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan but so far no noticeable change has occurred.

(iii) *Sexual harassment/indecent assault* — Women in all the countries face these offences, often in public spaces while walking on the streets, on public transport, in co-educational institutions and at the workplace. A Sri Lankan research paper expresses concern over increasing instances of this type of violence both in the universities and at the workplace and suggests comparative study at the regional level.

(iv) *Rape* — This most repugnant type of violence is on the increase in all the countries. Two new and alarming trend are gang rape and custodial rape. In Bangladesh, for instance, newspapers reported cases where a gang of four or five youths have broken into a house and after binding the parents' hand and feet have forced them to witness the rape of their daughter(s). There are many instances of women being sexually assaulted by members of law enforcement agencies, even when the women are presumably in "safe" custody. Except in India, law places the burden of proof on the women victim. Owing to delay in medical examination and other loopholes in the law, offenders often get the benefit of doubt. Women's organizations are demanding a review and reform of

existing laws and legal procedures.

(v) *Kidnapping and abduction* — Incidences of these have also been reported to be on the increase. In Bangladesh, recently there has been an increase of such incidents for ransom. Sometimes rival political parties also resort to this to embarrass opposition members.

(vi) *Trafficking and importation for immoral purposes* — A related phenomenon is the tremendous increase in trafficking in girls and women for immoral purposes. All the countries have experienced this in recent times. Poverty in rural areas has encouraged many unscrupulous agents to entice girls with promises of jobs. Some of the girls are sold to brothels within the country. Many, especially from Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka are exported to other countries, especially India, Pakistan, the Middle East and South-East Asia. Agents in Nepal are reported to have contacts with gangs in India, Hong Kong, China and other countries. Gangs of traffickers in Bangladesh are reported to have linkages with India, Pakistan and the Middle East.

Steps including studies should be taken at the regional level to generate precise information, provide help and prevent trafficking.

(vii) *Forced prostitution* — Though not legal, and subject to both moral and social condemnation, many girls are forced to choose this profession in all these countries. Once forced into the profession, they can hardly go back to normal life. A Sri Lankan research paper notes that there are several methods of operation:

- a. Unorganized amateurs: (i) poor urban slum dwellers who are forced to sell their bodies for extra income (ii) vagrants who become street walkers, and
- b. organized professionals working in hotels, guest houses as “call girls” and in brothels. All of them face hardship and health hazards, particularly STD/HIV/AIDS. Several measures have been taken in each country to rescue and rehabilitate these girls and women but none has been very effective so far.

(viii) *Violence of reproductive rights* — Governments in all these countries have emphasized rapid reduction of the rate of population growth as a major goal of national development. The vigorous campaign and push to increase contraceptive prevalence rate has often targeted poor women and subjected them to considerable pressure to accept methods, without proper counselling and referral to

manage side effects.

(c) Factors contributing to violence against women

The basic factor is prevalent patriarchal norms, values, tradition and customs which legitimize and maintain unequal power relation between men and women in all social structures — family, community, workplace and even in the state. This is exacerbated by several other factors: (i) poverty, which gives rise to dowry, trafficking, prostitution, kidnapping, (ii) commodification and derogatory representation of women in the media and entertainment, e.g. audio-visual media showing violent and pornographic materials, and (iii) state inaction in eliminating violence against women. Particularly significant is delay in reforming laws and legal procedures which discriminate against women, e.g. the Pakistan laws based on Shariat, particularly the law of evidence and Muslim family laws. In Bangladesh the religious personal laws governing family matters in all the communities discriminate against women, especially regarding inheritance. The same is true of India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Women in all these countries are agitating for removal/reform of these various discriminatory laws but so far the response has been slow. Regionally conducted and coordinated study on the progress of law review/reform has been suggested and should be undertaken.

(d) Some specific types of violence

Despite commonalities in the types and incidents of violence against women there are certain types of violence which are specific to certain countries. In addition, some types of violence have aroused special public concern and need immediate focus and attention in some of the countries. The major types of such violence are the following:

Bangladesh

(i) *Community violence through issuance of Fatwa* (religious decree) — Traditionally in the rural areas of Bangladesh, community action, through holding an arbitration court of village elders, is taken to resolve conflicts, especially in family matters. These courts, however, have no legal jurisdiction and generally use “shame” mechanism through social “boycotts” and/or small fines. In recent years, this “Shalish” process has been used to punish women for infringement of the moral code of conduct, particularly through charges of extramarital sexual contact. The

punishment handed out was public shaming through ritual stoning/lashing. Women's organizations have intervened successfully in several instances by taking the village elders to court. Yet, with the recent resurgence of religious extremist political parties, such incidents have given rise to great concern. The fact that administration, in many instances, was found to be inactive adds to the seriousness of the problem.

(ii) Violation of basic rights at the workplace

— Uneven development in Bangladesh, particularly inattention to ecological concerns and safety measures, has adversely affected women workers' health, bodily security and safety. This applies especially to the export oriented sectors, e.g. shrimp farming/processing and garments. The women workers are deprived of benefits/rights provided by both national and international labour laws. Unhygienic and unsafe work conditions are causing severe health problems and exposing women to accidents (e.g. due to fire). Private sector business owners violate all the rights quite cavalierly. Inspection is marginal and corruption is rampant. Vigorous steps have been urged by women's organizations.

(iii) Violation of reproductive rights

— In addition, in population policy and programme implementation, poor rural women in many areas have been subjected to accepting methods, without proper counselling about side-effects, inadequate follow-up and referrals. Instances of provision of obsolete/experimental methods also exist. On the other hand, many women have faced hostility from family members and community elders for accepting methods. Instead of safe-guarding poor rural women's health and welfare, the programme has, in effect, caused harm and violated their rights to health and well-being.

India

(i) Sati (widow-burning) — The ritual burning of the widow is unlawful but in recent years instances of this phenomenon has been observed. The recent resurgence of extremist religious parties in the national arena, emphasizing 'purity of Hinduism', is thought to have strengthened such incidents of violence.

(ii) Foeticide and Infanticide — Son-

preference, a characteristic of many patriarchal societies, is manifested very crudely in the recent use of amniocentesis in India for determining the sex of the unborn child and aborting the pregnancy if the foetus is not male. Reluctance to pay dowry also contributes to this violence.

The more traditional pattern of son-preference and gender discrimination manifests in infanticide. Denial of food and health care, stemming from discriminatory cultural allocation within the family has contributed to a conspicuous and continuing high rate of mortality for girl children, especially in the northern region, where dowry is prevalent.

Nepal

(i) Deuki — An old tradition among the Hindus of offering a girl child to a God, in effect, resulted in a life of prostitution. Though the Children's Act 1992, prohibits this ritualistic tradition the practice is still continuing.

(ii) Badi System — A group of people called Badis make their living entertaining people at festivals and marriage ceremonies. As the income is inadequate their girls often turn to prostitution. Many are trafficked to India.

Pakistan

(i) Marriage to the Quran — Girls are sometimes said to be married to the Quran. This custom permits the family to keep the assets intact and to save the expenses of arranging a wedding for the daughter.

(ii) Karo Kari — In some rural areas, there is a practice of killing female family members by male kin for illicit sex. Since this is culturally condoned and widely accepted, resistance is extremely difficult and reporting is minimal.

(iii) Violation of basic rights through discriminatory laws — A set of discriminatory laws such as the Hudood Ordinance, law of witness, law for veiling women, have also contributed to increased violence against women. The Hudood ordinance has often led to further victimization of raped women by interpreting rape as illicit sex/adultery.

3. Major Interventions: Their Impact

All over the world women experience numerous acts of violence in the home, at work and in public places. Any form of violation of their rights is an act of violence and therefore, governments, NGOs,

the private sector and the community have focused their attention on ensuring the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

The constitutional guarantee of equality

between women and men, the measures undertaken to reform the laws that relate to women, the ratification of international conventions for elimination of discrimination and violence against women, and the provisions in successive action plans to enhance opportunities for women, are all indicative of the commitment of the governments in all the countries to combat and prevent violence. In all countries of the region a number of legislative actions have been taken to protect the rights of women and children and reduce discrimination. It is interesting to note that some of the steps show a common pattern. It is worth mentioning here that in Bangladesh, the Women and Children Repression (Special Provision) Act 1995 Section 8 provides a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. It also provides deterrent punishment for committing rape, murder and acid throwing.

Successful application of the Act has been made by providing life sentences to those culprits involved in the Yasmin rape and murder incident.

Women(CEDAW) which ensures the removal of all forms of discrimination against women. So far, CEDAW has not been used effectively to prevent violence against women in the region. However, women’s organizations and NGOs are working to disseminate CEDAW at all levels.

In many cases laws to combat violence against women are inadequate. In addition, full enforcement and implementation could not be achieved due to various factors, including the lack of awareness of women’s rights among law enforcement agents. Both the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary need better orientation on women’s rights and the legal measures available to address them. Thus it is evident that in spite of all measures undertaken by both the government and NGOs, a striking fact is that violence against women is increasing at an alarming rate in all countries of the region.

