

# THE 'WE CAN' CAMPAIGN IN SOUTH ASIA

---

**By Duncan Green**

*To me, change is the killing of fear. For example, someone may know how to sing but will not sing. Someone or something needs to kindle the fire in you and kill the fear that stops you from changing. I have killed the fear of talking and that is a change for me.*

Selvaranjani Mukkaiah, Change Maker, Badulla, Sri Lanka

**We Can End All Violence Against Women ('We Can'<sup>1</sup>) in South Asia is an extraordinary, viral campaign on violence against women (VAW), reaching millions of men and women across six countries and subsequently spreading to other countries in Africa, Europe and the Americas. What's different about 'We Can' (apart from its scale) is that:**

- It is not primarily concerned with changing policies, laws, constitutions or lobbying the authorities. Instead, it aims to go to scale, by changing attitudes and beliefs about gender roles at community level. A special feature is the 'Change Maker' approach, which comes with a special ritual in the form of the 'We Can' pledge to reflect on one's own practice, end VAW in one's own life and to talk to 10 others about it.
- It seeks to involve men as well as women, with remarkable success
- Its origins lie in a South–South exchange: the 'We Can' methodology was developed from VAW community programmes in Uganda.<sup>2</sup>

## BACKGROUND

Violence against women (VAW) is deeply entrenched in South Asia, forming part of a wider pattern of discrimination and exclusion of women. According to the original South Asian 'We Can' campaign strategy in 2005:<sup>3</sup>

- One in every two women in South Asia faces violence in her daily life.
- Social customs and attitudes that support VAW are entrenched and institutionalized at all levels – home, family, community, society and the State.
- Underlying the acceptance of VAW is the deep-seated social belief that women are fundamentally of less value than men. This pervasive culture of patriarchy and VAW in the region affects women's lives, rights and their opportunities in almost all spheres of life.
- Despite successful actions by women's organizations over the past three decades, the scale and severity of discrimination and VAW is on the rise.
- More than 50 million women are 'missing' from the population in South Asia as a result. There are only 94 women for every 100 men and the situation is predicted to worsen.<sup>4</sup>
- To end VAW, it is important to challenge and change existing social attitudes that accept it as 'normal'; mobilize all sections of the family, community and society to eliminate it; build popular pressure on the State to implement gender-equal laws and policies; and bring together diverse local, national, regional and international efforts working to combat VAW.

In addition, South Asia is home to a vibrant women's movement which has achieved some remarkable institutional breakthroughs, such as 'reservations' of a third of elected posts at local government level in India and Pakistan (25 percent in Bangladesh)<sup>5</sup> and the creation of globally renowned organizations such as the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA).<sup>6</sup> Allied to progress (tangible though inadequate) in other areas of women's rights, such as access to education and involvement in the paid workforce, this meant that while the gender divide in South Asia is stark, the outlook for change was propitious.

## WHAT HAPPENED?

Launched in 2004, by 2011 'We Can' had signed up approximately 3.9 million women and men to be 'Change Makers' – advocating for an end to VAW in their homes and communities. Unexpectedly, about half of the Change Makers were men. A survey of some 1,800 Change Makers and their 'circles of influence' – those closest to them – found some level of changes in attitudes to VAW among 91 percent of those involved.<sup>7</sup> An external evaluation in 2011 conservatively estimated that 'some 7.4 million women and men who participated in 'We Can' and related activities, have started transforming their perceptions of gender roles and VAW, as well as their behaviour.'<sup>8</sup>

The campaign was developed by the Oxfam GB gender working group in South Asia, but designed as an independent campaign. It was implemented by diverse alliances in six countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Oxfam GB country offices initially invited partners in ongoing projects to form fledgling 'We Can' alliances. There was no blueprint for alliance development; alliance structures and

processes varied from country to country. The campaign allies had much leeway in developing their mobilization strategies – within a joint, clearly articulated regional strategy. High quality campaign materials were centrally designed, and subsequently adjusted to national contexts and languages.

## BUDGET

Between 2004 and 2011, the campaign had a budget of over £10.5m, including UK and Dutch government funding, and £0.5mn from the *Oxfam Unwrapped* fundraising scheme.<sup>8</sup>

## MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

'We Can' is probably one of the most-reviewed campaigns on ending VAW. Oxfam GB undertook a first round of internal reviews in five campaign countries in 2006–7. Large-scale, in-depth outcome assessments were carried out in 2007 (phase I, India and Bangladesh) and in 2009–10 (phase II assessment in five countries). A 148-page book, published in 2009 and updated in 2012,<sup>9</sup> traces the history and development of the campaign. Change Maker stories are available on the campaign website and print materials. Oxfam GB's 2012 Bangladesh Effectiveness Review was the first to try and make a comparison with a control group of communities.<sup>10</sup>

## THEORY OF CHANGE

### Power analysis

Power analysis reflects national and local contexts. According to Michaela Raab, who has been associated with the campaign as an external evaluator and occasional contributor to strategy development, 'Different alliances appear to pursue different strategies, for instance East African alliances appear to have been more successful at getting religious / traditional leaders and opinion-makers on board than South Asian alliances'.<sup>11</sup>

### Change hypothesis

In 2009, Raab identified a dozen assumptions underpinning We Can's understanding of change.

