



Department  
for International  
Development



## Consultation Summary: on the Ministerial Champion role on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Overseas





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# 1. Foreword from Baroness Verma, Ministerial Champion for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Overseas

I am very proud of the ongoing leadership that the UK Government is showing in tackling violence against women and girls. This is an issue I have been working on for decades, and presents a huge challenge for the international community, so I was delighted to have the chance to make a real difference when the Prime Minister appointed me as Ministerial Champion for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Overseas.



DFID's commitment to this agenda has been recognised by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact in its recent review "*DFID's efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls*", which highlighted the 'significant contribution' that UK aid has made on this agenda and 'strong achievement on both learning and international influencing.'

At DFID we do not rest on our laurels and this review reinforces our determination to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls. We know that there is so much more work to be done if we are to end this pervasive abuse of women's and girls' human rights. I see my role as an important part of the huge effort by the whole of Government to address violence against women and girls and tackle gender inequality.

Violence against women and girls does not take place in a vacuum: it is a practice that takes place in a world where men and boys are encouraged to think they have the right to have power over women and girls. Gender equality is inextricably linked with all of the work that the Department does - whether it is preventing violence against girls on the way to school, strengthening the capability of the police and the courts to give justice to survivors, or building the resilience of girls and women in humanitarian crises.

That is why the Secretary of State for DFID, Justine Greening, has put girls and women at the heart of everything that the Department does. Her leadership on mobilising international action to end child marriage and support for the Africa-led movement to end FGM, and in co-founding the High Level Panel for Women's Economic Empowerment is setting the international agenda, and is vital to my Champion role on tackling violence. Because there can be no world in which women and girls are free from violence, without addressing the fundamental inequalities of power that drive discriminatory practices. DFID will continue to consider gender as part of everything that we do, and to drive forward action across the four pillars of our Strategic Vision on girls and women: on education, maternal health, economic empowerment and violence against women and girls.

One of the incredibly fruitful outcomes of this consultation is that I have heard how strongly a wide range of people feel about taking a comprehensive approach to tackling violence against women and girls, starting with the experiences of the girl or woman. The consultation process has enhanced my understanding of the complexities of the challenge, the approaches that need to be considered, and the opportunities that lie ahead.

I would like to extend my warmest thanks to everyone who contributed to this consultation process. It is by learning from those on the frontline - of service delivery, preventing violence before it starts, and advocacy for change - that I can best understand the barriers to eliminating violence against women and girls. I will use what I have learned, alongside the UK's strong leadership to date, to spur relentless efforts to end violence against women and girls. Nothing less will do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Verma', written over a light blue horizontal line.

**BARONESS VERMA**

## 2. Key findings

Baroness Verma was appointed by the Prime Minister as Ministerial Champion for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in December 2015. In January 2016, she launched a consultation to draw on a wide-ranging set of experiences and ideas on how best to use the role to leverage further action to address violence against women and girls. This process has been open, iterative one, and whilst the formal period for consultation has come to an end, the conversations with participants on the shape of the work will continue as it develops. This consultation is part of an ongoing dialogue shaping the Ministerial Champion role. The formal consultation included:

- An open, [live discussion](#) hosted and promoted by The Guardian;
- A roundtable discussion with UK NGOs and academics;
- A roundtable with grassroots women's rights organisations working to tackle violence against women and girls internationally;
- A roundtable, co-chaired with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office, with UK-focused organisations working to address violence against women and girls;
- A bilateral with the former Ministerial Champion on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls, and other Ministerial colleagues – past and present – who have been closely engaged on this work;
- A roundtable with youth representatives in the UK, and a roundtable with youth representatives working internationally, to address VAWG and gender inequality.

Key messages (particularly ones emphasised by many participants in the consultation), ideas and issues of importance from the consultation are summarised below.

### 1. We must tackle the social norms that underpin all forms of violence against women and girls, including domestic, across the lifecycle

Many participants raised the importance of the Ministerial Champion role emphasising the need to tackle the root causes of violence against women and girls in all its forms: whether domestic violence; FGM; non-partner sexual violence; child marriage or other forms. This includes tackling social norms that mean that different forms of violence against women and girls are seen as typical and acceptable, including the belief that men and boys should have power over women and girls, and that there are a set of circumstances in which gender-based violence is acceptable.

