

# NPA policy with operational framework for ending violence against women (VAW)

This policy with operational framework:

- - is governed by the document “*Solidarity – principles and value basis for Norwegian People’s Aid*”, adopted by NPA’s General Assembly 22.06.03.
- - is governed by the “Strategy for women, gender equality and development a strategy for NPA’s international work (1998-2002)  
- *is governed by NPA’s hiv/aids policy*
- - is part of “*Policy and Strategy for NPA’s International Humanitarian and Development Work 2003 – 2007*”.
- - replaces “*The NPA policy for women’s human rights focusing on violence against women*” (2003 – 2007).

## 1. NPA’s analytical concept

### 1.1 Inequality is not a “law of nature”

In all societies, now and in the past, certain tasks and patterns of behaviour often have been associated with the “natural” domains of men and women. However, history has shown that the roles of men and women vary according to socio-cultural context. What has often been explained by reference to the male or female nature has gradually come to be recognised as *gender* roles – roles that are socially and culturally constructed. This implies that since roles based on tradition, class and culture are socially *constructed*, they are also negotiable and open to *de-construction* and change, if found to be harmful or unjust.

### 1.2 Discrimination of women is a breach of human rights.

History shows many forms of discrimination – based on race, religion or social status – where systematic subordination is justified as ‘the natural order of things’. However, history also shows an impressive range of protests against these socially created stereotypes. Usually, it is the oppressed groups themselves that constitute the driving force to end discriminatory and humiliating social practices. However, their struggle for justice has often been fuelled by the active support of solidarity groups, and political reform has now and again been inspired by individuals’ *ethical* standards and political conviction rather than their immediate and personal “self interests”.

Likewise, systematic discrimination of women is not only a women’s issue, but poses a serious challenge for all - both men and women - who are genuinely dedicated to secure human rights for all.

Discrimination of women prevents them from exercising their full human rights. It also degrades men as human beings – when accepting the role to dominate and exert power over

women. Hence, in a human rights perspective, men as well as women have a common interest in seeing an end to all gender-based discrimination. Today a growing number of men oppose gender-based discrimination, and join ranks in political action to secure equal rights for men and women as a fundamental basis for a healthy and democratic development of society.

### **1.3 The gender relation is a power relation**

Gender differences often confirm and justify social inequalities. As a matter of historical and socio-political record these inequalities systematically correlate with men's superior position in relation to women. The gender relation is a relation of power, expressed in the public as well as in the private sphere. Discrimination of women is expressed through a variety of mechanisms at different levels – being economic, political, cultural or sexual. The discrimination may range from a lack of economic opportunities or political influence to physical violence, often with molesting and even death as the tragic outcome. This explains why the struggle for equal rights and opportunities for men and women is expressed mainly by strategies to combat discrimination against *women*. It also explains why programs to combat violence against women (VAW) have been launched in addition to the general work to promote equal rights and opportunities for men and women. The aim is to abolish the most vicious forms of discrimination against women.

Although men hold power and have a dominant position compared to women they also suffer from being brought up in a patriarchal society, resulting in unequal opportunities for boys and girls, men and women. Many girls are raised to accept subordination, while boys are commonly raised to take for granted a dominant role and at times even a violent one.

## **2. The global movement on ending violence against women**

### **2.1 Global instruments**

The United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 proclaims that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Yet women's freedom, dignity and equality are persistently compromised by law and by custom in ways that men's are not.<sup>1</sup>

A growing global movement, with women in the forefront, has over the last five decades been working to secure women's human rights on an equal basis to that of men. These include women's rights to resources, education, property and income, as well as to political and economic empowerment, and to their right to freedom from oppression and violence.

In addition to the general human rights instruments "The covenants on Civil and Political Rights and the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" (1966), some major specific global instruments to combat discrimination against women have been created in the last five decades, such as:

- CEDAW – The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979, with the Optional Protocol of 1999
- The Declaration about Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993
- The Declaration of the International Conference on Population and Development,

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<sup>1</sup> The terms "women" and "men" in this document are meant to cover all females, girls included, and all male, boys included.