The interventions undertaken by governments and NGOs include the following: constitutional provisions, legislative actions, support services, shelter homes, advocacy, legal aid and counselling services.

In addition to having laws, many countries of the region are committed (with some reservations)to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against

INTERVENTIONS		
Country	Government	NGOs
Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional Provisions • Legislation: reform of existing laws • Enactment of new laws • Ministry of Women and Children Affairs • CEDAW • National Action Plan • National Policy for the Advancement of Women 	

INTERVENTIONS

Country	Government	NGOs
	<p>Support Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter House • Rehabilitation • Legal Aid • Advocacy • Counselling • Sensitization • Training 	<p>Support Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter House • Rehabilitation • Legal Aid • Advocacy • Counselling • Sensitization • Training • Legal Education • Medical Service
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional Provisions • Legislation: reform of existing laws • Ministry of Human Resource Development • CEDAW • National Action Plan <p>Support Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter House • Rehabilitation • Legal Aid • Advocacy • Counselling • Sensitization • Training 	<p>Support Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter House • Rehabilitation • Legal Aid • Advocacy • Counselling • Sensitization • Training • Legal Education
Maldives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional Provisions • Legislation: reform of existing laws • CEDAW <p>Support Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy Awareness • Sensitization 	<p>Support Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter House • Rehabilitation • Legal Aid • Advocacy • Counselling • Sensitization • Training • Legal Education
Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional Provisions • Enactment of Laws Against Human Trafficking • Law Review • Ministry of Women and Social Welfare • CEDAW 	

INTERVENTIONS		
Country	Government	NGOs
	Support Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victim and Destitute Women Welfare Centre • Sensitization 	Support Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy • Rehabilitation • Legal Aid • Shelter • Crisis Centre • Legal Literacy • Awareness Raising
Pakistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional Provisions • Legislation: reform of existing laws • Enactment of new laws • Ministry of Women Development, Social Welfare and Special Education • CEDAW 	Support Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter House • Rehabilitation • Legal Aid • Advocacy • Counselling • Sensitization • Training • Legal Education
Sri Lanka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional Provisions • Legislation: reform of existing laws • Enactment of new laws • Ministry of Women's Affairs • CEDAW 	Support Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter House • Rehabilitation • Legal Aid • Advocacy • Counselling • Sensitization • Training • Legal Education

Bangladesh

(a) Government interventions

1. Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961
2. Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980 and its amendment of 1986
3. Family Court Ordinance of 1985

4. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929
5. The Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Act 1974
6. The Women and Children Repression (Special Provision) Act 1995

(b) Support services

The Department of Women's Affairs (DWA) in the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs is running a Women's Support Centre in Dhaka and in five Divisional Headquarters to provide shelter and other support facilities.

The DWA also runs a cell for the Prevention of Violence Against Women (Nari Nirjatan Protirodh Cell) to provide legal assistance to abused women through counselling services.

In the district and thana offices of the Department of Women's Affairs, committees have been set up for the prevention of violence against women.

Jatiyo Mahila Sangstha runs a Nari Nirjatan Protikar Cell.

Women's organizations and NGOs in Bangladesh have played a very significant role in providing shelter to victims of violence, providing psychological counselling, legal aid support, and rehabilitation services.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad — This is the largest women's organization in Bangladesh. It has 59 offices all over the country and provides legal aid services to women. It also maintains a shelter home for victims of violence.

Bangladesh Jatiyo Mahila Ainjibi Samiti — This organization works to rehabilitate child prostitutes and provide shelter facilities and legal aid services.

Utsho Bangladesh and Protibha Bikash Kendra — These have shelter facilities for women victims. Specialized services are offered by organizations like *Normal Assort* which provides shelter homes for women rescued from prisons and has a programme for their rehabilitation.

Centre for Training and Rehabilitation of Destitute Women and the Mother Teresa Home — These homes offer shelter for pregnant women most of whom are victims of rape and thus socially ostracized.

Human rights and women's organizations and NGOs providing legal aid support to women include Mahila Parishad, Ain-O-Shalish Kendra, Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust (BLAST), Madaripur Legal Aid Association.

Naripokkho is providing specialized services to the victims of acid burns for treatment including reconstructive surgery and social rehabilitation.

Women For Women, a research and study group, has carried out revealing studies on violence against women.

Sammilito Nari Samaj — a network of women's organizations, works for lobbying and advocacy issues related to women's rights and their violation.

India

(a) Constitutional and legal rights of women

- a. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing their cumulative socio-economic, educational and political disadvantaged.
- b. Legislative Measures: The State has enacted the following women-specific and women-related legislation:
 1. The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 — equal pay to men and women for equal work.
 2. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 amended in 1976, provided the rights for a girl to repudiate a child marriage before attaining maturity.
 3. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956 as amended and renamed in 1986 makes the sexual exploitation of male or female, a cognizable offence.
 4. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 as amended in 1984 made women's subjection to cruelty a cognizable offence. The second amendment in 1986 makes the husband or in-laws punishable, if the woman commits suicide within 7 years of her marriage and if it has been proven that she has been subjected to cruelty.
 5. The criminal offence of "Dowry Death" has been incorporated in the Indian Penal Code.
 6. The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1976 raised the age for marriage of a girl from 15 years to 18 years and that of a boy to 21 years.

7. The Factories Act of 1948 (amended 1976) provided for establishment of crèches where 30 women are employed (including casual and contract labourers).
8. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971 legalizes abortion by qualified professionals on humanitarian and medical grounds.
9. Amendments to the Criminal Law 1983 provide for punishment of 7 years in ordinary cases of rape and 10 years in custodial rape cases. The maximum punishment may go up to life imprisonment.
10. The enactment of Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act of 1986 and the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 have been passed to protect the dignity of women and prevent violence and exploitation.
11. The National Commission for Women Act 1990 was passed to set up the National Commission for women — a national apex statutory body to review the constitutional and legal safeguards for women and to recommend remedial legislation. State governments have started setting up State Commissions for women with jurisdiction within the concerned State on lines similar to the National Commission for Women.
12. The Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse Act, 1994) has been enacted to prevent misuse of sex-discrimination tests and resultant abortions.

(b) Support mechanisms

The Department of Women and Child Development has taken up the following specific programmes:

1. Short Stay Homes for Women and Girls (SSH) 361, had been set up in the country by the end of the 8th Five Year Plan (31 March 1997).
2. Education Work for Prevention of Atrocities Against Women was started in 1992 and extends financial assistance to research and academic institutions like universities, colleges, women's study

centres, institutions of higher learning and voluntary organizations for various types of work — education, propaganda, publicity and research, legal literacy campaigning and legal worker training.

3. Awareness Generation Projects for Rural and Urban Women was introduced in 1987 - 1988.
4. Establishment of Observation Homes, Juvenile Homes and Special Homes under the Juvenile Justice Act is meant to ensure that no child, i.e. a boy under 16 years of age and a girl under 18 years of age, is lodged in jail or police lockup and to provide for the protection and care and rehabilitation of neglected and delinquent juveniles. The services of qualified doctors and psychiatrists are available on a part-time basis in the Homes set up under the Juvenile Justice Act.
5. Protective Homes and Correctional Institutions are set up under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.
6. Legal literacy on para-legal training is imparted through several strategies: awareness programmes, training-cum-orientation modules, literature dissemination, and multi-media campaigns.
7. The government, through advocacy programmes, is also endeavouring to make attitudinal changes in the family and the community towards women and girls.
8. The Balika Samridhi Yojana Scheme has been launched to change social, community and family attitudes towards the mother and the girl child and raise the overall status of the girl child by covering about 2.5 million girl children born every year.
9. Special campaigns of sensitization of police personnel, setting up of all women police stations, crimes against women cells, quotas for recruitment of women in police, and sensitization of the judiciary are some other areas of intervention.

Maldives

There are no specific policies formulated that

protect or guard women against violence. Policies are based on Islamic principles. A National Policy on Women has been drafted and is currently under consideration.

Existing laws, rules and regulations that have a bearing on women and their rights have recently been reviewed and recommendations made.

A family law is also being considered to ensure that women are protected against all forms of discrimination.

Maldives has signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The three year national development plan for the period 1997-1999 takes into consideration the Beijing Declaration and CEDAW, focusing on advocacy, education of both men and women as well as policies directed to ensure that women are provided with the tools necessary to ensure their well being and development and to ensure that there is no gender discrimination of any form.

The legal system of Maldives is based on Islamic principles and affords women security and protection.

All forms of violence against women are to be notified to the National Security Services (NSS). Reports received by NSS are investigated and the reports submitted to the judicial system which then takes action against the perpetrator.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare has the responsibility to monitor the situation with respect to women and violation of the rights of women. At present there is no formal mechanism established for monitoring the situation. As and when reports are received by the Ministry steps are taken to ensure that all available means are taken to protect the rights of women.

The Ministry of Women Affairs is strengthening its role in policy formulation as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of issues related to women.