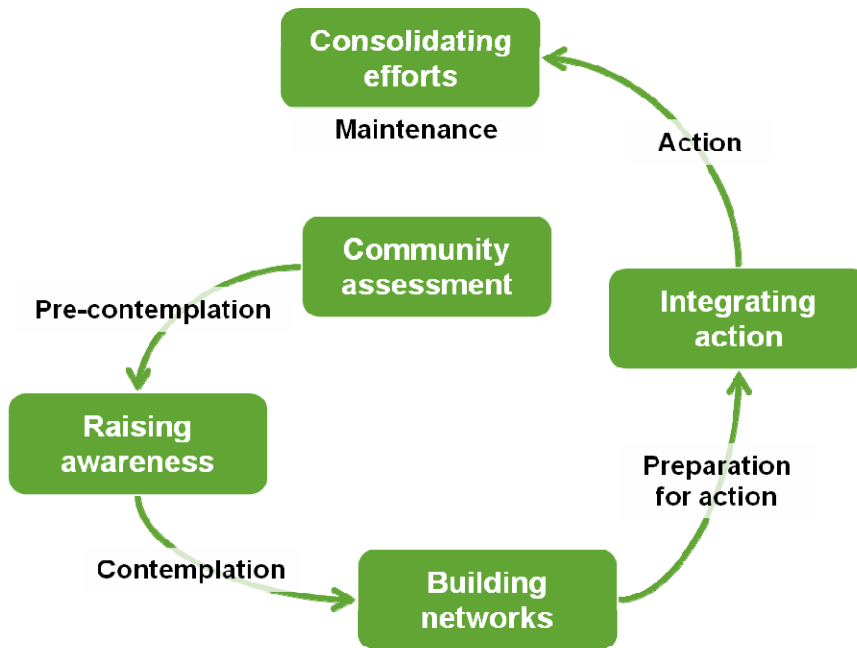
1. Current gender-inequitable social attitudes support VAW.
2. Social attitudes can be changed.
3. If VAW is socially unacceptable, VAW will decline.
4. Social attitude change on VAW requires large-scale multi-level multifaceted interventions reaching most sectors of society.
5. Social attitude change on VAW takes many years.
6. More gender-equitable attitudes in society will reduce VAW.
7. Men are key allies in ending VAW and promoting equity.
8. Change is the responsibility of the individual.

9. Change is within the power of the individual.
10. Change is a social process.
11. People can make a deliberate choice to change their attitude
12. Attitude change requires a supportive environment.<sup>12</sup>

'We Can' starts from the premise that 'real change can come only from within, from sustained action at an individual level, born of personal reflection and understanding and replicated on an ever larger scale through demonstration and mutual support. The premise is that people change when they recognise the problem for themselves, see alternatives, and – through understanding, freedom of choice and peer validation – feel empowered to act'.<sup>13</sup>

The campaign adopted the 'stages of change' model, based on the work of the NGO 'Raising Voices' in Uganda. Figure 1 represents the stages of change developed by Prochaska *et al.* (1992) and adapted by Raising Voices. 'We Can' sees its work as falling into four 'phases', corresponding to the phases in the model, although in practice these phases overlap and sometimes converge.

**Figure 1: Stages of change model**



Source: Prochaska *et al* (1992)<sup>14</sup>

**Phase I:** Raising Awareness (Engaging, Convincing, Inspiring), raising awareness with individual women.

**Phase II:** Building Networks (Supporting and Mobilizing Change Makers), which includes preparing them to take a public stand and action on VAW.

**Phase III:** Integrating Action (Supporting, Recognizing, Celebrating), encouraging 'We Can' groups to work together.

**Phase IV:** Consolidating Efforts (Strategizing, Securing, Sustaining) aiming to institutionalize mechanisms to advocate for and defend women's rights.

## Oxfam's change strategy

We Can's approach differs from 'traditional' Oxfam campaigns, which tend to focus on rallying popular support for specific objectives in policy advocacy. Unlike other Oxfam GB campaigns, 'We Can' was not Oxfam branded and not formally Oxfam-led. Although Oxfam and former Oxfam staff members have played an important role in running the campaign, which was created and managed by the Oxfam GB regional office, campaign leadership was collective and somewhat informal. Although some degree of power resided with Oxfam staff as the main funder of the campaign, they made an effort not to be the public leader of 'We Can', and there has been much consultation within the 3,300 campaign alliance members ('allies') across the sub-continent. These unusual features might be partly responsible for uneven levels of appreciation and support within Oxfam headquarters and country offices.

Oxfam started building 'We Can' campaign alliances in 2004. The alliances have followed different paths of development:

**Bangladesh:** A 33-strong national committee led the campaign, which was carried forward by some 500 organizations, including 'unusual' allies e.g. boy scouts and girl guides, trade unions, business and professional associations. The 'We Can' alliances in 48 districts, covering three-quarters of the country's districts, were led by 517 women and 766 men.

