

# Evaluation of South Asia We Can Campaign to End Violence against Women: 'Light Touch' Review of Year 1

Executive Summary

Oxfam GB Programme Evaluation

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## Executive Summary

The first phase of the campaign is on the right track and represents a major achievement. Enthusiasm, commitment, courage and excitement are evident at all levels not least due to the campaign's tackling an issue of real concern to millions of people in their every day lives. The campaign message is getting through to thousands of people and groups (although not always fully understood or fully accurate). There is growing and significant commitment to challenge the acceptability of domestic violence where this awareness didn't exist before. Extensive training of change makers is happening, albeit some of questionable quality.

But most importantly, We Can is empowering people: in many cases, creating a sense of energy and power to take action on an issue of fundamental importance, while at the same time providing tools and a way forward. It is giving individuals the opportunity and means of making different choices in their **own** lives as well as the courage to try to influence the choices of others. For many people, awareness of the issue is not new, but most have been without an accessible vehicle for action. The campaign offers a positive message, an alternative vision and the necessary practical steps. This has created a sense of measured optimism and confidence about the possibility of creating incremental change.

The campaign is seen by most as inclusive and embracing of wide sectors of civil society providing Oxfam and partners with a mechanism for reaching out to men and women in new sectors. Most partners had not done this before, especially those which had worked almost exclusively with women. Traditionally, previous initiatives on domestic violence have focused on working with women's organisations and/or have had a primary focus on policy change working mainly from a middle-class urban base. For these latter organisations, We Can has provided a new and practical tool to work at the grass roots level. The positive message of the campaign is a key success factor so far in bringing in new people and organisations (especially from the non NGO world) to the issue.

Arguably We Can is breaking new ground, at least within Oxfam, in creating a distinctive model of grass roots popular campaigning - using programme development skills, tools and methods. This 'hybrid' model is a new approach for Oxfam with impressive results to date. Further organisational attention is needed to distil the learning from We Can model to understand more clearly:

- What is working and what isn't in effecting change in beliefs and practice (moving beyond anecdotes)
- how We Can could strengthen both the campaigns and development programmes.

The campaign materials are a huge success, well received and heavily used. They have enabled difficult messages to be widely accessible without being overwhelming - in spite of the complexity and sensitivity of the issues involved.

Working with rural and urban young people - a new constituency for Oxfam and most partners - is considered a significant innovation and success by all. A number of partners are already building on this and drawing young people into other development initiatives. In addition, a number of other donors and partners have now incorporated domestic violence into their wider programme priorities.

The decision taken by OGB senior managers to let countries take the campaign forward in a way appropriate to each context (rather than follow a rigid blueprint) appears to have been the right one. This has meant a different pace and forms in different countries:

- **Bangladesh** gives a very positive impression of what is going on at community and national levels. The campaign is a vibrant, living experience with much energy, commitment and optimism in spite of the challenges facing partners and change makers, particularly, the increasing threat of religious opposition. The strong, creative leadership role played by OGB staff in driving and shaping the campaign at all levels has been key to success. Partners and other social actors are clear about the broad purpose of the campaign. Good, solid steps have been taken towards building a national, independent alliance. Initial stirrings of alliances/networks at state level need more attention from the in-country We Can teams.

The campaign will still need careful nurturing for some years to come: understanding more clearly 'what works' in terms of influencing ideas and beliefs and changing practice is critical as is more systematic follow up for change makers. The creation of a wider over-arching public 'campaign' to support the grass roots work of the change makers was seen by many as a critical component which needs to be strengthened.

- **In South India** the strong commitment is evident of the Andhra Pradesh Women's Network (APWN) – the single partner taking the campaign forward in AP.<sup>1</sup> While the partner is very clear on the broad aim of the campaign, there was more evidence of 'task' implementation (in terms of running trainings, getting the change maker kits distributed, holding events, etc) but less clarity on strategic thinking and future implementation of the campaign. Also absent was any sense of leadership and drive towards the future from the partner, but rather an assumption that this would come from Oxfam. OGB staff play a very effective support and accompaniment role to partner and are widely appreciated by the partner. This however is unlikely to be sufficient for moving forward and certainly not for scale up given the partner's limitations and lack of strategic capacity.
- In addition there has been very little active thinking and no concrete work to date on local or state alliance building (other than a complex and abortive attempt of a few years ago). The partner is unlikely to be up to the task on its own, and it would be a high risk decision to invest in them as the key player in bringing the state alliance together.