(a) Support service for women

Currently there are no formal services available to victims of different kinds of violence.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs with limited human resources does, however, listen to grievances and take whatever measures it can to provide the

necessary services.

The Unit for the Rights of Children is at present looking into the possibility of establishing a home for the girl victims of physical and sexual abuse.

An NGO, Society for Health Education (SHE) has an ongoing programme to provide consulting support to families who may be undergoing problems. This includes counselling for children who may be sexually or physically abused.

The Unit for the Rights of children has an ongoing programme that provides counselling for abused children and their families.

The NGO FASHAN provides information and education for women on all aspects related to women and development. The NGO also has plans to set up a counselling and support service for females who have been exposed to violence.

(b) The role of the state, NGOs and community level organizations

The State is responsible for the formulation of policies and the development and implementation of plans that would ensure women are protected against violence and that mechanisms exist for the punishment of perpetrators of violence against women.

The State is also responsible to provide information and education to both men and women to prevent violence against women.

Community groups such as Island Women's Committees and Ward Women's Committees are entrusted with responsibility to report all forms of discrimination and acts of violence. They also provide for women, to the extent possible.

Non-governmental organizations play a major role in providing information and education to women and men in an effort to prevent violence against women and also to promote women's development.

The NGO FASHAN has taken up a project in one of the atolls to develop the skills needed by women's committees of the atoll to strengthen their role in the development of women. This organization also publishes a magazine to provide information needed for women to know their rights and also to ensure their own development.

Nepal

(a) Interventions

1. The Government of Nepal has ratified all major human rights documents including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
2. The Constitution of 1990 of Nepal also guarantees equality on the basis of sex, class, caste or creed.
3. The Human Trafficking Act was enacted in 1987.
4. The Ministry of Women and Social Welfare was established in September 1995 for the advancement of women.
5. A task force to review all laws that are discriminatory against women was created.
6. The task force drafted a bill on equal property rights which is now forwarded to the Ministry of Law and Justice. The bill is now registered at the Parliament to receive approval of both the Houses. This was the first step the Ministry took to address in general, the issues of violence against women.
7. The Ministry has constituted a national committee on the follow-up of Beijing Platform for Action. Under the main committee, twelve sub-committees, one each for the twelve critical areas of concern, were formed. The thematic sub-committee on violence against women has proposed a number of activities to be launched during the Ninth Plan period.
8. The Ministry is also in the process of establishing family courts with the main objective of providing the opportunity for women to receive justice within a shorter timeframe by maintaining privacy of victims.
9. The Ministry has already initiated the task to help draft an Act especially on domestic violence.
10. The Ministry has initiated and will continue to organize sensitization programmes not only against domestic violence but on violence against women in general.
11. In order to effectively check and suppress trafficking in women and girls, Nepal has become a state party to the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others 1949, by a decision of the House of Representatives in December 1995.
12. The Ministry of Women and Social Welfare is also preparing a bill for elimination of family violence and establishing a Family Court Act in order to address issues of domestic violence, rape, family conflict, issues relating to marriage, divorce, custody of children etc.
13. A number of women's groups started public denouncement of violence against women and initiated services of advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about issues such as trafficking of girl children and women and to provoke state instruments into action. Women Security Pressure group including 65 women organizations has been actively working and raising protest against various types of discrimination and violence against women, including the mass media projecting a false image of women, punishment of rapists and girl traffickers, and women's property rights.
14. Some action-research based organizations such as Centre for Women/Children and Community Development(CWCD), CWD, New Era, Strii Shakti, Asmita and SAATHI have undertaken research on girl trafficking, domestic violence, as well as various other forms of violence prevailing in Nepal. Activities include awareness campaigns both at grassroots and policy levels; mobilization of local women's volunteer groups; literacy and legal advocacy programmes and income generation and rehabilitation of girls and women who have been victims of trafficking.
15. SAATHI has established a shelter for battered women "Ashreya Shibir", and a crisis intervention centre "Sumitra".
16. WOREC, Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre(CWIN), Maiti Nepal, CDC and ABC/Nepal conduct

rehabilitation programmes and run rehabilitation centres for victims and girls at risk of trafficking as well as women with HIV/AIDS.

Pakistan

(a) Interventions

1. Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid (LHRLA) have taken serious notice of the new phenomenon of violence against women and children.
2. A bill awarding death penalty to gang rapists has been passed.
3. Many women's organizations in the government and public sector have become active in recent years in highlighting women's suffering and demanding equal rights for women.
4. The Government has established women studies centre in all four provinces of Pakistan.
5. A Women Division was formed by President Zia-ul-Haque who had also promulgated the Hudood Ordinance.
6. The Ministry of Home and Youth Affairs was later formed to look into all matters relating to women's affairs.
7. Establishment of women's police stations in five cities, as a first step towards providing protection against custodial rape and ensuring women a more sympathetic hearing. The effectiveness of this measure in the light of its stated objectives, is yet to be assessed.
8. Announcement of a women's police force to be set up throughout the country for which recruitment and training arrangements are underway.
9. Establishment of women's crisis centres with the involvement of NGOs.
10. Establishment of an Inquiry Commission to review discriminatory laws against women. The Commission has submitted its report.
11. Establishment of a Human Rights Cell at the federal government level to assist women victims of violence and other human rights violations.
12. Use of the electronic media to project messages against domestic violence, especially during prime viewing times.
13. A number of NGOs interested in women's causes are established. Women's Action Forum (WAF), All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA), Association of Professional and Agricultural Women, Shirkat Gah, Aorat Foundation, War Against Rape (WAR), Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Pakistan Women Lawyers Association (PAWLA), Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid (LHRLA) are some important NGOs working in the area of violence against women. Their interventions include:
 - i. awareness-raising through nation-wide workshops, seminars, newspaper articles, television and radio programmes, on issues of violence against women;
 - ii. consciousness-raising and information dissemination through organizing tribunals on violence against women, legal literacy campaigns, alternative and street theatre, and other programmes for self-growth and development;
 - iii. protest demonstrations, signature campaigns and rallies to demand repeal of discriminatory laws, to condemn instances of violence (gang rape, custodial and domestic violence), and to demand action;
 - iv. legal aid, counselling, para-legal training to assist victims of violence;
 - v. establishing crisis centres and shelters for victims of violence;
 - vi. research, documentation and publication on issues of violence;
 - vii. working with women's groups at the community-level to help build up awareness and support structures for victims of violence;
 - viii. bringing women's issues, including violence, into the manifestos and agendas of political parties.

Department.

Besides these two, there are other crisis centres for women victims of violence.

Sri Lanka

(a) Interventions

1. The Penal Code (1833) was amended by the Penal Code Amendment Act No. 22 of 1995.
2. Adoption of CEDAW: General recommendation 19 of the CEDAW Committee formulated in 1992 deals entirely with violence against women.
3. Article 12/2 of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.
4. Sri Lanka has also adopted the Women's Charter 1993 to guide its policy imperatives (Article 16).
5. In 1996, the Ministry of Women's Affairs put forward a National Plan of Action in Sri Lanka:
 - i. The Plan of Action calls for legal abortion to be recognized in the case of rape, incest and foetal abnormalities.
 - ii. The Plan of Action suggests the setting up of a Monitoring Authority to monitor incidents of violence against women.
6. Women's and Children's Desk and 30 fully-fledged units had been set up in eight divisions by the end of 1993.

(b) Support service for women victims of violence

1. Two agencies concerned with violence against women provide counselling services for women:
 - i. Women in Weed in Colombo
 - ii. Women's Development Centre in Kandy is working in cooperation with the Probation and Child Care Department and the Police

2. Reforms of the Law of Child Abuse were proposed and accepted by the centres in 1993.
3. A committee has been appointed to review and propose reforms in the law on rape. The report of the committee was finalized and presented to the Ministry of Justice in January, 1994.
4. Awareness raising programmes for women and law enforcement officers have been presented by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Women's Bureau, the CENWOR, SAAWS, SLEUW and other non-governmental organizations and professional groups.
5. The Department of Social Services has maintained a detention home for women at Gangodawila (in suburban Colombo) since 1961.
6. Temporary Homes (shelters) to support abused women.
7. The Salvation Army provides temporary shelter for women.
8. The Legal Aid Centre of the Colombo University and the Legal Aid and the Diatom Project of the Open University conduct programmes of legal aid counselling.
9. Free Legal Aid Services by professional lawyers, non-governmental organizations and the universities, and the two Counselling Centres of the Women's Bureau offer free counselling services to women.
10. Ad hoc mobile counselling services have also been provided by the Women's Bureau.
11. Legal education covering aspects of protection and counselling of abused women is conducted by the Open University.

4. Suggested Future Action Plan

Review of the situation reveals that violence against women has taken a serious turn and it is now a grave concern of state parties as well as NGOs and

women's organizations. In this context the highest priority should be given to address this critical problem and therefore an action plan is urgently required.

Action strategy should emphasize the need for education and related cultural interventions as well as legal protection because gender violence is rooted in patriarchal ideology. The chief instrument of women's oppression is the family and to a large extent women internalize their own inferiority through a process of socialization, division of labour, customs, religious laws and rituals.