**India:** National alliance members were present in 13 states, reaching a total of 219 districts, the equivalent to about one-third of all districts. In twelve states, the 'We Can' alliance was led by a single 'nodal agency', which functioned as a state secretariat.

**Nepal:** 'We Can' alliances, animated by some 360 organizations, worked at national, regional (three networks) and district (37 alliances) levels; an inter-district alliance was formed by local government bodies who participated in the campaign. The national alliance (20 members) has reached four development regions and 41 out of the country's 75 districts.

**Pakistan:** The national 'We Can' alliance coordinated 750 allies. It reached 35 districts in five provinces, the equivalent to about one-third of the country's districts.

**Sri Lanka:** In 2009, the campaign, run by 'district action groups' and coordinated by a national alliance of some 10 members, aimed to reach 19 districts (out of 25). Up to eight 'We Can' centres with dedicated staff facilitated the campaign.

**Afghanistan:** An alliance of six Kabul-based organizations launched 'We Can' in a series of public events in late 2010/ early 2011.

There was no overall South Asian *regional* alliance. Until March 2011, the Oxfam GB South Asia Regional Centre hosted a regional 'We Can' secretariat within its Global Centre of Learning on VAW.

For the campaign itself, change started with the Change Makers, who in an exercise known as 'clean the broom before you sweep' were 'encouraged first to recognise, understand and address the acceptance of violence in their own lives, attitudes and behaviour before seeking to persuade others to do the same. [Thus] the campaign brought the goal of eliminating gender-based violence within the sphere which individuals can hope to

influence.’ Even minor changes in attitudes (a boy no longer demanding that his sister brings him water) were seen as significant.

This includes ‘naming as violence actions that are commonly tolerated or accepted... to point up and challenge the action and the attitudes which underpin it, rather than the individuals involved.’<sup>13</sup>

‘We Can’ deliberately promoted a broad definition of VAW to include not just physical violence, but exclusion, intimidation and early marriage.

‘We Can’ was about ideas (‘VAW is wrong’) rather than specific actions. Change Makers improvised, intervening with families and neighbours in cases of violence, talking with peers about violence, encouraging families and neighbours to educate girls and allow them greater mobility, acting to stop harassment of girls in public spaces and, for male Change Makers, playing a more active role in household chores.

Phase I of the campaign was focused on awareness-raising that encouraged individuals to reflect on VAW and gender inequality in their own lives. Women and men joined the campaign with the ‘Change Maker pledge’:

*(i) Not to tolerate or perpetuate violence against women under any circumstances, and (ii) to motivate at least ten people to help prevent and end gender discrimination and violence against women.*

Phase II was designed to systematically re-engage Change Makers and support them in deepening change, for example by becoming more involved in wider advocacy work, through the participation of Change Makers in local-level activities and work with institutions they may be part of.

Evaluations bore out the importance of building the density of contacts between Change Makers and others: ‘Change Makers were strongest where they had been in constant contact with Campaign allies, other Change Makers and other organizations working in the field. This finding was echoed in the Bangladesh Effectiveness Review, which found that significant results were only achieved in the community where ‘We Can’ had been at its most intense.

## **Communications**

A great deal of thought and effort went into designing communications materials that could reach millions of women and men:

*The materials and the Change Makers together form the growing web upon which the success of the Campaign depends. From posters to story booklets; street theatre to poetry and songs; seminars to public rallies; bags, caps, t-shirts, badges, stickers, pencil cases and key rings with the ‘We Can’ logo; comics to television spots; puppets to kites; murals to billboards – a huge range of formal, informal, traditional and popular media is used to bring ‘We Can’ messages to its great variety of potential audiences and activists.*

Aldred and Williams, 2012<sup>15</sup>

Deeply rooted in the Stages of Change theory, communications materials were developed, field tested and adapted to different contexts, but subject to an informal sign off to ensure they reflected We Can's underlying theory of change.

'We Can' recognised that changing entrenched attitudes and practices needed a process rather than a one-off change. It tried therefore to engage people to examine the issue of VAW repeatedly through different learning materials. Through keeping or creating the space for dialogue and debate, change makers could grow or deepen their own change and influence others.

Thus, for example, women and men have used packs of posters depicting typical South Asian scenes of VAW – men on women; mothers-in-law on daughters-in-law – to engage friends and neighbours in discussion. The packs were prized by Change Makers, appearing to convey status or pride for their owners, whether male or female.

Guidelines over the nature of materials have been successively refined, to include:

- Images to be positive and not depict people in derogatory ways.
- Messages to be respectful not blaming.
- Depicting a sense of solidarity between women is important.
- Messages to encourage reflection without providing solutions.<sup>15</sup>

## Involving men

The campaign consciously targeted men, both in terms of allies planning and also the focus of the materials. It avoided pointing fingers, focusing on the actions not the person and enabling men to become Change Makers who acknowledge that they have been violent but can change. The campaign also focused on youth and, depending on alliances and contexts, that meant young men too.

