



Weave

Policy Brief

Weaving change

The power of women's movements in ending violence against women and girls

A call to action for policymakers and donors

● Introduction

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations worldwide. Based on current progress, it is very likely that global targets, including Generation Equality commitments and SDGs, will not be met. Despite considerable evidence of what works to prevent and reduce VAWG, rates of violence remain alarmingly high, due to a limited investment in, and implementation of, policies and programs at scale.

While most global efforts have focused on evaluating and scaling individual programs, these approaches have often been siloed and disconnected. To achieve transformative and lasting change, we need to look at the enabling conditions generated by women's rights and feminist movements. Without them, prevention efforts and policy interventions lack sustainability and impact. Yet, too often, feminist movements have been overlooked in our efforts to address VAWG.

The WEAVE Collective's research, spanning Australia, India, Nicaragua, and South Africa, highlights the essential role of feminist movements in the fight to end gendered violence. Applying an intersectional feminist lens, the study centers the voices of historically marginalized groups. Documenting the impact of women's movements is critical to understanding what is needed for long-term, sustainable reductions in VAWG and improved community safety.

● The impact of women's movements

The WEAVE Collective's research, reveals the profound impact of women's movements in combatting VAWG by advancing the following strategies:

Policy and legal reform	Women's movements have driven landmark legal changes, from laws on domestic violence and sexual harassment to national action plans addressing VAWG.
Direct support for survivors	These movements fill critical gaps in service provision—operating shelters, legal aid, and crisis support where state services fail or are absent.
Holding states accountable	By challenging impunity, advocating for justice, and exposing state complicity in gendered violence, women's movements have delivered real systemic change. They do this through strategic communications around emblematic cases, monitoring the implementation of national laws and global human rights treaty bodies, and sustained advocacy in global and regional policy spaces.
Shifting social norms	Movements drive cultural and societal change, making GBV less socially acceptable through activism and public campaigns such as Take Back the Night, #MeToo, Ni Una Menos, and #TotalShutdown.
Building the evidence base	Women's movements generate critical research and data to expose the realities of gendered violence and inform policy and practice.

● How women's movements drive change

Women's movements are powerful because they share consistent foundational elements while also demonstrating adaptability, agility, and resilience.

Collective care

By fostering care and healing, movements sustain those on the frontlines of ending VAWG. For example, Women Human Rights Defenders, who face disproportionate violence, rely on collective support to continue their work.

Agile and adaptive strategies

Feminist movements evolve in response to changing conditions. They leverage social media for mass mobilization, like the #TotalShutDown movement in South Africa, form coalitions with other movements, and adopt new legal strategies, as seen in India, to overturn oppressive laws and secure justice for survivors.

Frameworks that evolve

Initially rooted in grassroots activism, women's movements have expanded to influence global policy, academic research, and legal structures. They have shifted from framing violence solely as a personal issue to a systemic problem requiring comprehensive, intersectional solutions.¹

Responding to crisis

Whether in response to state repression, public health emergencies, or economic downturns, women's movements adapt swiftly, creating community-based solutions that governments often fail to provide. For example, during Nicaragua's authoritarian crackdown, feminist networks established underground support systems for survivors of violence.

● The challenges

Women's movements face a triple burden—they advocate for policy change, provide direct services where governments fail, and fight for their own survival. This is exacerbated by:

State erasure and repression

Many governments actively erase feminist histories and marginalize feminist voices through systemic discrimination. In Nicaragua, over 200 women's rights organizations have been shut down. Activists in India, South Africa, and Australia face state hostility, surveillance, erasure of certain voices, and violence.

Backlash and misinformation

Anti-gender movements, fuelled by religious fundamentalism and authoritarian regimes, actively undermine women's rights and block feminist progress. For example, the failed Voice referendum in Australia intensified racism and violence towards First Nations women.

Lack of funding

Women's organizations—both products of and sustainers of feminist movements—are consistently underfunded, despite being proven as a protective factor against violence.

● What needs to happen?

For Policymakers

- 1 Institutionalize gender-responsive policies: ensure that National Action Plans to address VAWG are adequately funded, implemented, and informed by feminist movements.
- 2 Protect civic space: stop the criminalization of feminist activism and repeal laws that target women's rights defenders.
- 3 Commit to intersectional and survivor-centered approaches: develop policies that address the specific needs of marginalized women and recognize their expertise in shaping solutions.

For donors and philanthropic organizations

- 1 Provide flexible, long-term funding: move away from project-based, short-term funding toward core, unrestricted funding that sustains movements over time.
- 2 Invest in grassroots and feminist leadership: support organizations led by and for women from the communities most affected by VAWG.
- 3 Fund security and wellbeing: ensure that funding includes resources for the safety, wellbeing, and collective care of activists facing threats and burnout.

¹ <https://blackfeministfuture.org/resources/what-is-patriarchal-violence-a-working-definition-from-the-abolishing-patriarchal-violence-innovation-lab/>

● The bottom line

Women's movements have been here for decades, leading the fight against gendered violence despite systemic obstacles. Evidence based VAWG prevention strategies will not be effective without robust women's movements in place to ensure that gains can be sustained for the long-term. Their work saves lives, transforms societies, and strengthens democracies. Yet, they cannot continue to do this alone.

Policymakers and donors must act now to protect and invest in women's movements. The cost of inaction is too great—without them, gains in gender equality and safety for women and girls will be lost.

Join us in weaving a future free from violence.



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