Actions need to be directed towards study and documentation; advocacy awareness of relevant sectors of the population at different levels; mass mobilization through media campaigns; review of existing

legislation and regional network, implementation of laws, and strengthening the support services to victims of violence.

Actions should start at the national level and regional networking is necessary for addressing the regional dimension of violence. Keeping in view the urgency of addressing both national and regional dimension of the issue, the following matrix of selected priority actions is suggested herewith:

Matrix of Actions to be taken for addressing the problem of violence against women:

	Reform Targets	Needed Priority Actions	Implementation Mechanism
1.	Assessment of the extent of different forms of violence against women through establishing data base at the national and regional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Undertake research on different type of violence against women(VAW) such as trafficking, domestic violence, forced prostitution, rape, sexual harassment, kidnapping and abduction ii. Collect, analyse and document them. iii. Disseminate the information as widely as possible. 	Coordinating bodies at the national and regional levels with relevant organizations/ departments/groups for research/database and documentation on different forms of VAW.
2.	Conscientization and sensitization/ awareness raising on VAW and women's human rights.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Organize workshops, seminars, meeting to sensitize law-enforcing agencies, judicial administration, lawyers, health practitioners and all men and women at the local and regional levels. ii. Include concepts of women's human rights and VAW in all training programmes for men and women in decision/policy making and implementation levels including law implementation/enforcing agencies. iii. Include the topic in the curricula of secondary and higher education. iv. Hold public lectures on the issue of VAW for academics and students at the university level. v. Include CEDAW in the curricula of 	Relevant ministries including Ministries of Women's Affairs, Education, Home Affairs, Information, Law, etc. along with NGOs, women's organizations, writers, journalists and intellectuals.

		law schools.	
3.	Enactment of comprehensive legislation and enforcement of relevant laws.	i. Review all existing legislation which are intended to prevent violence against women. ii. Formulate and amend necessary laws. iii. Monitor implementation of laws.	Permanent law commission and necessary linkage with human rights commission. Monitoring cell.
4.	Immediate follow up and post corrective actions.	i. Establish national apex coordinating body for violence against women ii. Strengthen collaboration among concerned agencies; (a) hospitals for treatment and forensic report, (b) police for criminal action, (c) legal for pursuing criminal proceedings and (d) welfare for counselling and rehabilitation of the victims.	Apex coordinating body consisting of representatives of all concerned agencies.
5.	Monitor cases of violence and prevent suppression and misrepresentation of incidences of VAW.	i. Immediate fact finding of the occurrence and the role played by law enforcing agencies. ii. Taking up the issue with local administration for appropriate action. iii. Reporting facts to media for wide publicity.	Task forces at the government and NGO/women's groups levels.
6.	Long term monitoring and follow up of VAW at the national and regional levels.	i. Monitor the activities ii. Negotiate with Human Rights Commission of respective countries iii. Report to United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and CEDAW	Task forces for monitoring and follow up purposes set up at the local, national and regional levels.
7.	Eliminate cross-border trafficking.	i. Establish joint police commission under the SAARC secretariat and take necessary action on the line of Interpol. ii. Establish national taskforce on trafficking iii. Strengthen collaboration between/among countries for action on protection, prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration regarding trafficking in women and children.	Relevant ministries of the countries involved undertake effective communication and action for curbing trafficking.

5. Possible Areas of Cooperation

This action plan envisages action both at national level and regional level. These areas may be explored:

(a) National Level

1. Cooperation among research institutes/organizations for study and research
2. Cooperation among government and non-government organizations for monitoring incidence of violence
3. Cooperation among media, NGOs and government information systems for publicity campaign on this issue
4. Cooperation between government legal system and human rights organizations for pursuing criminal proceedings

5. Cooperation between NGOs/ women's organizations and government training institutes to initiate sensitization programmes for law enforcing agencies, judiciary, health practitioners, lawyers and media people

(b) Regional Level

1. Coordination of different agencies through regional organizations like SAARC
2. Cooperation among governments in the region for exchange of information about violence

3. Research and study on regional basis through regional study groups like the South Asia Association of Women's Studies(SAAWS).
4. Cooperation for surveillance of cross country border to stop intercountry trafficking in women
5. Cooperation among United Nations agencies such as ESCAP and UNICEF, NGOs and women's groups for information dissemination and resource mobilization for action

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B. Violence Against Women in Bangladesh

Roushan

Jahan

(a) Introduction

Over the last two decades, violence against women has emerged as one of the most visible and articulated social issues in Bangladesh. Two factors have been instrumental in bringing violence against women to public attention. One is the focus on women's issues following the declaration of the United Nations Decade for Women (1986-95). The other is the publicity given by newspapers and various women's groups to the abuse/torture of young married women due to non-payment of dowry, a fairly recent phenomenon among Bangladeshi Muslims.

Rising pressure from women's groups and concerned citizens resulted in actions taken by the government and non-government organizations designed to reduce violence and support victims of violence.

However, so far imperfect understanding and inadequate knowledge of this multi-dimensional problem have produced limited success. Moreover, the linkages established by gangs of traffickers across borders calls for actions at the regional level as well as those taken at the national and local levels.

(b) Definition and types of violence against women

(i) *Definition* — Gender-violence, i.e. violence against women, is now defined very broadly to include anything “involving use of force/coercion with an intent of perpetuation/promotion of hierarchical gender-relations in all social structures: family, community, work-place and society” (APWLD, 1990). Defined this way it regards any violation of women's basic rights on the grounds of gender as an act of violence. An issue related to definition is the variation in definition among the various agencies engaged in actions designed to resist/reduce violence against women. The conventional categorization by the police is based on a very narrow definition. This often results in serious gaps in documentation and sometimes affects quality of intervention.

(ii) *Forms of violence against women* — Assaultive behaviour against women may take the following forms: a) physical violence, b) sexual violence, c) psychological violence and d) vicarious

violence, i.e. violence directed against something/person held dear by the victim. Of these, physical violence is the most obvious and easily recognizable phenomenon. Indeed, to many people, the term “violence” is synonymous with physical violence. Physical violence includes all aggressive behaviour inflicted on the body of a victim by an aggressor, such as pushing, pitching, spitting, slapping, biting, punching, grabbing and pulling by the hair, choking, burning, stabbing, throwing acid/boiling water, shooting and so on. The injuries caused by these acts may range from mild to serious/fatal ones.

Sexual violence includes physical attacks on the victim's erogenous organs, i.e. breast/genitals, or forced sexual activity accompanied by physical violence as described earlier.

Psychological violence is committed by using psychological weapons such as verbal threats of violence against the victim or a person dear to her; forcing the victim to degrade herself; excessive controlling, curtailing and/or disruption of routine activities such as sleeping or eating habits, social relationship, access to money; verbal insult and so on.

Vicarious violence is committed through damage or destruction of property, assault on pets or even children.

Ideally any discussion of gender-violence should use a broad definition encompassing a wide variety of oppression and abuse suffered by women. But in Bangladesh, psychological violence, especially among married couples, is not given serious consideration either by family or police and therefore remains unreported. Incest is a taboo topic, and therefore is seldom reported. Marital rape is not recognized by either Bangladeshi culture or law. These are serious issues which need to be discussed.

All these forms of violence may take place in private and the public arena, committed by family members or strangers. Major types of violence committed against women are :

1. Family violence;
2. Violence against women at working place;

3. Trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
4. Rape, molestation and sexual harassment;
5. Violence resulting from Fatwa;
6. Violence resulting from development policies and process.

(c) Major trends and issues

(i) *Family violence* — Violence committed by family members within the family home is the most serious and repugnant of all types of violence. The intimate context makes it difficult for the victim to seek redress. At the same time, the closed family structure makes it possible for the aggressor to repeat the violence. Moreover, the family is the training ground for socialization. Studies have found that exposure to domestic violence often influences the behaviour of children in later life and perpetuates the cycle of violence.

Though family violence includes child abuse, sibling abuse, parent abuse and in-law abuse perpetrated by male aggressors on female victims, available information indicates that marital violence (wife abuse) is the most serious type of family violence. The gravity is indicated by statistics from a study on family violence which shows that over a seven-year period, the number of female victims of family violence has increased three times. (Jahan, 1994).

There are issues related to dearth of reliable data. Police files, comprised only of reported incidents are also limited by narrow definitions. They are only related to cases of serious or fatal injury. Newspaper reports are often arbitrary, sensational, selective and uneven. Even with these drawbacks, they offer the only flow of information on the dimensions of the problem at the national level. Lack of reliable data at the macro level has to be addressed without delay.

- a. Increase in frequency — According to all available reports of the Ministry of Home and of newspapers, all types of incidents of violence against women are increasing. A study on family violence shows a perceptible increase between 1982-88.

