

GAGE Digest

Policy and legal analysis notes: Ethiopia

A review of the Strategic Plan for a
Multisectoral Response to Violence
Against Women and Children

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Introduction

Ethiopia is a country with significant geographic, economic, ethnic and religious diversity. This diversity is also reflected in disparities in gender norms affecting women and girls, including the forms and prevalence of violence. There are also important differences in the issues and problems affecting adolescent girls in urban and rural areas and between the highland agricultural areas and the lowland pastoralist and semi-pastoralist areas (Jones et al., 2019 forthcoming). Violence against women and children (VAWC) in Ethiopia takes different forms and varies by region (Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer, 2017). While on the decline, widespread practices such as early marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) continue to have a negative impact on the lives of adolescent girls in Ethiopia. Domestic violence, exacerbated by social norms that allow for widespread acceptance of intimate partner violence (IPV), is another major challenge. Forced labour and trafficking of girls, internally from rural to urban centres and cross-border to countries in the Middle East, is also becoming a major issue (Jones et al., 2017).

To understand the policy context for adolescent health, psychosocial wellbeing and bodily integrity, we reviewed the Strategic Plan for an Integrated and Multi-Sectoral Response to Violence against Women and Children and Child Justice in Ethiopia (hereinafter referred to as 'the Strategic Plan') developed in 2010. The Strategic Plan also provides an opportunity to look at the policy-making process as it unfolds, explaining that the document 'has been developed with a view to the development of a national strategy and action plan for the implementation of the multi-sectoral and integrated response' to violence against women and children (VAWC).

This note provides a brief summary of our findings. We draw some conclusions on the usefulness of political economy analysis for understanding the politics and complexities of policy and legal change, and reflect on how this approach can support research and programming more broadly.

The story of the Strategic Plan

Contextual factors

Although Ethiopia has progressive laws and policies in place aimed at eliminating VAWG, implementation and enforcement has proved challenging. The legal and policy climate on VAWG has seen major reforms since the adoption of the Constitution in 1995. The Revised Criminal Code has increased the punishment for violent crimes against women and criminalised new acts, such that it now outlaws rape and sexual violence, physical violence, trafficking of women and children, abduction, FGM/C and early marriage. Moreover, the Revised Family Code has set a legal minimum age of marriage (for boys and girls) of 18 years. However, Ethiopia does not have a comprehensive law on VAWG and the legal and policy framework has been criticised for not proscribing acts such as marital rape, economic and psychological violence, and sexual harassment and stalking, which are very common forms of VAWG. The absence of civil remedies for victims of violence and the fact that the law does not specifically provide procedures to obtain protection orders are considered as gaps in the legal framework.

How did the Strategic Plan evolve?

The foundations date back to a visit to South Africa by delegations composed of government officials and non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives in 2008. This exchange was the driving influence behind the development of the Strategic Plan. The South African government was considered to have taken exemplary measures in responding to VAWC that were having substantial positive impacts; those measures were being taken up by other countries and showcased by the United Nations (UN).

Having seen close up South Africa's multi-sectoral approach to VAWC, the delegation recommended that similar measures be adopted in Ethiopia. It put forward two main recommendations: (1) to set up a body in charge of coordination between different sectors (a recommendation that was acted on in 2009/10 with the establishment of the National Coordinating Body (NCB) on VAW); and (2) to set up 'one-stop centres' modelled on South Africa's Thuthuzela Care Centres, which provide comprehensive medical, justice and psychosocial support for survivors of violence. The latter was also put into action with the

establishment of the Gandhi One-Stop Centre, the most visible manifestation of the Strategic Plan's implementation.

The NCB, comprising higher officials from the relevant ministries and civil society organisations (CSOs), assisted by a technical committee of experts, was responsible for drafting the Strategic Plan. It covers a five-year period and was accompanied by a three-year detailed operational plan. It identified the justice, health, education and social sectors as the most relevant stakeholders in the prevention and response to VAWC and focused on activities that should be undertaken and coordinated by institutions in these sectors. The Strategic Plan has five overarching pillars: (1) the adoption and implementation of protective laws and policies; (2) system and capacity building of the major actors in the health, justice, security, education and social sectors; (3) comprehensive service delivery for survivors of violence; (4) community mobilisation; and (5) coordination. Its goals are further elaborated in the operational plan, which lists objectives, outcomes, indicators and the focal institutions tasked with activities under each goal.