Cairo, 1994

- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995
- The “Beijing + 5” Declaration, 2000
- The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, 2000

These instruments are all useful tools in the global struggle to end violence against women, and should be used actively as such. They also confirm the fact that the UN acknowledges violence against women as a serious worldwide problem to be continuously addressed.

In addition to these global instruments national and regional documents have been produced. For some regional ones, see annex no 2.

## **2.2 Violence against Women - Definition**

**Violence against women** is a serious breach of women’s human rights under general international law and human rights conventions<sup>2</sup>. NPA understands “violence against women” as the gender-based violence, which is directed against women because they are women.

There are several ways of defining “violence against women”. NPA chooses the statement in the UN Declaration about Elimination of Violence against Women of 1993, as a basis for our efforts in this field :

“Violence against women includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women’s full advancement. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.”

Examples of violence against women may be female infanticide, differential or reduced access to food and medical care for girl infants, child marriage and other forced marriage arrangements, female genital mutilation, sexual abuse and harassment, rape in times of peace and as a weapon of war, prostitution, trafficking in women, dowry abuse, murders, “honour killing” and various forms of domestic violence and psychological abuse.

## **2.3 Scope and consequences**

Violence against women is universal and takes place in all societies, in peace as well as in times of armed conflict – differing only in form and scope in societies with different culture and traditions. Research indicates that 1 in 3 women in the world will experience violence in her life<sup>3</sup>. The abusers and victims are in all classes, nationalities and at all economic levels<sup>4</sup>. The vast majority of the abusers against women are men, and research suggests that women are more at risk from their husbands, fathers or other male relatives, than they are from

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<sup>2</sup> According to Amnesty International these human rights are: The right to life, the right not to be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the right to equal protection according to humanitarian norms in time of international or internal armed conflict, the right to liberty and security of person, the right to equal protection under the law, the right to equality in the family, the right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health, the right to just and favourable conditions of work.

<sup>3</sup> UNFPA’s State of World Population report 2002

<sup>4</sup> Human Development Report, UNDP 1995

strangers.<sup>5</sup> Violence against women during armed conflict has reached epidemic proportions – including rape used as a weapon of war, trafficking and other forms of sexual slavery, prostitution and exploitation by exchanging sex for food, shelter, passage or other necessities<sup>6</sup>.

Violence against women has huge consequences for society as it is a block to development and a block to peace and democracy: Violence impedes women's positive participation in shaping their society. It disrupts women's lives and denies them options, it erodes their confidence and sense of self-esteem and damages their health, it accelerates the spreading of hiv/aids and contributes to a feminisation of the epidemic. All this has serious economic consequences for society.

Violence against women is also violence against children – having serious consequences for children's lives and well-being. It increases the probability for a future repetition of violent behaviour; i.e. the vicious circle of children repeating their parents' handling of problems.

### **3. Ending violence against women as a priority area for NPA**

NPA's contribution to the global movement for ending violence against women has the following objectives:

**Long term development objective:**

All women are able to participate in society without being subjected to violence.

**Immediate development objective:**

Organisations or groups, working actively to remove oppression of women with the aim of combating violence against women in their respective societies, have strengthened their ability and influence.

NPA supports the development of a society where both women and men can fully realise their potential as human beings, without being molded into discriminatory gender roles imposed by oppressive social norms or political systems. NPA believes that men as well as women will benefit from this transformation. The aim is to transform the hierarchical structures of domination so that power is exercised with equal rights to participate and influence for women as well as men, without the fear of violence. Authorities in society have the responsibility to make these changes on an institutional level.

Women is the main force to seek redress and end the violence. The empowerment of women, and especially young women and girls, is therefore a key strategy at the individual and community levels. However, empowerment cannot be given, but must be generated by the women themselves. NPA will look for ways to facilitate for and support women's empowerment – based on an analysis of the local context.