There is anecdotal evidence from different male Change Makers as to why they joined the campaign. Mostly, men talked about becoming conscious that what they thought was normal behaviour was actually a form of violence, but also about their perceptions of the benefits of changing – improved relationships in the home.

In Pakistan, male Change Makers outnumber female Change Makers by over 2:1, perhaps because restrictions on women's mobility in some regions where 'We Can' was active made it hard for women to participate in public activities.

Male 'We Can' activists from Bangladesh even reported that men talked to each other about their very pleasant experience with (We Can-promoted) consensual sex with their spouses (as opposed to the 'traditional', coercive version), and how that convinced them.

But working with men also raised difficult issues. Some saw the materials as reinforcing the role of men and boys as protectors of women and, in its efforts to make it comfortable for men to join, the campaign failed to effectively challenge underlying power imbalances.

*There is a risk that male Change Makers are rewarded for benevolent patriarchy – allowing their wives and relatives certain freedoms within the overall structures of male control... the creation of 'happy families' by reducing some forms of violence, at*

*the expense of greater rights and freedoms for women and a chance for permanent change. However, there are also numerous reports of men facing ridicule or opposition for supporting women, opposing violence or changing customary rules of behaviour.*

Aldred and Williams, 2012<sup>15</sup>

Mona Mehta, who has been a crucial figure in the campaign since the beginning, cautions against generalizations here:

*In a large number of cases, men and boys engaging in the campaign were not overtly practicing violence. Even in South Asia there is a substantive percentage of the male population who is not violent. For them, the change process is somewhat different - a lot of it was about changing roles, sharing household work, supporting their sisters, friends, mothers, wives etc. For men in relationships where there was more overt violence, the change was a lot more visible and radical.*

Mona Mehta, 2014<sup>16</sup>

'We Can' recognised that changing entrenched attitudes and practices needed a process rather than a one-off change. It tried therefore to engage people to examine the issue of VAW repeatedly through different learning materials. Through keeping or creating the space for dialogue and debate, change makers could grow or deepen their own change and influence others.

## RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

While the *quantity* of the reach of 'We Can' is striking, the *quality* of impact on attitudes and beliefs has proved harder to assess, with different insights emerging from different methodologies. According to the September 2011 External Evaluation report by Michaela Rabb:

*Overall, 'We Can' campaigners and external women's activists in South Asia report significant, encouraging changes in social norms, despite other, unhelpful trends such as the rise of religious fundamentalisms. "For sure the silence has been broken": VAW is publicly discussed and condemned. Young women seem "not as submissive as they used to be"; more survivors of VAW are seeking support. Men's and boys' engagement in initiatives against VAW has reportedly increased.*

Michaela Raab, 2009<sup>12</sup>

However, the lack of reliable statistics (which, due to issues of complexity and because of taboos surrounding VAW, would be difficult to generate) makes it extremely difficult to gauge the precise degree to which people and their ideas have changed, and what share in such change can be attributed to 'We Can'.

Suzanne Williams, who has been involved in documenting 'We Can' at intervals over several years, believes the question of attribution is best understood in terms of contribution rather than a crudely linear causation.

*In 'We Can', where individuals were asked to make significant and difficult changes in their lives, many factors came into play. Change could not be attributed solely to*



*the Campaign, nor to the organisations that worked with individuals – but all the evidence gathered in the wide range of studies and evaluations conducted suggests that the campaign contributed significantly to the changes in their lives with regard to violence as perceived by the participants.*

Suzanne Williams, 2014<sup>17</sup>

Why do such numbers of women and men sign up? Beyond a personal experience of violence (e.g. between their parents), key motivating factors include inspirational individuals (friends, a respected figure and/or 'We Can' activists) and the sense of belonging to a movement. However, would-be activists face real obstacles – threats, ostracism or mockery at the hands of family, neighbours or friends. The pressure often comes via a spouse, whose initial support can be undermined when he is mocked for 'not controlling your wife'.

As for what such changes in perceptions actually produced in terms of behavioural changes, the regional assessment found that:

*Within the family, the most common changes, according to the Change Makers, are the reduction or ceasing of physical and emotional violence and abuse, sharing of housework, lifting of restrictions on female mobility, allowing girls to continue in education and denouncing of early marriage. Outside the family, the most common changes include not restricting girls and women from moving outside the home, allowing them to pursue education, not engaging in 'eve teasing' (harassment) of girls and greater discussion on the subject.*

Suzanne Williams, 2011<sup>7</sup>

In-depth interviews with 44 selected Change Makers<sup>18</sup> found that they improvise, intervening with families and neighbours in cases of violence, talking with peers about violence, encouraging families and neighbours to educate girls and allow them greater mobility, acting to stop harassment of girls in public spaces and, for male Change Makers, playing a more active role in household chores. The study concluded:

- Self-change is an essential component in social change processes.
- Attitude and behaviour change are not always causally linked and need to be addressed both separately and together.
- Personal experience, personal resources and the socio-political and cultural contexts of individuals determine many aspects of the change process and must be taken into account.
- Gender, caste, class, ethnicity, race and age are, inter alia, all important determinants in the change process, and while this study was not broad enough to draw conclusions on all aspects of difference, gender differences emerged strongly – and always will. Gender analysis is foundational to change work on violence against women.
- Guides, mentors and role models all play a central role in the change process of individuals, at different stages, and this source of support should be recognised and fostered.
- Motivation to stay with a difficult initiative such as tackling VAW requires not only benefits and encouragement, such as a sense of personal value and self-belief and internal empowerment, but visible and practical rewards, such as seeing improvements in the situation of women, and the achievement of personal goals.