Major reasons for non-reporting or under reporting are: a) the universal acceptance of gender inequality, buttressed by social and religions sanctions in favour of male dominance of women in every sphere of life, including the right of a husband to chastise a wife; b) the

deep-seated reverence felt for family as an institution for continuing the existing social order and values related to regulating sexual behaviour, particularly female sexuality, within the bounds of marriage; c) the prevalent social notion of the centrality of marriage in a woman's existence; d) the prevalent bias among the middle-class, who form the bulk of law-makers, law enforcers, social norm-setters and opinion-makers, of regarding domestic violence as peripheral, and e) the fear of social censure and loss of face. In addition, there is a widely held attitude for regarding domestic matters as "private" and a resulting reluctance among third parties to interfere and intervene. Often the victims hold similar sentiments and suffer in silence.

- b. Class and location — Though domestic violence cuts across class and location, field experience shows that poor women from rural areas are more vulnerable to male violence. There are issues related to non-reporting of violence by the higher income families and differences in rural/urban attitudes to family violence. In the rural areas, lack of privacy and close neighbourhood interaction makes it difficult to hide any occurrence of violence, thus leading to greater reporting.
- c. Immediate reasons — In many cases reasons are not reported. Jahan's study on family violence indicates that of the cases reported in newspapers, reasons are not stated in 25 per cent of cases.

There is a clear gender differential in the reasons given. The highest number of women become victims of violence due to family quarrels. Non-payment of dowry was the reason given for the next highest number of women as victims of violence. More recent reports indicate that this trend of dowry related violence is continuing. This clearly demonstrates that the law designed to prevent dowry has not had the desired effect. This issue relates to other issues of ineffective implementation of laws designed to deter/reduce violence. These need to be addressed.

Family quarrel is a value term which includes many specific reasons. However, case studies of marital abuse show that major factors triggering violence are: husband's dissatisfaction over wife's management of expenses, house keeping

and child care; his jealousy and suspicious nature; exaggerated sense of superiority and proprietorial rights over a wife as reflected in household decision making; sexual maladjustment. These may be exaggerated by stress arising from prolonged illness in the family, sudden financial loss, loss of job and aggravation by in-laws, e.g. complaints about the wife's shortcomings as a housewife. The real perpetuator is a high level of acceptance and/or tolerance of violence by the husband against the wife by the family members, friends, acquaintances and the community.

(ii) Violence against women at the workplace

— The type of violence at the working place may be manifest in two major forms: a) sexual violence and b) violation of basic rights of workers. The human rights violations include deliberate exploitation such as unequal and low wages, forced overtime, harassment, deprivation of benefits such as maternity leave, locking the workers in during factory shifts. All these violate rights granted by the laws of the land. In Bangladesh, violence against women at the working place is increasing.

The informal sector, especially the export-oriented industries, i.e. garments, shrimp farming, offer alarming instances of such gross violations of women's basic rights. These affect the productivity of women workers. For many women, such violence induces a reluctance to continue in the work force. In addition, workers face sexual harassment both at the workplace and on the way to and from the workplace. (Hossain and others 1990). Finding ways of preventing such violation of basic rights is a serious issue which needs to be addressed.

Major factors contributing to women's vulnerability in the workplace are: women's marginal presence in decision-making structures; the urgency for earning an income because of drastic change in the economy and lack of traditional male support; lack of options in a job market for which they have little preparation, e.g. inadequate training and education; exclusion/marginalization from the channels of bargaining and negotiation.

(iii) Prostitution and trafficking in women —

Trafficking in women and young girls includes all acts involved in the capture and acquisition of girls and women for trade and transport with the intent to sell, exchange or use for such purpose as prostitution, sexual abuse, forced labour, bonded labour, slavery, etc.

This problem, though not new, seems to have increased tremendously in the last two decades. It is extremely difficult to assess the actual number of prostitutes currently operating but according to police estimates, their number in Dhaka and the adjacent port town of Narayonganj is nearly 50,000. Some of them are in brothels, some operate as street prostitutes and some as hotel call-girls.

Some of the reasons for the increase of this particular problem are: increasing poverty in the rural area which forces young girls to seek jobs making it easy and profitable for pimps to entice them to brothels through false promises of securing a job; terrorism from increasingly widening network of petty criminals and gangsters who are tempted to join this loathsome but highly profitable trade; the conservative attitude in society which regards prostitutes as "fallen" and effectively closes avenues for their repatriation; increasing exposure to pornographic material in the written and electronic media. A grave issue is the recent regional linkages established by gangs of criminals engaged in trafficking in women and children. A related issue is the increase in smuggling of addictive drugs in the region. This requires coordinated action taken at the regional level.

(iv) Rape and sexual abuse — Women in Bangladesh often suffer from indecent verbal abuse/sexual molestation from men when using public spaces, in co-educational institutions, in buses, railway stations, streets, theatres, cinema-halls etc. Social reaction to such "unlawful" action is lukewarm. Rape is the worst form of intimidation used by men to demonstrate their dominant position. A woman's right to bodily security is violated in the grossest possible way. The taboo surrounding sexuality and the "shame" and loss of honour prevent women from seeking justice in cases of rape. Moreover, the chances of proving the fact of assault rests on the victim. Men in the court, too often male lawyers, seem to focus more on the victim's character and possible provocation/temptation rather than the offence perpetrated by the assailant. The extent of this violence may be seen from the official figure of the rape victims (5738 in 1991-96) as quoted in the parliament by the Home Minister himself. Taking into account the reasons for non-reporting cited above, this may be taken as only the tip of the iceberg. The most shocking part of the information was the fact that 933 of the victims of rape, i.e. 16.26 % percent, were minors. This points to the extent of social failure to protect girl children from such horrible violation.

Another alarming recent trend is the

increasing incidence of gang rape. Newspapers have reported cases where a gang of four or five youths have broken into a house and after binding the parents/other relatives by hands and feet, forced them to witness the rape of their daughters/women relatives. Social indignation is high but effective resistance is yet to come.

A disturbing development in this area is the increased reports of incidents of violence against women committed by members of state agencies entrusted with the keeping of law and order in the country and guarding the security of the people and the state. Instances of rape, sexual harassment, torture and other types of abuses, including physical and psychological violence and violation of basic human rights of women by members of the police, Ansar, BDR and armed forces, including custodial rape, have given rise to apprehension and mistrust about the state's will and commitment towards protection of women against violence. Such mistrust and doubt has deepened by instances of lack of vigour in follow-up action on the part of state agencies in such cases. The case of the rape and murder of Yasmin and forcible suppression of public protest at the local level has underscored the need to address issues related to state violence.

(v) *Violence resulting from Fatwa* — The recent surfacing of violence related to issuance of *Fatwa* (religions decree) by village *Moulavis* and to implementation of punishments is in contradiction to the law of the land. As such, it is punishable by the Penal Code. However, in recent years, such incidents have threatened the security and rights of women, especially the rural poor women. Information collected by Ain-O-Shalish Kendra, gives some idea of the extent and form of such violence. During January 1993 to August 1995, action was taken in 20 cases. However, progress is very slow, mainly due to procedural problems and hostility from local elite. In eight cases women's organizations initiated the protest and action for redress.

Related issues are: the collusion between the local elite and the *Moulavis* who exploit the naive religious sentiments of rural people; hostility of elite money-lenders and *Moulavis* against efforts to make the rural poor self-reliant and economically solvent, as these undermine the patron-client relationship and base of income and influence. The support provided by religious extremist parties such as Jamat at the national level reinforces such violence. The gender aspect of politics, based on the ideologies of extremist "religious

revivalist vision" and narrow communal divides, needs to be addressed.

(vi) *Violence resulting from development policies and process* — Available reports indicate that women face considerable violence, especially affecting their health, participation in the labour force, bodily security and safety due to the uneven process of development and inappropriate policies pursued at the national level. Macro-economic forces such as globalization affect their situation. For example, the number of men working abroad has increased significantly. The likelihood of their carrying and transmitting various forms of STD, especially HIV/AIDS to their wives is a serious issue. The focus on women as the major target group in family planning policies and programmes and the system of service delivery exposes them to serious health hazards caused by severe side effects and indiscriminate use of methods. These violate their reproductive rights by denying them necessary information and choice (R. Jahan and others, 1994). Increasing desertification in the north, deforestation in the south due to indiscriminate logging, increased salinity in the coastal belt and other development-related environmental degradation increasingly threaten women's livelihood, well-being and fundamental human rights (R. Jahan and others, 1995).

(d) Factors contributing to increased violence against women at the macro-level

The socio-economic and cultural factors which have contributed to the increased vulnerability of women to male violence are: a) a growing tendency towards acceptance of violence in the society, mainly due to certain socio-political factors; b) the unquestioning acceptance of patriarchal gender ideology and gender relations in all social structures including family, community and the state; c) increasing poverty and adverse conditions brought about by changing socio-economic process; and d) society's basic reluctance to drastically change patriarchal laws and policies which perpetuate male dominance over women.