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<sup>5</sup> Panos Briefing no 27 "The Intimate Enemy: Gender Violence and Reproductive Health", March 1998

<sup>6</sup> Progress of the World's Women 2002 Volume 1 "Women, War and Peace", assessment by Elisabeth Rehn & Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, appointed by UNIFEM

NPA supports the women's movement, social groups and organisations and human rights organisations in the field. In addition, NPA will look for opportunities to enhance men's – especially young men's and boys's – involvement and cooperation in changing attitudes towards women particularly with regard to violence. It is encouraging to see men's organised initiatives in some countries to bring an end to violence against women, and their efforts to redefine the traditional concept of masculinity and femininity<sup>7</sup>. This is important in order to change attitudes and behaviour, especially where the life or health of women is at risk.

Although poverty is not the direct cause of violence against women, living in poverty makes women particularly vulnerable and may expose them to violent and sexual exploitative situations. In turn, violence against women exacerbates poverty. The current feminization of the hiv/aids epidemic is a huge challenge. Efforts to end violence against women are important means to reduce the risk of further spreading the hiv virus. NPA will look for cooperation with organisations that link these issues.

To end violence against women it is essential to understand local conditions and cultures. Cultures are not static, but constantly in a state of development. Within all societies there are many cultures, the dominating one being that of the group holding power. All too often oppressive practices, expressions and behaviours are explained and accepted as “culture” or “tradition”. NPA will never accept culture or tradition as an excuse for abuse. NPA will carefully analyse the local conditions and cooperate with those struggling to change oppressive traditions and practices harmful to *women*. NPA will respect the pace of change, capacity and strategies of our partners.

## **4. Operational framework for NPA**

### **4.1 Reference documents**

⇒ *The Policy and Strategy for NPA's International Humanitarian and Development Work:*

- “A rights-based approach, as a method to achieve political, economic and social changes is a prerequisite to achieve a lasting change in the power structures, which in turn ensures the rights of all. NPA and its partners will as rights-based organisations struggle together to secure human rights for all”<sup>8</sup>.
- “All activities of NPA shall adhere to the cross cutting issues on gender, hiv/aids and environment.”<sup>9</sup>
- **“NPA's key working methods are:**
  - Networking
  - Awareness building and mobilisation
  - Advocacy and lobbying efforts
  - Organisational development

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<sup>7</sup> Examples are the global “White Ribbon Campaign” and “Association of Men Against Violence” in Nicaragua.

<sup>8</sup> Chapter 3, point A

<sup>9</sup> Chapter 3, point D

- Competence building
- System development”<sup>10</sup>

⇒ ***NPA’s policy document on Civil Society and Partnership Cooperation (2004):***

- A key to NPA’s approach to end violence against women is cooperation with civil society organisations. However, due to the complexity of this issue, cooperation with research institutions, media, state institutions and local authorities may be considered necessary.

## **4.2 Implications for NPA.**

### ***4.2.1 The scope of NPA’s involvement to end VAW***

The groups or organisations that NPA will support in this field should actively work to remove oppression of women with the aim of combating violence against women, (according to NPA’s immediate objective).

Currently (in 2004) NPA supports programs concerning

- Violence against women in conflict and post conflict situations, for example sexual abuse and gender based violence in refugee situations,
- domestic violence (including the so called “honour killing”, child marriages and other forms of forced marriages),
- female genital mutilation.

NPA will maintain its main focus on these issues in the near future, but will remain open for *partners’* involvement in ending other forms of VAW.

### ***4.2.2 Partner’s interventions and standards for the work.***

As VAW is a deeply rooted and complex problem, successful strategies to end VAW tend to be integrated and multi-level of nature. NPA may support partners whose interventions are at different levels, e.g.:

- Studies and documentation**: Initial data collection, prevalence studies and analysis of the context and forms of VAW, as well as ongoing documentation and monitoring throughout an intervention.
- Challenging attitudes and beliefs**: Public awareness-raising campaigns and other activities to break the silence about VAW and change attitudes of individuals, families and communities - young and old, women and men.
- Changing policy and practice**: Lobby and advocacy efforts for legal and policy change in government institutions and politics, intended to protect women by changing the laws, and/or their implementation; develop measures to prevent VAW, support survivors/victims, prosecute perpetrators or support/treatment of perpetrators to change.