A 2010 assessment of Phase II in India found that ‘approximately 39 percent of Change Makers exhibit significant deepening of change, 20 percent have shown some deepening of change, 25 percent of Change Makers have reported deepened understanding along with no concomitant actions and 12 percent show no change of any kind at all.’<sup>19</sup>

The assessment also looked at the differences between men and women Change Makers.

*Male Change Makers have typically articulated deepening of change in terms of growing sensitivity to women in their families (mothers, sisters or wives), sharing of housework and intolerance towards small forms of discrimination and VAW. This has been more or less consistent among rural and urban, more educated and less educated men. Among women, however, the deepening of change has been heavily influenced by the social context and the stage of their life. The stories of deepening of change among older women Change Makers are more about a firmer resolve to not marry their daughters young, invest in their education and treat sons and daughters equally. Among younger unmarried women, the stories are about a more responsive environment where restrictions on mobility are fewer, there is greater acceptance of higher education for girls and less pressure to marry girls at a young age. They have responded to this change in the environment with increased self-confidence.*

Anuradha Rajan and Swati Chakraborty, 2010<sup>19</sup>

An Oxfam GB ‘effectiveness review’ of one ‘We Can’ partner in Bangladesh reported more mixed results, perhaps because the Rajan survey was conducted in states where the campaign was known to be particularly active – i.e. the equivalent of high intensity implementation in Bangladesh. Comparing attitudes and behaviours in villages with and without a ‘We Can’ presence, it concluded:

*Overall, statistically significant and positive differences were found between women and men residing in the implemented and non-implemented sites in relation to both gender and intra-marital violence attitudes. However, when the data are disaggregated by research site, it is clear that these differences only apply to one site in particular. In this site the campaign was more intensely implemented. The lack of evidence of impact in the other sites, then, appears to be due to differences in implementation, rather than the We Can Campaign model per se. The other interesting – although possibly unsurprising – finding is that there is evidence that the campaign affected the attitudes of Change Makers to a greater extent than non-Change Makers in the site where it was more intensely implemented. Finally, in this particular site, women were more likely to report cessation of intra-marital violence.*

Oxfam GB, 2012<sup>10</sup>

## CRITICAL JUNCTURES: EVENTS AND SURPRISES

Two unexpected findings emerged from the experience of the campaign, and the evaluations of its impact.

Firstly, the changes in attitudes to domestic violence, particularly among women, were more complex than a simple move from acceptance to rejection. Surveys and interviews with over 1,500 Change Makers and those associated with them found that the beliefs related to violence were more resistant to change than those relating to equality or general statements on women's rights.

*While general principles – non-tolerance of violence, community support for women – were upheld, when the issues were more specific, people's attitudes were less coherent. Just over one third of interviewees did not agree that a man was never justified in hitting his wife, and 37–40 percent thought that an occasional slap does not amount to domestic violence.*

Suzanne Williams, 2011<sup>7</sup>

The 2012 Bangladesh Effectiveness Review had similar findings:

*Approximately 60 percent of female Change Makers, as opposed to 30 percent of male Change Makers, reported that they find it justifiable for a man to hit his wife, at least in certain circumstances. This is also true for the Naogaon site [which showed the greatest transformation in attitudes and beliefs]. If the Change Makers, as per the 'We Can' theory of change, really do go through such a deep rooted attitudinal transformational process, how could this be possible?*

Oxfam GB, 2012<sup>10</sup>

What seems to have taken place is a shrinking of the space within which VAW is deemed acceptable, but not its total eradication. But these changes are subtle and complex.