(i) *Increasing use of violence in the public arena* — Bangladeshi society, viewed from a historical perspective does not appear as a conspicuously peace loving and peace maintaining society. Increasing use of violence in the political arena and a corresponding deterioration in the law and order situation have become national issues of grave concern. Use of black

money, patronage of musclemen, application of rigorous repressive measures to stop public protests, elimination of political opponents through intimidation, abduction, even murder have been used to grab or retain political power and influence since liberation. Rise of militant fundamentalist parties which subscribe to patriarchal gender ideology, has exacerbated the situation. Violence has noticeably increased in campus politics. The level of all general crime i.e. purse snatching, car-hijacking, kidnapping, bank looting, arson and vandalism has increased significantly, according to the police. Women are becoming increasingly vulnerable to such violence in the public arena.

Factors which contribute significantly to this phenomenon are: a) easier access to firearms, acids and other lethal weapons; b) increasing exposure to violence through popular reading, theatres, films and television shows, mostly modelled on foreign materials; c) increase in the number of unemployed youths desperate for jobs, hiring and protection of “armed cadres” by political parties; d) corruption and collusion among the members of law enforcement agencies, criminal justice personnel and the power holders. The police point to lack of necessary logistical support, inadequate number of available personnel and pressure/interference from powerful vested interest groups as factors obstructing them.

(ii) *Hierarchical gender-relations in all social structures: cultural-ideological factors* — Violence against women is neither new nor uniquely limited to Bangladesh. Studies show that irrespective of national affluence or level of development, women are vulnerable to exploitation, oppression and all other types of explicit violence from men in all societies where cultural norms, tradition and the legal system sanction women’s subordination to men. For instance in the United States of America, one of the richest and most developed of nations, violence occurs in 25 percent of all marriages (Straus and others, 1980).

Male domination and women’s subordination are basic tenets of Bangladeshi social structure. Several mechanisms and institutions maintain male dominance in all social structures. A major one is the propagation of gender ideology through sanctions by religious texts and their gender-selective interpretation by the community leaders through the village *moulavis* and *mullahs*, as manifested in the case of *Fatwa*-related violence. Both Muslim and Hindu traditions maintain clearly the superiority of men. The other mechanisms and institutions for maintaining male supremacy

through domestication of women and strict control over their mobility, sexuality and labour are: gender-division of labour, sex-role stereotyping during childhood socialization, segregation of the sexes through *purdah* and differential allocation of opportunities, social services and resources. Devising effective strategies to undermine these institutions and mechanisms is a grave issue and major challenge.

(iii) *Socio-economic factors* — Disruption in the traditional rural economic pattern brought about by changing socio-economic processes has adverse effects on women. Increasing lawlessness, pauperization, unemployment, increased stress and tension in male-female relations in poor households have given rise to desertion, divorce and violence. Introduction of automation shrank women’s opportunities of earning through rice processing. This has resulted in a perceived devaluation of women’s contribution in economic terms. Rise of dowry, related to economic and demographic trends, has underscored the commodification of women and the commercial aspect of marriage transactions. The increase in trafficking and kidnapping of women and forced prostitution is also related to the economy, particularly the erosion of traditional means of income generation and support.

The issues of effective programmes for increasing women’s income generation, poverty alleviation and equitable distribution of resources by class, gender and location are major ones in countering these factors.

(iv) *Law and the state’s attitude to women’s subordination* — Theoretically the State of Bangladesh regards men and women as equal. The Constitution of 1972 grants all citizens equal rights (Article 28). Moreover, the State has been signatory to many United Nations conventions designed to eliminate gender discrimination. However, the State’s concern with preserving the existing patriarchal social order is clear from the way laws operate regarding violence against women.

So far, the Bangladeshi legal system, based mainly on the British Penal Code and common law, has done little to diminish women’s vulnerability to violence. In many instances of rape, molestation, abduction, sexual harassment, technicalities and legal loopholes deprive women of justice, especially where the aggressors are in a dominant socio-economic position.

The precedence accorded to religious laws in all personal matters curtails the rights of Muslim and

Hindu women in marriage, divorce, inheritance, custody and guardianship. Moreover, women's socio-economic powerlessness and ignorance of legal rights limit the scope of legal protection. The scarcity of effective agencies offering support/intervention and the excessive expenses and long time involved in litigation also prevent many women, especially the poor and uneducated ones (who are the worst sufferers) from seeking redress through criminal proceedings. Besides, litigation does not guarantee that the desired judgement would be pronounced.

Religious sanctions and traditional values safeguard the interests of patriarchy through family norms, community practices, state policies and laws by maintaining women's vulnerable position. This is reinforced by macro socio-economic process over which they have no control at present.

The major issue is to devise a holistic approach to undermine the patriarchal structures and counter the processes and forces interacting with and reinforcing each other to maintain violence against women.

(e) Intervention to combat violence against women

Interventions against violence in Bangladesh may be classified into two major categories, namely a) measures for preventing and eliminating violence and b) support services to alleviate the suffering of the victims of violence.

(i) Measures for preventing and eliminating violence include:

1. Anti-violence campaign: mobilize public opinion through signature campaign;
2. Protest: hold demonstrations and rallies; organize media campaign against violence whenever cases come to notice;
3. Information collection: collect information on violence and disseminate information of the harmful effects and inhuman aspects of violence through rallies, seminars, workshops and press briefings;
4. Awareness-raising: establish liaison with people in all walks of life, make the women at grassroots conscious in the meetings of the NGO programmes on income earning and family planning services, etc.

5. Legal action: enact laws and enforce the laws by awakening sense of commitment in the administration and in the law-enforcing agencies.

(ii) Support services to relieve the suffering of the victims of violence include:

1. Shelter: provide accommodation, subsistence, medical care to helpless victims of violence;
2. Rehabilitation: provide them skill training to become economically independent and self-reliant; assist them in getting employment; provide support service for self-employed rehabilitated women;
3. Legal aid: file and conduct cases; arrange free legal services; expedite speedy disposal of cases; induce arbitration.

These two categories of intervention, however, are often overlapping. For instance, anti-violence campaigns, awareness-raising and information dissemination are likely to help eliminate violence by creating a strong public opinion against it. On the other hand, these actions may bring incidents of violence against women into focus and create pressure on the relevant authority for immediate action against the criminal.

(f) Agencies involved in interventions

Three major agencies namely government, non-government organizations (NGOs) and mass media are working to resist violence against women.

(i) Government intervention — Government intervention embraces both the categories. However, the Government mainly operates on the preventive and coercive side because it has the power to enact preventive laws and punish wrongdoers. The Penal Code traditionally provides for some anti-violence measures. The Penal Code prescribes stringent punishment for kidnapping, abduction and rape extending to deportation for life and the death sentence. Abduction of a girl under the age of ten in order to subject her to lust may be punished by death. Purchase, sale, hire and disposal of girls under the age of 18 years for purpose of prostitution is also punishable. Sexual abuse of a girl even with her consent is considered rape if the girl is under 14. It will be rape by the husband if the wife is under 13 years of age. The maximum penalty for rape is imprisonment for life; if death is caused through rape, the death

sentence may be imposed. The Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act provides penalty for detaining girls under 18 in a place where prostitution is carried on. Wilful disfiguring of a woman, for example, by acid throwing has been made punishable with the death sentence in the Penal Code.

During the 1980s, women's organizations and conscientious public opinion became very vocal and induced government to take a number of punitive actions which included enactment of the following laws:

1. Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980 (Act no. XXXV of 1980) which was amended as the Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Ordinance, 1986 (Ordinance no. XLIV of 1986). This law prohibits dowry in all forms and makes it punishable by imprisonment up to five years but not less than one year.
2. Cruelty to Women (deterrent punishment) Ordinance, 1983 (Ordinance no. LX of 1983) provides punishment up to deportation for life for kidnapping or abducting women, trafficking in women, cruelty for dowry and rape as well as abetment of such offences.
3. Muslim Family Laws (Amendment) Ordinance, 1982 (Ordinance no. VII of 1982) restrains indiscriminate divorce and polygamy.
4. Family Courts Ordinance, 1985 provides for summary trial of offences regarding marriage, dowry, maintenance and guardianship and custody of the children.

Appreciating that legal measures are not enough, the Government also initiated some support services. A National Advisory Council for Prevention of Violence Against Women has been set up by the Government and a Prevention of Violence Against Women Cell, headed by a Deputy Secretary, is functioning in the Ministry of Women's Affairs to monitor and deal with instances of violence against women at the national level. Committees to prevent violence against women have been set up in every district and thana under the chairmanship of the Deputy Commissioner and the thana *Nirbahi* Officer respectively. Each committee will take necessary steps to settle complaints received by it. Complaints that cannot be resolved by it will be referred by the Thana Committee to the District Committee and by the District Committee to the Director, Women's Affairs

Division. Each committee will, within its jurisdiction, adopt measures to resist violence, strive to convert the anti-dowry campaign into a national movement and collect statistics on the instances of violence. The Deputy Commissioner will furnish monthly reports on violence in the district including the thanas to the Women's Affairs Division which will in turn report to the Council.