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<sup>10</sup> Chapter 4

- d. Direct support and provision: Crisis support to women and girls, such as hotlines and shelters, legal and psychosocial counselling and protection may be supported if it is part of an integrated strategy with interventions on political as well as social support level.<sup>11</sup>

Because of the complex and wide-ranging nature of the problem it is unlikely that one single organisation will be able to achieve significant results to prevent/end violence against women on its own. A wide range of expertise is essential, as campaigners, politicians, lobbyists, educationalists, service-providers, counsellors, health professionals, lawyers. NPA will support efforts to coordinate, develop and build capacity of organisations and networks at different levels.

Standards relating to broad and strategic alliances should include:

- Awareness of key actors in the field.
- Identification of key partnerships and alliances for wider impact.
- Working with key strategic allies at national, regional, and/or international level.<sup>12</sup>

NPA is aware that, contrary to the intentions, programs may actually lead to and increase violence against women. This is also the case if the program work is gender blind. Gender sensitive programming, however, can support those women and men who seek change in gender relations and want to end violence against women. In order to mitigate negative effects, NPA will insist that:

- All interventions are based upon a clear gendered analysis, including ideas, beliefs, and attitudes of men and women, and the impact of these on VAW.
- Women are involved in the planning of such interventions.
- All interventions and policy positions are informed about their possible impact upon violence against women.
- All interventions include measures to protect women from violence if it is likely to be a by-product of women's development,<sup>13</sup> including the risk of contracting the hiv virus

NPA cooperates with local partners in our development work. In circumstances, however, if NPA works within emergency operations - where local organisations have limited capacity and/or access to the target groups, NPA may consider direct project implementation in a transition period.

#### **4.2.3 Internally NPA will:**

- Secure expertise at HO and Regional/Country offices on violence against women to support partners and networks.
- Implement a personnel policy and procedures to prevent and handle violence against women, including Code of Conduct with sanctions when the the code of conduct is broken<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> This division of levels is mainly based on Suzanne Williams "strategy grid" presented at the NPA workshop "Ending Violence against Women", Klækken, Norway, April 2004 - Report.

<sup>12</sup> Oxfam GB "Ending Violence against Women – A Challenge for Development and Humanitarian Work" by Francine Pickup with Suzanne Williams and Caroline Sweetman, 2001

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

- Eschew silent complicity and create an atmosphere conducive to discussion and internal debate on violence against women.
- Ensure competence and awareness on gender issues and violence against women within the organisation
- Have gender balance in decision making positions.

## **Annex 1: Relevant literature**

1. "Ending Violence against Women – A Challenge for Development and Humanitarian Work" by Francine Pickup with Suzanne Williams and Caroline Sweetman, Oxfam GB 2001, [www.oxfam.org.uk/publications.html](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/publications.html)
2. "Why is Violence against Women a Block to Development?", presentations at the conference on Violence against Women, Oslo, 26.04.04, [www.npaid.org](http://www.npaid.org)
3. "Ending violence against women", Klækken, Norway 27.-30.04.04, workshop report, [www.npaid.org](http://www.npaid.org)
4. "Not a Minute More! Ending Violence Against Women", UNIFEM 2003, [www.unifem.org](http://www.unifem.org)
5. "Women – War – Peace", Progress of the World's Women 2002, Volume 1, by Elisabeth Rehn & Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, appointed by UNIFEM for an independent experts' assessment
6. "It's in our hands – Stop violence against women", Amnesty International 2004, [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)
7. "Women, Peace and Security" Report of the UN Secretary General to the Security Council, 16. October 2002, [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/publication](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/publication)

## **Annex 2: Regional instruments/tools to end violence against women**

- Africa:**
- The Protocol on the Rights of women in Africa, African Charter on Human and People's Rights, 2003
  - The African Platform of Action
- America:**
- The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (The Convention of Belèm do Parà), 1994
- Asia:**
- Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Sub-Committee on Women, 1975
- Europe:**
- Council of Europe Measures to Combat Violence Against Women, 2002

NPA Board meeting 15.04.05

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<sup>14</sup> Reference is made to the documents "NPA's Ethical Guidelines" and "Sanctions in case of violation of Ethical Guidelines.