*A whole lot of people have been given a chance to reflect on their attitudes, and some used that to add extra attitudes to the ones they had, or to strengthen some attitudes over others. Maybe some people also abandoned a few 'old' attitudes. But people hold many, diverse and often contradictory attitudes. That is normal. You can be against VAW but beat your partner, because, say, you are in a wild rage or because you think you must punish behaviour that could harm the community. One can be a supporter of human rights while committing human rights violations.*

Michaela Raab, 2014<sup>20</sup>

Secondly, the influence of Change Makers showed up in another area of Oxfam's work: responding to emergencies. Change Makers in particular often resurface to raise VAW and gender equality issues in camps set up to receive those affected by the emergency, e.g. identifying cases of abuse inside/outside camps, alerting authorities, or initiating discussions, sometimes using 'We Can' materials. In Sri Lanka, Change Makers and Oxfam also did awareness raising on issues of early marriage, persuading the Registrar in one camp not to conduct marriage ceremonies if either one was under 18.<sup>21</sup>

In Pakistan, male Change Makers interviewed said they had worked with male Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) on a range of issues to do with women's rights, and had managed to enlist their support to the campaign for women's ID cards, and to allow women to leave the camps to attend the various centres set up in the host community. General discussion was held about forms of VAW, including access to education:

*Another change in the mindset that we brought about in men was that we asked them if they would want their wives or daughter checked by a male doctor, and of course they said 'No!'. So we told them that if you won't educate your daughters and sisters, how can there be female doctors for our women? So we said that today is the day when we have to take steps and let our sisters and daughters get an education because this is the only way when we can have females in important positions to help our women. And the response from the male IDPs was really good.*  
Suzanne Williams, 2010<sup>21</sup>

## WHAT HAS CHANGED DURING THE COURSE OF THE CAMPAIGN?

The campaign has evolved in light of experience and evaluation. While Phase I focused on individuals, rapidly achieving impressive scale, Phase II tried to reconnect these individuals through new actions.

*'We Can' allies had become concerned that the early emphasis on recruiting enormous numbers to the Campaign risked a diluting of messages and impact, which led to the Phase II emphasis on quality rather than quantity. In particular, this involved a deepening of contact between Change Makers, and between Change Makers and partner organizations – especially through events.*  
Suzanne Williams, Measuring Change, 2011<sup>7</sup>

The effort to re-engage Change Makers involved creating new meso-level categories of connectors and volunteers to bring Change Makers together, for example supporting clusters or neighbourhood groups of 50 people.

## WIDER LESSONS

According to an external evaluation in 2011 by Michaela Raab,<sup>8</sup> three types of factors appear critical for effective Change Maker engagement:

- **Action** reinforcing the change, such as daily gestures that bolster gender equality (e.g. men and boys sharing household chores) and frequent exchanges with other Change Makers and like-minded people
- An **enabling environment**, created by abundant communication materials, campaign events, sympathetic relatives and friends, groups that pursue goals close to those of 'We Can', supportive institutional policies, and favourable macro-level context factors

- **Personal characteristics**, such as expectations, self-perceptions, intentions, social role and physical characteristics, which determine to some extent the range of activities an individual can undertake.

There appears to be a complex trade-off between the benefits of a single core approach (scale in generating materials, exchanges of ideas, experience and learning) and the need to adapt methodologies to local contexts (risk, attitudes to women, role of fundamentalism, level of mobility etc).

*It was very important in the beginning to have a centralized team which worked on ideas, strategies and materials design; but it was always envisaged that country campaigns and allies would adapt the campaign to their own contexts. This became more complicated as the Campaign spread outside South Asia.*  
Suzanne Williams<sup>22</sup>

More generally, it is also worth asking whether the 'We Can' approach is particularly relevant to VAW because government, laws, institutions etc. have so little traction on attitudes and beliefs around gender roles. Or could it be applied to other issues in the 'private sphere', such as consumption decisions, or community participation?

## CONCLUSIONS

The 'We Can' campaign in South Asia offers an inspiring example of how to work at scale to change entrenched attitudes and practices. It combines a deep understanding of the nature of power, nuanced approaches to local context, and high levels of ambition to achieve real changes in the lives of millions of men and women. It is no surprise that it has inspired similar campaigns around the world.

## FURTHER READING

Some of these publications are available on the Oxfam Policy and Practice website.

Aldred, A. and Williams, S. (2009) 'We Can: The Story So Far', <http://www.wecanendvaw.org/we-can-story-so-far>, (accessed 7 November 2014).

Aldred, A. and S. Williams. (2012) 'The Story so Far 2: An account of the We Can Campaign in South Asia', Second edition, updated to 2011, [http://issuu.com/tsfoundation/docs/wc\\_sf2](http://issuu.com/tsfoundation/docs/wc_sf2) (accessed 7 November 2014).

Aldred, A. and S. Williams. (2011) 'Change Making: How We Adopt new attitudes, beliefs and practices. Insights from the We Can Campaign' Oxford, [http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/policy\\_and\\_practice/gender\\_justice/we\\_can/change\\_making.ashx](http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/policy_and_practice/gender_justice/we_can/change_making.ashx) (accessed 7 November 2014).

Barker, G. and Ricardo, C. (2005) 'Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict and Violence', *Social Development Working Paper*, No 26, Washington DC: World Bank, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2005/06/6022525/young-men-construction->

[masculinity-sub-saharan-africa-implications-hiv-aids-conflict-violence](#) (accessed 7 November 2014).

Green, D. (2011) 'Why are over 3 million people campaigning on violence against women in South Asia?', <http://www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/?p=6922> (accessed 7 November 2014).

Kaul, K. (2010) 'Mitigating Gender Based violence. Going Beyond the Sphere of Influence', Study and Analysis of the Phase II interventions in India under the We Can Campaign, (unpublished).

