

LEARNING FROM PRACTICE: PREVENTION SERIES

# RESISTANCE AND BACKLASH TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

LESSONS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS FUNDED BY THE UN TRUST FUND TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Awareness session of land documentation. Credit: Mamun Ur Rashid/Badabon Sangho (Bangladesh)

Civil society organizations (CSOs) working on the prevention of violence against women and girls (VAW/G) face numerous forms of resistance<sup>1</sup>. In the prevention space, resistance to work that seeks to end VAW/G is quite common: the forms it takes include denial of support for feminist work, pushback on what are considered progressive feminist agendas, attacks on civil society spaces, and even the re-emergence of past resistance because of shifting political agendas. Resistance is often political, so CSOs may also have to manage geopolitics and ideologies.

This paper, part of the Learning from Practice: Prevention Series, draws on the experiences of eight UN Trust Fund-supported CSOs in Armenia, Jordan, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Serbia and Turkey, which highlight the different forms of resistance that they encounter and the pathways that they take to mitigate, respond to and manage resistance and backlash.

## Key lessons learned include:

1. CSOs face a range of forms of resistance or backlash as they work with communities to prevent VAW/G

The most common and undocumented forms of resistance identified were passive, such as denial that there was a problem with VAW/G in their communities, deflections away from the issue of violence prevention, inertia in taking action, and expressions of prejudice and discrimination. More active forms of resistance emerged where stakeholders recognized VAW/G as an issue in their community but covertly attempted to disrupt the process of change and limit its impact. The CSOs experienced instances of appeasement, co-option, appropriation, repression and backlash.

<sup>1</sup> Here we refer to negative resistance to progressive social change and prevention work.

For example, in **Pakistan**, Shirkat Gah's activities faced frequent inquiries and surveillance by local government offices. As a response, the organization had to find novel ways of engaging with existing power structures in the region and identified key male allies from the community who acted as supportive intermediaries.

## 2. CSOs use several strategies to mitigate or prevent resistance

When facing resistance, organizations have developed several response strategies, including working with other stakeholder institutions where engagement and dialogue are possible; raising awareness and mobilizing communities; adapting the intervention or reframing narratives where required; and building internal capacities for resilience.

For example, in **Armenia**, Society Without Violence mitigated the impact of strong anti-gender campaigns by conducting a risk assessment. As a result, it decided to pursue the project's goals while limiting public exposure.

### Key recommendations from practitioners include:

- Integrate risk mitigation exercises into programme design to plan for resistance.
- Consider more research on resistance to prevention work in different geographical and sociocultural contexts.
- Help organizations find solidarity and communities of practice to safely share their experiences of resistance and their response strategies.

For the full set of conclusions and recommendations, please read the paper through the QR code below:



## About the Prevention Series

As part of its commitment to elevating practice-based knowledge, the UN Trust Fund commissioned a prevention series of 10 papers on “Learning from Practice”, produced in collaboration with almost 100 grantees and external researchers. Each paper in the series draws on the monitoring and evaluation reports of 10 civil society organizations that are implementing prevention projects funded by the UN Trust Fund in different countries and contexts. The findings identified 10 key pathways to prevent violence against women and girls. Each theme is explored in conversations with 10 grantees, resulting in one detailed report per theme.

Scan the QR code below to listen to a podcast about this topic.



## About the UN Trust Fund

The UN Trust Fund, managed by UN Women on behalf of the UN system, remains the only global, multilateral grant-giving mechanism exclusively dedicated to supporting efforts to prevent and end violence against women and girls. Since its establishment in 1996 by UN General Assembly [resolution 50/166](#), the UN Trust Fund has awarded USD 215 million to 646 initiatives in 140 countries and territories. Focusing on preventing violence, implementing laws and policies, and improving access to vital services for survivors, the UN Trust Fund invests in life-changing initiatives for millions of women and girls around the world.

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