The GAGE policy and legal analysis (PLA) workstream in Ethiopia explored the inception and development of the Strategic Plan, the major actors involved, their roles and motivations, the process of implementation, and the major achievements and challenges. The methodology included historical process tracing and stakeholder mapping to identify relevant actors involved in developing the Strategic Plan, or with capacity to influence its development. A timeline was then developed to situate the Strategic Plan within the wider history of policy and legislative measures relevant to government approaches to addressing different aspects of VAWG. Key informant interviews were conducted with government officials and NGO personnel participating in the NCB's technical committee. Subsequently, a review of primary and secondary documentation was conducted to supplement the information gathered during those interviews.

The historical process tracing of a specific policy or legal change helps to identify its key drivers, how the process was influenced by previous policy legacies, and what has been done so far to implement the policy or legal change. It also helps to identify any resistance and blockages in the process. This PLA analysis constitutes an important step in unpacking the politics around both policy adoption itself and, in the next stage of PLA analysis within GAGE, to inform implementation experiences of the policy framework addressing VAWC issues.

Key findings

On balance, the Strategic Plan has not been a game-changer from the perspective of policy responses to addressing VAWC, either generally or in relation to adolescent girls. In practice, it has not delivered substantively beyond support for setting up one-stop centres. At the same time, it has galvanised shared thinking around the merits of an integrated approach to addressing VAWC at policy level and across sectors, and created a shared platform on how to advance such an approach.

Gains

- The Strategic Plan remains a relevant lens through which to consider the state of affairs on policy and international response efforts across sectors to address VAWC. It provides a useful snapshot by which to gauge where the current incentives, investments, opportunities and blockages are, and to push further towards an integrated, multi-sectoral and multi-level approach to addressing VAWC.
- One of its main achievements is its contribution at the level of ideas, and the sense of ownership it has created among many of the key stakeholders involved in its development. Despite the challenges of implementation, stakeholders have a keen sense of their own responsibility for ensuring the realisation of the ambitions of the Strategic Plan. Albeit unevenly so, the experience of its development has contributed to changing the view that VAWC is a primarily a security and justice issue, and rather, that there is a need for a multi-sectoral and integrated approach to address the breadth of prevention, protection and response issues. At the level of policy discourse, there seems to be limited resistance to this.
- The revision of the Strategic Plan is being seen as an opportunity to galvanise new momentum and energy around the ambition of a more integrated approach to VAWC. At the time of conducting interviews for this report, and despite shortcomings identified, there seemed little doubt about the importance of revising the plan and continuing its activities. UNICEF (which has agreed to fund the process of revision) and the Secretariat tasked with facilitating it are both confident that the revision will be undertaken within the current fiscal year (2019–2020). This is a good opportunity to look at successes and achievements to date as well as gaps and challenges, and to strengthen the coordination mechanisms going forward.

- The Strategic Plan has created a permanent platform to bring together a range of stakeholders, including line ministries, international donors (currently led by UNICEF), and organisations such as the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), the Coalition of Faith Based Organizations and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (the national human rights institution directly accountable to parliament). These stakeholders have all been involved in the development and implementation of the Strategic Plan. It remains an opportunity structure that can be tapped into in future to provide more integrated services, by establishing a platform and organisational structure that can facilitate intersectoral engagement and dialogue among the relevant state actors and service providers.
- There remains strong commitment among line ministries, with the necessary support and resourcing, to use the Strategic Plan to incentivise and streamline a more interconnected approach to protection and treatment response capabilities for survivors of VAWC. Significantly, at the level of discourse, there is no explicit resistance by key stakeholders to advancing an integrated approach. For international organisations, the Strategic Plan provides a platform (if still under-used) for more strategic support to multi-sectoral capacity for addressing VAWC. The support of UNICEF remains central.

Challenges

There remain important challenges regarding the implementation of the Strategic Plan, at several levels.