Kaul, K. (2011) 'A World of Change: We Can Global Movement stories of Change Makers from around the world', (unpublished).

Mehta, M. (2004) 'Towards Ending Violence Against Women in South Asia', Oxfam Briefing Paper, Oxford: Oxfam International, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/towards-ending-violence-against-women-in-south-asia-115043> (accessed 7 November 2014).

Hughes, K. (2012) 'Effectiveness Review: We Can Campaign, Bangladesh', Oxford: Oxfam GB, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/effectiveness-review-we-can-campaign-bangladesh-247213> (accessed 7 November 2014).

Prochaska, J.O., C.C. DiClemente, and J.C. Norcross (1992) 'In Search of How People Change' *Applications to Addictive Behaviors, American Psychologist* 47: 1102–1113.

Raab, M. (2011) 'The "We Can" Campaign in South Asia, 2004–2011, External Evaluation Report', Oxford: Oxfam GB, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-we-can-campaign-in-south-asia-2004-2011-external-evaluation-report-146189>, (accessed 7 November 2014).

Raab, M. (2009) 'The We Can End All Violence against Women Campaign in Oxfam Novib', <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-we-can-campaign-in-south-asia-2004-2011-external-evaluation-report-146189> (accessed 10 October 2014).

Rai, Shirin M. (2012) 'Reserved Seats in South Asia: A Regional Perspective, in Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers', *Women in Parliament: beyond numbers*, Handbook series, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Stockholm, Sweden: International IDEA, pp. 174–184.

Rajan, Anuradha and S. Chakraborty (2010) 'Assessment of We Can Phase II India report' (unpublished).

Sushma, K. (2000) 'Domestic Violence Against Women And Girls', Inocenti Digest 6, Florence: UNICEF <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/213> (accessed 7 November 2014).

We Can (2005) 'We Can: Campaign strategy paper', <http://www.wecanendvaw.org/> (accessed 7 November 2014).

We Can (2007) 'Guiding Principles of the 'We Can' Campaign', Regional Secretariat, [http://policy%2Dpractice.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/policy\\_and\\_practice/gender\\_justice/we\\_can/we\\_can\\_guiding\\_principles.ashx](http://policy%2Dpractice.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/policy_and_practice/gender_justice/we_can/we_can_guiding_principles.ashx) (accessed 7 November 2014).

We Can (Undated) 'We Can End All Violence Against Women', campaign brochure, [http://www.wecanendvaw.org/sites/default/files/Campaign%20Brochure\\_0.pdf](http://www.wecanendvaw.org/sites/default/files/Campaign%20Brochure_0.pdf), (accessed 7 November 2014).

We Can (Undated) 'Understanding change in the WE CAN Campaign' [http://www.wecanendvaw.org/sites/default/files/Understanding%20Change\\_1.pdf](http://www.wecanendvaw.org/sites/default/files/Understanding%20Change_1.pdf), (accessed 7 November 2014).

We Can (Undated) 'Assessing Change: Mapping changes in Attitude and Behaviour in Change Makers', <http://www.wecanendvaw.org/sites/default/files/Assessing%20Change.pdf> (accessed 7 November 2014).

Suzanne, W. (2010) 'Beyond Protection: Changing Attitudes and Behaviours in Humanitarian Emergency Response to Violence against Women', South Asia: Oxfam GB, (unpublished).

Williams, Suzanne (2011a) 'Measuring Change: Synthesis of Results and Lessons from the Regional Assessment of the We Can Campaign', (unpublished).

Wilson-Garwood, R., and H. Lindley-Jones. (2011) 'Breaking the Cycle of Violence and Exclusion: A review of Oxfam GB's work on Gender Based Violence and Violence Against Women', (unpublished).

## VIDEOS

Beauty Ara (Bangladesh Change Maker). Two minutes. <http://www.wecanendvaw.org/we-can-videos/beauty-ara-bangladesh> (accessed 10 October 2014).

## ANNEX: TIMELINE

1994	UN General Assembly adopts Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. UN appoints Special Rapporteur on VAW heralding beginning of process of systematic documentation and publication of the nature and extent of VAW around the world.
1995	UN World Conferences on Women, Beijing, seen as turning point in international women's movement.
1990s	Oxfam becomes increasingly involved in programming and research on VAW, including in South Asia.
2001	Oxfam GB South Asia gender working group (GWG) starts planning a campaign to end VAW, which will (i) link up with existing Oxfam GB programmes, (ii) address attitudes and beliefs, and (iii) work with women and men.
August 2004	Oxfam Briefing Paper by Mona Mehta, 'Towards Ending Violence Against Women in South Asia' sets out analysis underpinning campaign, including need for a focus on norms, <a href="http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/towards-ending-violence-against-women-in-south-asia-115043">http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/towards-ending-violence-against-women-in-south-asia-115043</a>