Besides dealing with cases reported by the Deputy Commissioners, the cell at the Ministry also collects information from the newspapers on cases of violence and refers them to the Deputy Commissioners for taking legal action. The cell also receives direct applications from aggrieved persons. As the cells do not have legal backing, they find it difficult to impose decisions on the defendants and as a result, disposal of complaints is not satisfactory.

There is a legal aid cell in the Ministry of Women's Affairs which helps complainants to conduct cases. The Department of Women's Affairs runs two projects for women's awareness about violence and services to affected women. One project aims at raising awareness of women through video films, legal education meetings, observation of Women's Day to focus on their rights and potentials. The other project provides support to women who are abused and assists them with legal aid. Under the project, centres are maintained to give shelter to abused women and their children, impart to them vocational training and provide financial assistance for establishing them as self-employed persons. Those who are accepted by their families are returned to their homes.

(ii) *Interventions by NGOs* — Non-government organizations, especially women's organizations and human rights groups are quite active against violence. These organizations apply all categories of interventions except enactment of laws which is beyond their jurisdiction. But they campaign for enactment of laws and modernization of existing laws to protect women against violence and eradicate the problem. The campaigns by these organizations went a long way to inducing the government to introduce new laws and modernise old laws in the eighties.

In recent years, the tendency towards joint action by all the women's organizations is gaining momentum. *Sammilita Nari Samaj* (United Women Community), a combination of major women's organizations, organizes large-scale demonstrations and rallies to protest cases of violence. Such united actions have on many occasions forced the

Government to take coercive measures. Women's organizations have achieved particular success in restraining *Fatwa* and organizing public opinion against the *mullahs* indulging in oppression of women in the garb of religion.

As a continuing process of conducting anti-violence campaigns, these organizations hold workshops, seminars and rallies periodically to which people from all walks of life are invited. The purpose is not only to involve women but also men in the efforts to contain the menace and also to project the problem as a major national issue affecting overall development and progress of the country. Besides women's organizations, general types of NGOs like BRAC and institutions like Grameen Bank implement programmes to sensitise women about their rights, assist and organize them in fighting and resisting violence, mobilise public opinion and work for the rehabilitation of affected women.

Many NGOs maintain and deliver support services to affected women. Some organizations such as Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, Bangladesh Mohila Ainjibi Samiti, Utsho Bangladesh, Centre for Training and Rehabilitation of Destitute Women and the Mother Theresa Home run homes for sheltering helpless victims of violence. In these homes, the inmates are provided adult literacy and skill training.

They are also helped in finding job through advice and referral. Trained inmates are referred to NGOs having income generating projects and also to garment factories which are at present the main employers in the organized sector. Marriage or remarriage of eligible women is also arranged in suitable cases. Families are encouraged and motivated to take the affected members of their families back.

Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust (BLAST), Madaripur Legal Aid Association, Ain-O-Salish Kendra and Mahila Ainjibi Samity file and pursue court cases on behalf of the affected women free of charge. They publish reports on the progress of individual cases. They also circulate booklets providing information about legal rights and remedies available. They have arrangements for receiving complaints. On receipt of complaints, they initiate reconciliation and arbitration, failing which they help in obtaining legal remedies. These organizations sometimes make independent inquiries themselves into alleged violence, publish the reports and agitate for action on the reports. In suitable cases, they bring matters to appropriate government authority for inquiry and redress.

(iii) *Interventions by media* — Newspapers, mainly the dailies, have played a crucial role in agitating against violence and thereby forcing positive action. The main role of the media is providing information and dissemination of the events of violence, awareness raising and campaigning against the problem. Many of the glaring cases of violence would not have come to the surface without media initiative and would have gone unpunished. Besides reporting cases, commenting editorially and publishing articles against violence, the press gives wide coverage to public protests, rallies and demonstrations. By this process, media moulds public opinion, forces the culprits on the run and creates a favourable climate for government action.

(g) Gaps and limitations in the actions against violence

Violence against women is today a pathetic reality in spite of all kinds of government and NGO interventions. But the silver lining is the strong public opinion against it. On many occasions, people have demonstrated their opposition even at the cost of blood. Still, violence against women persists. The reason is the gaps and weaknesses in the interventionist policies and measures. Some of these are mentioned below.

(i) *General law and order situation* — Over the last decades, the law and order situation has been deteriorating. It is often complained that political violence has been at the root of the situation. Armed miscreants often ascribe their allegiance to political parties which ignore if not support and protect the miscreants. If the miscreants are not suppressed, violence against women is difficult to control. Suppression requires firm political will and commitment.

(ii) *Lack of political commitment* — Political commitment to eradicate violence, especially violence against women, has been conspicuous by its absence. None of the political parties make eradication of violence against women an election pledge or lay down any programme or policy as to how they will deal with the problem. Election manifestos of parties give lip service to women's issues. Political exigencies have the upper hand over women's causes and women have yet to emerge as a vital force in party caucus. As a result, politicized government tends to shield the wrong-doers and downplay violence.

(iii) *Lack of commitment in the administration* — Administration, including the law enforcing

agencies, take their cue from the government and have no motivation to champion women's causes. Deputy Commissioners often follow the government and give low priority to redressing violence against women. It is the experience of the anti-violence cells at the district and thana levels that the police do not extend cooperation to the cells. Due to lack of police support, defendants ignore the notices issued by the cells and do not appear at hearings. Thus the cell fails to enforce attendance of the culprits.

In Bangladesh, a powerful military-civil bureaucracy is manned predominantly by males. Representation of women in the armed forces is nil and in the police is negligible. In civil and police administration, there is no woman in higher authoritative positions. In a police station, there is no woman to listen to the women complainants. In recent years, rape in police custody and rape by the police have been on the increase due to the government's unwillingness to bring such cases to the public.

(iv) Administrative inefficiency and corruption — Complaints registered in police stations often result in futile reports as the police fail to establish a case or to apprehend the culprit due to gross inefficiency in making proper investigation or due to corruption. In the power structure of the village, the police tend to side with the economically and politically powerful for personal gain. Trafficking of women and girls across the border remains unchecked because there is hardly any coordination or concerted action between governments, another instance of inefficiency and incompetence in taking effective action. The law-enforcing agencies are either too inefficient or lethargic to break the international racket.

(v) Inadequacy of the legal system — The legal system has loopholes and inconsistencies. Trafficking and abduction cannot be stopped if prostitution is legal. The pimps and procurers will be tempted to create new prostitutes to raise their income and business. Moreover the law discriminates between men and women. A prostitute soliciting a customer is punishable, but the customer is not. When women and girls, victims of trafficking, are caught on the other side of the border, they are thrown into prison, but their traffickers remain free on this side of the border.

The existing attitude of the legal system towards women is paternalistic. The laws on rape, abduction and wrongful confinement were enacted in an age of male supremacy and female subordination. Rather than protecting women, the purpose of the laws on rape and abduction is to protect a man's private

property — his wife and daughters. This attitude throughout the legal history influenced judicial decisions which tended to weigh against women and towards giving men the benefit of doubt.

(vi) Problems related to legal proceedings — Court proceedings in Bangladesh are cumbersome, lengthy, dilatory and complicated. The environment in the court premises is not congenial for waiting; especially for women it is often a hell. The entire situation is a major deterrent to seeking legal remedy in cases of violence against women.

The laws of evidence as applicable to criminal cases are followed in violence cases which involve touchy and delicate personal and conjugal matters on which women are generally reticent. Defence lawyers play on and take advantage of the situation and indulge in character assassination and comments on personal and intimate matters with the approval of the court. As a result, real evidence is often suppressed.

The record of the Women's Affairs Division reveals that only 5 to 10 per cent of cases reported to the cells could be taken to the courts because, in most of the cases, the very strict requirement of evidence demanded could not be produced.

(vii) Double standard of society — Society shows a double standards in crimes against women. A raped or abducted woman or a tortured wife acquires social stigma and brings disgrace and disrepute to the family. On the other hand, the male culprit undergoes no such stigma and his family faces no loss of reputation. This double standard in society promotes violence against women and denies justice to women.

(viii) Invisibility of women — Though women are no longer completely confined to home, their newly acquired mobility is subject to many restrictions. Due to limited mobility, women are handicapped in pursuing court proceedings independently. The male kin and relations fail to come to the side of their female relatives not because they have no feelings and sympathy for them, but because of the discriminatory attitude of the society.

(ix) Economic dependence of women — Women who are victims of trafficking generally do not have any source of income of their own. Victims of dowry and conjugal cruelty are also dependent women. Their dependent status coupled with their restricted mobility make them prey to violence. For want of self-reliance, they have to depend on kin for financial means to pursue legal remedy and are helpless if such assistance is not forthcoming.

(x) *Lack of consensus* — Women's organizations, human rights groups and NGOs have been working to mobilize public opinion; but they have failed to generate a national anti-violence movement having common planks and providing continuously sustained activities. Prevention of violence is still to become an integral part of the national development policies and efforts. There is no long-term strategy and no plan and programme to bring about systemic change and eliminate the roots of gender oppression.

In order to achieve national consensus, the relevant organizations must have consensus among themselves first. It is sad but true that there is rivalry and dissension which prevents sincere and effective collaboration.

