



**OXFAM**  
Canada

# GENDER JUSTICE: ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**WE LIVE IN A RICH WORLD. YET MORE THAN A BILLION PEOPLE LIVE IN EXTREME POVERTY, AND THE GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR IS WIDENING. GENDER IS A MAIN PREDICTOR FOR WHO WILL BE POOR AND WHO WILL HAVE POWER.**

**Gender Justice** is the goal of full equality and equity among women and girls and men and boys in all spheres of life. It is the result of women, jointly – and on an equal basis with men – defining and shaping the policies, structures and decisions that affect their lives and society as a whole. It is both an outcome and a process.

## **GENDER JUSTICE REQUIRES WE WORK TOGETHER ON TWO LEVELS**

- ▶ To change societal attitudes and behaviour that lie at the heart of gender inequality;
- ▶ To change those laws, policies and government programs that discriminate against women and sustain gender inequality.

If you don't deal with gender justice issues you are only dealing with fifty percent of the problem. You still have to go back and deal with the other half.

Teresa Mugadza,  
Zimbabwean feminist and  
human rights activist

## **ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread and acute human rights violations. According to the United Nations, one out of three women and girls worldwide is estimated to have been a victim of violence or sexual abuse.<sup>1</sup> It is not only a major cause of death, ill-health and disability. Violence also prevents women and girls from escaping poverty by limiting their choices and access to education and by making it harder to earn a living or participate in political and public life.

Slow gains in the global acceptance of women's rights as human rights are now under threat. The "war on terror" and growing militarization in many regions of the world has effectively narrowed the space and resources for the promotion of women's rights, resulting in reduced health and reproductive rights, reduced sexual rights and freedoms, reduced autonomy and rights in the public sphere and increased violence against women.<sup>2</sup>

Social practices and cultural traditions that sanction unequal power relations between men and women result in women and girls having little control over their fertility, sexuality and marital choices. Restricting women's ability to negotiate safer sex or discuss reproductive health issues with their partners is a major factor in the HIV/AIDS epidemic in many parts of the world. Women now account for half of all HIV/AIDS infections worldwide. In sub-Saharan Africa, approximately 60 percent of all adults living with HIV are women.<sup>3</sup> HIV positive women face stigma, discrimination, and violence.

Oxfam Canada uses a rights-based, transformative approach to strengthen women and girls' capacity to mobilize their own power and that of others.

This means we work towards people realizing their basic human rights through transformational change, which creates a fundamental and lasting improvement in women's lives.

Oxfam's efforts to end violence against women ranges from the provision of services to support for survivors to girls' education programs. Oxfam also supports advocacy campaigns for better laws that enshrine women's rights in national legislation.

## STORIES FROM OXFAM CANADA'S PARTNERS

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### SEKE RURAL HOME BASED CARE, ZIMBABWE

Twelve hundred community volunteers – all but a few of them women – devote part of their week to supporting people who are HIV positive, ensuring no one is abandoned. A key part of their work is changing the underlying attitudes and behaviours that put themselves and their daughters at risk of violence and infection.



Through song and dance, drama and discussions that involve the whole community – including the village elders and the keepers of culture – they expose the practices and the underlying power relations that explain why young women are the most vulnerable to HIV. They create a safe space for frank and honest discussion. They are transforming lives by breaking taboos.

These incredible women and men also support families who have lost someone close to AIDS, often the same families who have seen extreme weather destroy their crops or who have been forced to leave their communities in search of work. This calls for integrated support programming, including the introduction of community gardens. Using drip irrigation and intensive, organic farming methods, the organization has had great results: improving diets, increasing incomes and helping families become more resilient and self-sufficient in coping with the many intertwined challenges they face.

## MEN'S ASSOCIATION AGAINST VIOLENCE, NICARAGUA

This Association works with men, especially young men, on understanding traditional concepts of masculinity and how they relate to violence against women and to HIV/AIDS. An important part of the work is educational, and includes a group training manual that promotes reflection and personal change on issues such as violence, sexual and reproductive rights, responsible parenting, gender roles, and housework.

Teenager Victor Javier Martinez, 17, credits the Association for helping change his attitude, values and understanding of the dominant macho behaviour.



*"It wasn't easy, because that's the way we've been brought up, what we're told; when my Dad hit me, he would say, "don't cry, be a man." I remember when I was around 5, I would wash the dishes and hang around in the kitchen. When I was around 10 or 11 my Dad would say, "what are you doing in there, that's for women." After going through the educational process with the Association, I'm back in the kitchen again. Even my Dad goes into the kitchen."*

The Association has also taught Victor about violence against women, how speech and gestures can inflict pain. "When it was hard to change, we'd talk about it in the group, and we monitor the group.... We ask the wives, other guys, their friends, to see if everyone is practicing what they preach, because it doesn't do any good to just talk the talk," explains Victor. "It made me reflect on my personal life and on how to make changes in my life."

## ENDING GLOBAL POVERTY BEGINS WITH WOMEN'S RIGHTS.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Ending Violence Against Women. An Oxfam Guide. November 2012, 4.

<sup>2</sup> AWID, *Contexts and Trends Influencing Funding Landscape for Gender Equality and Women's Organizations & Movements*, February 2010, p.25

<sup>3</sup> UNAIDS AIDS Epidemic Update 2009, [http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2009/jc1700\\_epi\\_update\\_2009\\_en.pdf](http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2009/jc1700_epi_update_2009_en.pdf).

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