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Policymaker brief

Accountability in Action: Turning EVAWG Commitment into Funded, Measurable Delivery

Executive Summary

States have made significant progress in their adoption of laws, National Action Plans (NAPs), and commitments to end violence against women and girls (EVAWG).[1] However, the fulfillment of these legal and political commitments often breaks down at four critical points: planning, financing, implementation, and oversight. The challenge lies in ensuring that responsible systems effectively translate commitments into funded services, connect these funded services to delivery systems, measure results transparently, maintain the independent oversight necessary for fulfillment of all steps, and hold institutions responsible for results. This brief identifies where accountability is lost across this chain and what policymakers can do to close the gap between commitments made to deliver life—saving results for women and girls.

Thirty years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Beijing+30 review period provides a critical opportunity to assess progress, confront implementation gaps, and ensure that renewed commitments are met with the institutional systems, resources, and accountability mechanisms needed to deliver meaningful change for women and girls. This moment is particularly urgent as governments face increasing fiscal pressures on public services and a challenging funding environment for EVAWG efforts, making it essential to protect existing gains and strengthen the systems that sustain them.

The Challenge

Since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, governments have made important advances to strengthen legal and policy frameworks to end violence against women and girls (VAWG). By 2025, 88% of countries had enacted laws addressing VAWG, reflecting widespread recognition that violence is a human rights violation requiring a legislative response. NAPs have also become an established policy tool, along with improved monitoring and data systems and the expansion of survivor services and multi-sectoral responses to violence. Many countries have adopted dedicated NAPs or integrated EVAWG commitments into broader gender equality strategies, creating clearer policy frameworks and coordination mechanisms across governments.[2] Yet across every region, there is a vast gap between political commitment and lived reality.

Implementation gaps persist across all regions, despite governments possessing the legislative frameworks, institutional structures, and policy instruments to act on EVAWG commitments. Furthermore, funding for women's rights organisations (WROs) and feminist movements is especially limited, receiving only around US$453 million of official development assistance (ODA) in 2022.[3] In 2025, UN Women reported that less than 1% of ODA targeted EVAWG, having declined by 13 per cent between 2018–2019 and 2020–2021. [4] These trends reflect the available evidence prior to the drastic funding shocks experienced in the humanitarian and development sectors due to USAID's 2025 closure. Across the world, EVAWG NAPs have frequently been adopted without fully costed implementation frameworks, dedicated budget allocations, or mechanisms to track expenditure. For example, implementation reviews in countries such as Uganda[5], South Africa[6], and Nepal[7] have highlighted financing constraints, fragmented responsibilities, and reliance on existing departmental resources as barriers to achieving NAP objectives.

When laws go unenforced, NAPs are adopted without adequate funding, or budgets exclude or sideline prevention and survivor services, women and girls in all their diversity bear the cost of institutional failure.

The Accountability Chain

Governmental commitments to EVAWG show up in four interconnected areas before they can reach communities in need. At each step, accountability can be either strengthened or lost.

STEP	WHERE ACCOUNTABILITY BREAKS DOWN
Policy Design	When government adopts laws, policies, or NAPs that demonstrate intent but lack defined responsibilities, clear timelines, coordination mechanisms, and reporting requirements; all of which are needed to make commitments measurable and enforceable.
Financing	When laws, policies, and NAPs are adopted without corresponding budget allocations and transparent expenditure reporting. Governments can point to legislative and policy commitments while avoiding scrutiny of whether resources have actually been allocated, spent, and delivered to frontline services
Implementation	When cross-sectoral commitments are not supported by clear institutional responsibilities, coordination mechanisms, and accountability across sectors and levels of government. Fragmented implementation can leave survivors navigating disconnected services without a clear institution responsible for overall outcomes.
Oversight	When oversight bodies lack the political independence, capacity, or authority to effectively scrutinise government performance. Parliamentary oversight, audit institutions, human rights bodies, WROs, civil society, survivor-led groups, and the media are essential to ensuring accountability focuses on results and delivery, not only commitments made.

What functioning accountability requires

1. Policy design and NAP planning

Governments adopt NAPs on EVAWG as the mechanism for translating legal obligations into institutional action. In practice, most NAPs function as political statements rather than governing instruments, and this pattern is consistent across regions.[8] A plan is adopted at the political level, often assigned to a coordinating body without the authority to compel other departments to act. Justice, health, education, policing, and social development may deliver their own mandates without any coordination between them. However, accountability requires assignment responsibilities to a named institution, setting time-bound targets, and establishing transparent reporting mechanisms support by disaggregated data.[9] For example, when prevention is underfunded or absent, survivor services are named in the plan without a budget, and performance is measured by activities (ex: trainings delivered, guidelines produced) rather than by whether or not women, girls, and gender diverse people can access safe and timely support services, a NAP isn't delivering on its promise.