Organizations which are currently active have some weaknesses. Most of their members come from the urban educated middle class. Their life experience is different from that of the poor, predominantly rural, women who are illiterate and have inadequate exposure

to modernizing influences. There is a feeling that urban educated women and these poor women are miles apart with a resultant communication gap.

(xi) *Research and dissemination of knowledge about violence* — Inadequate research has been a prime handicap in fighting violence which still remains one of the major under-researched and under-reported social issues. There are very few in-depth and extensive studies. At present the main source of information is newspaper reports which are not substitutes of studies enriched by field experience and theoretical understanding.

Not only is information sketchy but dissemination of information, especially among the poor, is inadequate as the organizations are urban-based with few linkages with the masses outside the cities. Dialogue and debate on violence take place in cities only and are attended by the elite. Rural grassroots people are largely beyond the reach of the existing information system.

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ANNEX

The ESCAP Expert Group Meeting on Eliminating Violence Against Women held at Dhaka, Bangladesh from 14 to 16 December 1997 made the following recommendations:

Definition and Scope

1. Many definitions have been used to refer to violence against women. Operational definitions of violence that are relevant to specific needs, particularly for legal purposes, should be developed, taking due consideration of the definitions in the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW, etc.
2. The scope of violence against women should also be defined - possible coverage would include different types of violence as well as different groups of victims such as refugees, and women violated in situations of armed conflict.
3. Violence against women should be situated within the context of women's rights as human rights and remedial measures would be premised upon the conceptual framework of violence as an infringement of women's right to personal security and the right to enjoy all other rights.
4. Violence against women can also be viewed as stemming from unequal gender relations, the remedy of which would have to be sought from the developmental and socialization process.
5. Conceptualization of violence against women within a humanistic context should also be considered.
6. While the process of globalization and economic reforms could provide opportunities for developing countries, the challenges and negative effects arising from these adjustments, particularly for women, and its possible effect on the incidences of violence against women, should be considered.
7. Data collection of statistics on violence against women should be improved to provide a more accurate and comprehensive picture of the situation. This would include developing better indicators to record the incidences of violence against women, gathering information from sources in addition to hospital and police

records, and devising methodology to reach affected persons.

Remedial Measures

A. Prevention

8. Remedial measures should address the root causes of violence against women. To this end, such measures would include:
 - a. targeted poverty alleviation programmes;
 - b. education schemes particularly for the girl child;
 - c. curriculum reform to remove gender biases.
9. Attitudinal change should also be brought about through various measures including:
 - a. media campaigns
 - b. schemes to welcome the girl child
 - c. family education to foster gender equality in the socialization process
 - d. gender-sensitization of males, and of children
10. Measures should be taken to encourage the media to observe guidelines such as:
 - a. respecting the right of privacy of victims of violence against women by not revealing their identity
 - b. avoiding sensationalization of incidents (to avoid inciting or encouraging copy-cat occurrences)
 - c. being more progressive in providing information on women's rights, and urging concerted action against violence against women
11. The media needs to be constantly monitored so that stereotyped portrayal of women may be stopped. Commodification of women through derogatory and indecent advertisements in the media should be stopped.

B. Legal

12. Laws that discriminate against women should be reviewed and reformed e.g laws on property rights in Nepal, the Hudood Ordinance in Pakistan etc.

13. With regard to violence against women, specific laws could be enacted where laws do not exist or are inadequate.
14. Domestic laws should be reviewed and brought into conformity with the standards of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against women (CEDAW). The standards and provisions of CEDAW should also be used as a basis for legal judgments and rulings.
15. Codification of laws which would encourage greater utilization of various laws relevant to violence against women could be undertaken.
16. Legal rules of procedure should be simplified and rendered more affordable. Legal aid and counselling should be provided.
17. Procedural laws that are weighted against women such as evidentiary rules should be reviewed.
18. Since legal measures cannot exist in a vacuum, a supportive enabling environment conducive to the application of the law must be created eg. birth and marriage registration in relation to early marriage laws.
19. Legal literacy campaigns should be conducted especially among rural women and high-risk groups. However, such campaigns should not sanctify the status quo where it discriminates against women.

C. Enforcement

20. In spite of numerous laws which currently exist, implementation and enforcement of these laws are often weak. Measures to strengthen the implementation and enforcement of laws are essential and these could cover:
 - a. using mechanisms such as national law commission to monitor implementation of the laws
 - b. establishing police mechanisms and procedures e.g. special desk for women at police stations, simplify police reporting procedures for violence against women
 - c. exemplary punitive measures for perpetrators
21. Strong action should be taken against law enforcing authorities/agencies involved in cases of trafficking, rape, torture, extortion or any other form of violence. Strong and effective measures on the part of the government is urgently needed

and NGOs are to play an appropriate role in this regard.

22. While laws and legal measures are important preventive and protective instruments, there should not be over-dependence on the law; furthermore, in the interpretation of the law, there could be occasions where the spirit of the law should be considered.

D. Support mechanisms

23. Relevant training should be imparted to concerned personnel - medical, police, legal and judiciary etc. and such training should be undertaken as early as possible to increase receptivity. Training should cover gender-sensitization for attitudinal change and specific training related to handling of violence against women incidences. Such training should as far as possible be integrated into existing training programmes. Training manuals tailored to particular target groups could be produced for standardized and sustained training. CEDAW should be included in the curriculum of law schools.
24. Shelters/crisis centres should be established in strategic location and these centres should try to offer "one-stop" service (covering for example medical, counselling, legal and economic assistance) by governments and NGOs.
25. Investigation desks should be established at every police station so that women and girls can report acts and file charges of violence against them in a safe, confidential and enabling environment free from fear of penalties or retaliation.
26. Special units/cells in the Ministry of Home Affairs and other agencies should be strengthened or created to handle cases of violence against women more efficiently. NGOs and women's groups should act as pressure groups in this regard.
27. Customary or traditional practices that are inherently violent and infringe upon the personal integrity and human rights of women should be reviewed and challenged.
28. Strong action has to be taken against inimical local practices such as any fatwa which is being used to victimize women. Illegal practices like child marriage and polygamy are to be stopped by the respective countries in the region.

29. The prevailing concept and ideology of support services and counselling with the view to preserving the integrity of the family unit should be examined as reconciliation could sometimes result in VAW victims returning to the situation in which further harm could be inflicted.

E. Reintegration/Rehabilitation

30. Development schemes such as poverty alleviation schemes, micro-credit schemes should provide special windows of support to target groups including victims of violence e.g. micro-credit provided to a disadvantaged group of women in Nepal with the aim of assisting in their economic improvement and integration into society.
31. With regard to the issue of trafficking, initiatives taken with regard to protection, prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration should be intensified. In this regard, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and NGO initiatives on trafficking and the proposed South Asian subregional convention on trafficking should be supported.
32. Special attention should be focused on assisting victims of trafficking with HIV/AIDs, particularly in trans-frontier cases.

Institutional Mechanisms

33. At the institutional level, coordinating mechanisms to combat violence against women such as a task force or national committee on violence against women should be established. A plan of action should also be formulated identifying priority concerns, remedial measures, implementation bodies and mechanisms, and time-frame for action.
34. Institutional mechanisms (such as national women's rights commission) should be established for legal reform, and for overseeing implementation of laws.
35. Community-based groups should be mobilized both to prevent and remedy, as well as serve as watchdogs and monitors against violence against women. In this regard to maximize people's participation, the process of democratization and decentralization should be promoted.
36. The participation of women in decision-making in the political process and governance play an

important role in promoting the interests of women and in this regard, measures like affirmative action to increase the participation of women in this process should be encouraged.

Networking and Strengthening of Linkages

37. Networking and the strengthening of linkages should be promoted among :
- women's NGOS
 - women's NGOs and NGOs in other sectors e.g. development, children and youth
 - NGOs, the government sector, research institutes (especially women's studies centres) and related members of civil society
38. Particular attention should be paid to strengthen the linkage between the women's movement and the national machinery (focal point) for the advancement of women, while not prejudicing the advocacy and watchdog roles of NGOs.
39. Since many studies and activities have been undertaken on the subject of violence against women, a repository of available information should be established, preferably within existing national and subregional facilities.
40. Existing networks, such as network of women's studies should be mobilized to identify gaps in research and information and to undertake the necessary steps to fill those gaps. Such studies could include culture-specific studies, subregional comparisons and evaluative studies of existing schemes and projects.
41. The use of modern information technology such as the Internet should be explored to facilitate the collection, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information pertaining to violence against women. The use of such technology can also be used to lobby and mobilize support to moves against violence against women.
42. Linkages with subregional and regional organizations and United Nations bodies with programmes on violence against women (such as ESCAP, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIFEM, APWLD, APDC, ADB, South Asia Association of Women's Studies, Traffic Watch South Asia Group, South Asia Partnership International) should be forged. Linkages should also be established with the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, core human rights

treaty bodies and the Special Rapporteur on
Violence Against Women.

