



We can end all violence against women

The six-year, six-country, South Asian Campaign to End All Violence against Women - or the **'We Can'** campaign - aims to deal with violence women endure daily, both within their homes and in the larger society in **Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan.**

It recognizes violence against women is rooted in gender inequality and that whether in homes or outside, it reflects the power structures in society which relegate the status of women to be only after that of men. Its starting point is, thus, to deal with conditions that systematically deny women their lives, health, rights, choices, and power in the family.

Violence against women affects every woman's life, even if she herself is not a victim. It is evident in every decision she makes - or does not - (within homes, social settings or workplace) be it the mode of dress, behavior or movement. And, in turn, it affects each one in society adversely.

Launched in 2004 and being taken forward by over **1,810 organizations in the six countries**, 'We Can' has raised large scale public awareness on bias, inequality, and violence against women and is a trigger for a new consciousness, attitudinal change and enhancement of rights.

It is allowing millions of ordinary men and women find their own solutions to violence in their homes and lives, and find ways to reject it.

In its second phase now, 'We Can' is building social cohesion and networks. This will support and sustain the created change, foster an organized mass movement, and aid in transforming existing power relations in society to end all violence against women.

The campaign seeks to spark awareness in ordinary women and men that VAW is an issue for them personally and they have the capacity to do something about. The idea is not that the campaign alliance recruits volunteers to work to promote its aims, but that change makers identify goals of their own in response to 'We Can' messages and discussions with peers. The campaign can provide the stimulus and encouragement to people to live up to their own moral aspirations. Once someone embarks on that course, it is then in their interest to raise awareness in others in order to garner support for their own change process – and so on in ever-widening circles of change. Alliance partners and change makers in Nepal remark that requests for material incentives are common when individuals and communities first come into contact with the campaign, but that these tend to die away once people start to make it their own and see that they can make changes in their immediate sphere, to their own benefit and without necessarily incurring personal costs.

At the same time, there are many reasons why someone might be attracted to the campaign, beyond the immediate benefits of reducing violence in their own life. Some change makers see the appeal in improved self-esteem, social recognition and respect – and these are benefits the campaign can foster through public acknowledgement of the role of change makers. For others it is a chance to be part of an international campaign, or to support a local organisation they admire. Whatever the 'pull', to date a

combination of more peripheral factors such as these and personal identification with the central aims of the campaign has proved sufficient to spur over half a million change makers into voluntary action.

The campaign's model of change is unique. It is centered on individuals addressing structural gender inequalities. The Campaign includes:

- large numbers of men and women and organisations to oppose violence against women through large scale public awareness programmes and empathy for the issue.
- emphasis on people and personal change.
- the belief that people change when they recognise something as their own problem, and feel both that another way is possible, and that they themselves are capable of taking it.
- Promoting the positive message that violence is neither acceptable nor inevitable, and that ordinary women and men have the capacity to end it.
- focusing on personal change, it taps into people's self-interest, and also puts the possibility of solutions at a level that they can influence themselves.
- genuine understanding and commitment to personal change can trigger in ordinary women and men; the aim is to spark such authentic change in the widest possible number.
- Change Makers actively aid in this process. They do not offer readymade solutions. Instead they raise awareness on the issue through personal interaction and the communication aids they are provided with, extend information about support services and networks and offer the campaign identity as aids for change.
- Everybody - students, housewives, teachers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, businesses, policy makers, religious groups and rural populations, among others are encouraged to find their own solutions to violence in their lives and within their community, make their own choices, and carry it forward at the pace they determine.

The emphasis is on engaging critical thinking and engagement of people and the perpetrators and not on putting them on the defensive by 'naming and shaming'.

The campaign, hence, only provides the stimulus and encouragement to people to live up to their own moral aspirations. Once someone embarks on that course, it is then in their interest to raise awareness in others in order to garner support for their own change process.

The campaign also provides a common platform for discrete individuals and organisations making efforts to empower women facing violence in the six countries.

While each of the campaign allies responds in their own manner to the unique social, cultural, political and economic environments and have different focus areas, they are all bound by their commitment to the long-term and sustained process of the campaign to change social attitudes on violence against women.

<http://www.wecanendvaw.org/>