- First, in practice, the only visible outcome of the Strategic Plan is the one-stop centres, with little

progress on its other pillars and goals, particularly around prevention and awareness-raising. The focus remains clearly on the response (justice, protection and treatment) components of the plan. A further problem relates to the lack of effective engagement between ministry-level commitment to the Strategic Plan and how roll-out is experienced at the implementation level. This is even evident for the Gandhi One-Stop Centre, where line-ministry support for inter-sectoral engagement was weak.

- Second, there is uneven commitment from participating stakeholders, reflected through irregular attendance at meetings, not assigning the appropriate personnel, and high turnover of assigned personnel. While interviewees stressed the importance of the one-stop centre as a model to be rolled out more widely, they also noted that insufficient attention is being paid to other aspects of integrating cross-sectoral work.
- Third, there is a lack of effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and enforcement mechanisms seem ineffective. There are also insufficient incentives for institutions to integrate the activities listed under the Strategic Plan into their sectoral plans, since these will not form part of the evaluation of their implementation.
- Finally, integrated resourcing remains a challenge as line ministries are responsible for funding their obligations, and it is unclear how commitments under the Strategic Plan compete with other sector-specific commitments. International donors are mostly working at sector level, representing an additional challenge to cross-sectoral working.

Conclusion

Applying a political economy lens to reviewing the formulation and implementation of the Strategic Plan in Ethiopia has enabled a clearer understanding of the multi-level complexities of policy and legal change processes addressing VAWC. Our review has identified some of the challenges encountered and the opportunities for advancing an integrated approach that addresses prevention, protection and response efforts holistically. It has also identified where there are evidence gaps.

The above discussion highlights the usefulness of political economy analysis in understanding how the Strategic Plan came about, the role of different actors in formulating the strategy, and the challenges to effective implementation, despite its inclusive rhetoric and ambitious agenda. What do these findings mean for future research, practice and programming for VAWC?

- Ethiopia's experience with the Strategic Plan indicates that at the level of policy and legal change, the enabling constitutional and legal context can be more effectively utilised by agents of change to advance integrated multi-sectoral efforts across different sectors. The consensus on the merits of an integrated approach is fairly robust; thus, gaining traction across government at national level is not the main challenge.
- Resourcing incentives that reward integrating an integrated approach within line ministries, which can be rolled out at the delivery end, remain problematic. Addressing the budgeting implications of an integrated approach to VAWC requires more strategic engagement with both government and international partners.
- Linked to this, international funders themselves need to reflect more critically on their own organisational tendencies to engage in sectorally siloed ways with Ethiopian VAWC strategies, including rethinking their programming and funding mechanisms accordingly. The Strategic Plan offers a platform to channel such

efforts, but more research is needed to understand the organisational constraints that international partners face, and opportunities change their own approaches.

- There are important gaps in translating the ambitions of the Strategic Plan into actions on the ground and implementation. There remains a disconnect between its ambition – and indeed resourcing – and the experience of even its most visible outputs (one-stop centres). It will be important to research more closely where the specific bottlenecks are for translating policy objectives into delivery.
- Finally, the study provided a snapshot of the Strategy at the policy level, and in relation to some of its manifestation in Addis. There remain major gaps in our knowledge of the political economy of integrated approaches to VAWC at sub-national level. We need to know more about the challenges and opportunities for implementation, in ways which take account of intersectionality and regional variation.

The Strategic Plan has achieved commitment among key actors in ensuring its development. Following a lull in its development, there is new momentum and energy around the ambition of a more integrated approach to VAWC. It has created a shared platform for relevant line ministries and implementing organisations to engage in an integrated effort to address VAWC. Specifically, the one-stop centre experience – while still extremely limited in reach – is seen as promising, though its rollout is subject to resourcing and addressing important capability gaps. There was a strong sense among interviewees that the Strategic Plan has established a platform and organisational structure that can facilitate intersectoral engagement and dialogue among the relevant state actors and service providers. It further provides a space for international actors to give more strategic support and engage with a nationally owned architecture to develop an integrated and multi-sectoral response to VAWC.

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Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a nine-year longitudinal research programme generating evidence on what works to transform the lives of adolescent girls in the Global South. Visit www.gage.odi.org.uk for more information.

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