Inevitably, in spite of the significant achievements of We Can to date, there are critical 'fault-lines' which need serious attention. Further recommendations are also outlined in Section 3, pp 24-28.

**Alliance – building:** The conceptual framing and thinking behind the campaign (change objective, framing the message, change makers strategy) is sound and excellent. There is, however, a corresponding gap in thinking about the organisational and external alliance framework needed to ensure that the campaign will be sustainable and successful in the long-term as an independent initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> Comments and observations are based on visits to only two members of the multi-member network and as such may not be representative of the wider achievements of the APWN as a whole. While staff were concerned with much of the evidence from these two visits, they assured the Review team that experience was stronger with other APWN members.

There is an urgent need to focus on design and a planning and implementation framework for alliance-building including:

- further clarity on what kind of alliances are needed to build a mass movement
- better analysis and understanding of the different roles required of Oxfam staff
- the different kinds of alliances appropriate to distinctive country and local contexts
- staff and partner skill sets needed to take this work forward
- milestones to be achieved within a reasonable time frame

Included in this process should be the essential step of staff's sharing more systematically the overall vision and strategy to date with key partners and actors, especially those playing a leadership role in the campaign. Without this, real buy-in for the future will be hampered as will the capacity of others to play a leadership role in building campaign independence.

**Time frame:** While the campaign has rightly established a long-term time-frame (2005-2011), it is likely that an even longer overall time-frame will be needed to achieve full independence and sustainability. Most partners buy in fully to the objective of independence but feel that more than a few years will be needed to achieve the spread, solid building blocks, ownership and capacity. It is likely that countries will differ in the time needed to get these building blocks for a solid independent alliance in place. Timeframes are also likely to differ for alliance building at district/state/provincial levels.

**The Message:** The timing and phasing of the carefully crafted campaign message needs to be reconsidered. It is clear that for many change makers it will take longer to consolidate the basic elements of the message on domestic violence while others are ready to move on to a more complex message, and indeed, some already have. There is a further danger of some change makers getting 'stuck' with a simplistic message about reducing family tension and creating greater harmony while not necessarily understanding or accepting the fundamental issue of women's rights and gender-based discrimination.

**Change makers strategy:** The change-makers strategy appears to be working but is hard to measure or identify what works most effectively. It was difficult get beyond the simple rhetoric and stories to identify clearly what works and what doesn't in influencing people's beliefs and practice.<sup>2</sup> In south India, it was difficult to assess to what extent the element of 'personal change' had been embedded versus the arguably easier task of trying to change the behaviour of others. The introduction of big target numbers was a surprise to some and the drive to achieve numbers might have had some negative impact on quality of campaign delivery, especially in south India, where the personal change element of strategy also appeared relatively weak.

Follow up with change makers is a serious problem for most partners with some more aware and beginning to think about it than others. Overall, change makers still and will meet a lot of resistance with family, friends, community; further thinking on alternative influencing strategies and how to overcome this resistance was asked for by many change makers.

**Materials:** A wide range of suggestions were made by partners and change makers about how to make the materials even more successful. These are outlined in

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<sup>2</sup> although the planned impact assessment work will begin to tackle this

Section 3, as are a series of suggestions for strengthening the campaign's capacity to mobilise, sustain and retain change makers.

**Oxfam's role:** A major challenge to Oxfam from partners focused on the organisation's failure to date to integrate We Can and the campaign issues into wider regional and in-country programming. While a number of partners have integrated domestic violence into other programme streams, Oxfam is still seen to be keeping We Can in a separate bubble.

A major strength of We Can is the very able people who make up the team. In order to ensure the team will be able to meet future challenges, greater priority is needed on:

- strengthening the leadership capacity of the team, ie. in addition to the strong focus on operational delivery
- being clearer about the changing and most appropriate role(s) for staff to play over time
- bringing campaigns-specific experience into the team which could be adapted to meet the distinctive We Can model
- establishing a clearer matrix management relationship between the centrally based We Can coordinator and the in-country leads.

It was reassuring to find that many of the issues identified in the Review process were already on the radar of some of the We Can team, or at least not far off. This team has the capacity and commitment to tackle the fault-lines.

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