Many participants encouraged Baroness Verma to shine a light on the impact of domestic violence, as a form of violence that is often overlooked - whilst maintaining a clear focus on the attitudes and beliefs underpinning of all forms of violence against women and girls. The importance of tackling coercive and controlling behaviours, and communicating the impact of these actions on the individual and their ability to escape poverty were emphasised. Participants emphasised that shining a spotlight on domestic violence is not enough though: concrete action is required and DFID will continue to play its role in delivering programmes to address domestic violence. There was strong appetite to maintain momentum on efforts on FGM, child marriage, and sexual violence in conflict alongside efforts on domestic violence.

Domestic violence and non-partner sexual violence against adolescent girls and older women is overlooked internationally: participants recommended that the Ministerial Champion role bring a lifecycle approach to all work on violence against women and girls. A specific request was that the UK ramp up on efforts to encourage spaces for young people within decision-making bodies globally, as it was felt that they would prioritise efforts to address violence against women and girls. There was strong consensus that the Ministerial Champion's work on violence against women and girls should take a 'Leave No One Behind' approach: ensuring marginalised women and girls remain a priority at every opportunity. Some participants highlighted and welcomed DFID's existing leadership on this agenda.

## **2. Prevention is possible and there are proven approaches. If the international community is to address violence, we must do more with women's rights organisations; survivors; men & boys and young people to achieve this goal**

An important issue for participants was the need to maintain and drive forward a focus on prevention of violence against women and girls as well as response: including utilising the full range of actors and interventions to shift social norms and reduce rates of violence against women and girls at a community-level. Many participants felt that the Ministerial Champion role could use the platform to highlight the need for:

- consistent challenging of social norms about violence against women and girls being both normal and acceptable at a community-level: including encouraging uptake of DFID's [new guidance on addressing harmful social norms](#) and supporting creative and innovative methods for community-level conversations;
- additional, flexible and long-term funding for women's rights organisations to work on prevention and response at a community and national level globally;
- recognising the gendered nature of violent behaviours and the need to promote positive masculinities in order to address violence against women and girls – including challenging patriarchy when engaging men and boys. Peer to peer and inter-generational conversations were emphasised as critical;
- prevention of violence against women and girls being mainstreamed through education systems and programmes globally, including specific education on shifting social norms and healthy relationships (non-formal as well as formal education);
- comprehensive action plans being created and implemented at the national level globally, that are properly costed and funded;
- private sector organisations to support work to address social norms that underpin violence against women and girls, including through corporate social responsibility and internal policies;
- engaging with diaspora groups and faith groups in ending violence against women and girls;
- women's empowerment and access to informal and formal decision-making roles, in order to prevent violence;
- empowering survivors of gender-based violence as part of prevention work, and to recognise their agency, resilience and right to make their own choices about their futures. The role of safe spaces for this;
- continuing to adhere to the principle of do no harm: including ensuring response services are in place when doing preventative work.

A specific ask was that the Ministerial Champion would ensure strong language on violence against women and girls in the Agreed Conclusions at the Commission the Status of Women in March 2016. The UK worked hard with allies across the international system to secure this language and the UK is pleased with [the outcome document](#).

## **3. VAWG policy and interventions must cut across contexts and sectors**

One of the key messages coming out of the consultation was the importance of maintaining the UK's current leadership on preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in fragile and conflict-affected states. DFID's leadership on the Call to Action on Protecting Women and Girls in Emergencies was particularly praised, and the importance of continued senior political engagement in the run up to (and at) the World Humanitarian Summit was highlighted. Some participants suggested drawing on the UK's work domestically to support lesson-learning and exchange of ideas in developing and humanitarian contexts. Organisations working on violence against women and girls in the UK noted the value of learning from other contexts, including community-based organising in developing countries to address harmful social norms.