2004:	South Asia programme of Oxfam GB initiates 'We Can' campaign.
2010:	Phase II assessments in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka conducted by Anuradha Radan.
March 2011:	Oxfam GB's formal involvement in the regional campaign ends, although several Oxfam GB country offices still support national campaigns/
August 2011	Four national alliance secretariats operational, albeit with some national Oxfam GB support. But Afghanistan and Sri Lanka have 'come to a halt'.
November 2011	Global 'We Can' Campaign launched. <sup>23</sup>

## NOTES

1 See <http://wecanendvaw.org> (accessed 10 October 2014).

2 Raising Voices, <http://raisingvoices.org/> (accessed 10 October 2014).

3 See <http://www.wecanendvaw.org/why> (accessed 10 October 2014).

4 For a 2003 updated version of this calculation, see: S. Amartya (2003), 'Missing women—revisited', *BMJ* 2003;327:1297, <http://www.bmj.com/content/327/7427/1297> (accessed 10 October 2014).

5 Shirin M. Rai (2012) 'Reserved Seats in South Asia: A Regional Perspective', *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, [http://www.idea.int/publications/wip2/upload/South\\_Asia.pdf](http://www.idea.int/publications/wip2/upload/South_Asia.pdf) (accessed 10 October 2014).

6 Self Employed Women's Association, <http://www.sewa.org/> (accessed 10 October 2014).

7 S. Williams (2011a). 'Measuring Change: Synthesis of Results and Lessons from the Regional Assessment of the We Can Campaign'.

8 M. Raab, (2011) 'The "We Can" Campaign in South Asia, 2004-2011, External Evaluation Report', Oxford: Oxfam GB, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-we-can-campaign-in-south-asia-2004-2011-external-evaluation-report-146189> (accessed 10 October 2014).

9 A. Aldred, and S. Williams (2009) 'We Can: The Story So Far' <http://www.wecanendvaw.org/we-can-story-so-far/>; A. Aldred and S. Williams (2012) 'The Story so Far 2: An account of the We Can Campaign in South Asia, Second edition updated to 2011', [http://issuu.com/tsfoundation/docs/wc\\_ssf2](http://issuu.com/tsfoundation/docs/wc_ssf2) (accessed 10 October 2014).

10 K. Hughes (2012) 'Effectiveness Review: We Can Campaign, Bangladesh', Oxford: Oxfam GB, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/effectiveness-review-we-can-campaign-bangladesh-247213> (accessed 10 October 2014).

11 M. Raab, (2014), correspondence with author.

12 M. Rabb (2009) 'The We Can End All Violence against Women Campaign' in Oxfam Novib Policy and Practice <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-we-can-campaign-in-south-asia-2004-2011-external-evaluation-report-146189> (accessed 10 October 2014).

13 We Can (undated) 'Understanding change in the WE CAN Campaign', [http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/policy\\_and\\_practice/gender\\_justice/we\\_can/understanding\\_change\\_we\\_can.ashx](http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/policy_and_practice/gender_justice/we_can/understanding_change_we_can.ashx) (accessed 10 October 2014).

14 J.O. Prochaska, C.C. DiClemente, and J.C. Norcross (1992) 'In Search of How People Change' *Applications to Addictive Behaviors*, *American Psychologist* 47: 1102–1113.

15 A. Aldred and S. Williams (2012), op. cit.



16 M. Mehta (2014), correspondence with author.

17 S. Williams (2014), correspondence with author.

18 A. Aldred and S. Williams (2011), 'Change Making: How we adopt new attitudes, beliefs and practices: Insights from the We Can Campaign.' [http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/policy\\_and\\_practice/gender\\_justice/we\\_can/change\\_making.aspx](http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/policy_and_practice/gender_justice/we_can/change_making.aspx) (accessed 10 October 2014).

19 A. Rajan and S. Chakraborty (2010) 'Assessment of We Can Phase II India report' (unpublished).

20 M. Raab (2014), correspondence with author.

21 S. Williams (2010) 'Beyond Protection: Changing Attitudes and Behaviours in Humanitarian Emergency Response to Violence against Women', Oxfam GB South Asia.

22 S. Williams (2014), correspondence with author.

23 We Can, <http://www.wecan.nl/english> (accessed 10 October 2014).

© Oxfam International January 2015

This case study was written by Duncan Green, [dgreen@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:dgreen@oxfam.org.uk). Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Mona Mehta, Michaela Raab Ines Smyth and Suzanne Williams in its production. It is part of a series of papers and reports written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail Oxfam's We Can contact point, Mona Mehta, [mmehta@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:mmehta@oxfam.org.uk).

This publication is copyright but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured and a fee may be charged. E-mail [policyandpractice@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:policyandpractice@oxfam.org.uk).

The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-1-78077-788-7 in January 2015. Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

The Active Citizenship Case Studies are part of a wider Oxfam research project on 'How Change Happens', supported by The Developmental Leadership Program – a global research partnership between the University of Birmingham, University College London and La Trobe University – and the Australian Government.



## OXFAM

Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations networked together in more than 90 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty. Please write to any of the agencies for further information, or visit [www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org).