Participants felt that it was important that Baroness Verma and other Ministerial colleagues continued to use their voices to demand greater accountability at a national-level on women, peace and security, including on violence against women and girls. Participants recommended that Baroness Verma and Ministerial colleagues clearly articulate the importance of including work on preventing sexual violence in conflict within the Women, Peace and Security framework. It was also noted that

cross-government working had improved from an external perspective. An example of this was the FCO-DFID-MOD National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. Participants asked that the UK Government continue to scale up efforts on this agenda.

There was strong consensus that the Ministerial Champion role should emphasise the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing violence against women and girls through all sectors and multi-pronged interventions, from education to economic empowerment; from health programming to infrastructure; and from legal reform to community-level social norms change. Feedback from the UK experience was that – although recognising the need for context-specific and tailored interventions – the health sector is key as community health workers often have access to the home in a way that others do not, and have a unique role in identifying and addressing domestic violence.

#### **4. We should lead on evidence, and tackle the learning ‘frontiers’: such as sports and alcohol**

Participants felt that evidence collected by academic institutions is not reaching organisations working on the ground – and that the Ministerial Champion role and DFID’s world leading level of investment in rigorous evidence should be used to maximise the uptake of evidence and learning at all levels. Participants suggested that the UK play a further role in encouraging different programmatic mechanisms to share learning and networks on violence against women and girls.

Many participants emphasised the need for better data to address violence against women and girls, and recommended that the Ministerial Champion highlights this at all levels – particularly for older women. Some of those taking part in the consultation suggested that the UK use its leadership role to further explore programme and policy ‘frontiers’ to address violence, including around alcohol misuse and sport.

#### **5. Implications of main messages heard during the consultation process**

A key takeaway from the consultation was that whilst the Ministerial Champion should draw on every opportunity, every visit, every conversation and every network to push for further action on violence against women and girls on the areas outlined above, focus within the work will be critical for success. Some ideas for focus were:

- Shining a spotlight on a specific form of violence against women and girls or a specific age group whilst consistently driving key messages about the need to shift harmful social norms underpinning violence across the lifecycle;
- Creating a small group of high-profile leaders in like-minded governments and the UN to drive action;
- Working closely across Government to deliver discreet, specific results;
- Exploring with partner governments whether they too would find value in a Ministerial Champion role, and sharing the UK experience.



### 3. Areas of focus within the Ministerial Champion objectives

The consultation process has reaffirmed the importance of existing work and deepened our understanding of the approach that needs to be taken. It has helped to identify priority areas of focus and opportunities that should be explored.

Baroness Verma set out seven high level objectives when she was appointed as Ministerial Champion on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Overseas. These are as follows:

1. Securing and defending the rights of women and girls to live free from violence, through international frameworks;
2. Further linking and ensuring policy coherence across the entire UK efforts to end violence against women and girls overseas;
3. Forging strategic partnerships and influencing the international system to increase financial, political and technical commitment for tackling all forms of violence against women and girls in all contexts;
4. Leading step change in galvanising the use of evidence of what we know works to prevent violence against women and girls;
5. Eliminating FGM and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) within a generation;
6. Driving forward a new and significant push on all forms of Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence as a policy and programme priority for the international community;
7. Stepping up global leadership on tackling violence and abuse against adolescent girls overseas.

This consultation has informed the development of the following areas of focus within those wider objectives:

- A. To take every opportunity to talk about the drivers and social norms underpinning all forms of violence, whilst shining a spotlight on domestic violence. This will include further exploration of the evidence base on engaging men and boys to address violence against women and girls, without reinforcing harmful social gender norms.
- B. To maximise international opportunities to speak up on the specific vulnerabilities that girls and older women can face, including using the role to push for greater disaggregation of data by age;
- C. To build political will at home and overseas to utilise the emerging global evidence base on VAWG. This includes disseminating UK funded evidence widely as recommended in [ICAI's "green rated" 2016 review of our work on Violence Against Women and Girls](#).
- D. To create strategic partnerships with global leaders on VAWG to drive international action; and to share UK experiences, with partner governments globally – including in a set of planned VAWG-focused country visits as outlined in a [recent Written Ministerial Statement](#).

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