An effective NAP defines VAWG explicitly as a manifestation of gender inequality and discrimination, adopting a gender-responsive, intersectional, and human rights–based approach that recognizes the diverse experiences of women and girls. It addresses the full continuum of state response, including prevention, protection, access to justice, survivor-centred services, economic empowerment, and reliable administrative and survey data to monitor progress.[10] Effective coordination also depends on institutional arrangements between all state actors that can drive whole-of-government action. This requires a clearly mandated coordinating body

with sufficient authority, dedicated resources, and effective mechanisms for intersectoral collaboration, while ensuring that subnational governments have the mandate, capacity, and financing needed to implement the plan in practice. A comprehensive NAP must include legislation addressing VAWG, a dedicated national action plan or strategy, specific budget allocations, an identified coordinating mechanism, norms change and education initiatives, administrative and population-based data collection systems, and the provision of specialized and general social support services. Together, these elements provide a practical and evidence-based benchmark against which the quality and implementation of NAPs can be assessed.[11]

COUNTRY EXAMPLE -Sierra Leone [12]

In addition to a NAP on the UNSCR 1325 on WPS, Sierra Leone developed their NAP on GBV in 2012 as a comprehensive planning tool for a multi-sectoral response to GBV. It set out multi-level initiatives, from implementation of laws, training of health and police personnel, and support for justice for survivors. However, the NAP failed to specify forms of VAWG to address (i.e. whether and how to address conflict-related sexual violence), recognize the history of mass-scale sexualised violence during the civil war, define provisions related to addressing the needs of women and girls impacted by violence during the civil war, or link to the existing mechanisms, such as UNSCR 1325 and the Sierra Leone reparations programme. Additionally, there was no recognition of plans outside of the country's capital. This example shows how a government can develop a comprehensive NAP through a participatory process but still face challenges in translating commitments into an effective accountability framework.

States Are Responsible for Realizing Women and Girls' Right to Access Justice

Under CEDAW General Recommendation No. 33, access to justice encompasses six interconnected dimensions: justiciability, availability, accessibility, good quality, provision of remedies, and accountability. For women and girls experiencing violence, access to justice extends beyond the courtroom. In practice, this requires a functioning continuum of prevention, protection, response, redress, and structural reform. Access to justice depends on adequately resourced social, health, legal, and economic systems. Failures anywhere along this chain are breaches of state responsibility.

2. Financing

This pattern holds at the budget-line level: survivor empowerment may be named a national priority while receiving the lowest sub-programme allocation. Shelters are often required to provide skills development programmes as a condition of funding yet not given additional funding to do so. And when budgets are tight, EVAWG lines are among the first to be cut, deferred, or quietly reallocated.

Laws, policies and NAPs should be fully costed and linked to identifiable budget allocations, named budget holders, measurable performance indicators, and transparent expenditure reporting. Accountability requires that commitments are integrated into the budget cycle, with clearly designated institutions responsible for securing resources, managing expenditure, and reporting on implementation. In decentralised systems, these transfers are a matter of life and death for women and girls and other marginalised groups; they determine whether shelters, legal aid, and psychosocial support are funded where survivors live. A NAP without a budget is a wish list, while accountability requires engaging every step of the budget cycle, from formulation to approval, execution to oversight.

According to the Council of Europe's widely used definition,[13] gender budgeting involves conducting a gender-based assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process, and restructuring revenues and expenditures to promote gender equality. In short, gender budgeting is a strategy

and a process with the long-term aim of achieving gender equality goals. Effective EVAWG financing must therefore be a mechanism for establishing whether a government's gender equality commitments translate into budgetary commitments.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has a useful toolkit to track effective budgeting.[14] At formulation, governments incorporate gender analysis into budget through mechanisms such as gender-responsive budget analysis and early consultation with gender experts, service providers, and EVAWG stakeholders, to ensure that budget ceilings and resource decisions reflect the costs of implementation. At the approval stage, governments and parliaments scrutinize EVAWG allocations through mechanisms such as gender budget statements, budget documentation, and parliamentary budget review processes that assess whether proposed expenditures are adequately costed, aligned with national strategies, and sufficient to achieve stated objectives before budget adoption.

During execution, responsible institutions track whether allocated resources reach intended programmes and communities through mechanisms such as expenditure tracking systems, budget monitoring tools, and implementation reporting. These mechanisms determine timely funding disbursement, protected frontline services, and translation into accessible and effective EVAWG responses. Finally, at the oversight stage, governments and accountability institutions evaluate the effectiveness of EVAWG spending through mechanisms such as gender-responsive monitoring, programme evaluations, audits, and outcome assessments. This requires examining not only whether funds have been spent in accordance with financial rules, but whether investments have improved prevention, service availability, survivor support, and broader real-world gender equality outcomes.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE - Uganda[15]

Uganda's NAP on the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence (2016–2020) established a multisectoral framework for preventing and responding to gender-based violence, assigning responsibilities across government institutions. However, the plan did not have sufficient predictable domestic financing attached to its commitments, leaving many activities dependent on resources mobilised through development partners. An assessment of Uganda's EVAWG financing needs found that, of the estimated UGX 89.67 billion (approximately USD 24.5 million) required to implement the NAP, only UGX 10 billion (approximately USD 2.7 million) was mobilised, with around 90% of this funding coming from conditional grants from external donors. This has created sustainability risks, as implementation is vulnerable to changing donor priorities and limited domestic budget ownership.

3. Implementation

Implementation is the point at which commitments translate into services, protection, and support for women and girls. Even well-designed laws, policies, and NAPs will fail if the institutions responsible for delivery lack the authority, resources, capacity, or coordination required to act.

Sub-national governments are expected to implement national commitments without corresponding transfers, staffing, or clarity about what they are responsible for. Sectors deliver their own mandates while gaps open between them. Women in rural areas, conflict-affected regions, or informal settlements often have fewer services and less legal protection than those in capital cities because the implementation architecture is not designed to reach them.

Effective implementation requires that every commitment correspond to an accountable actor. Policymakers should assign responsibilities across departments and all government levels, with defined roles, reporting lines, and accountability mechanisms. National commitments should reflect departmental strategic plans, annual performance plans, operational plans, and staff performance agreements, embedding EVAWG delivery into routine institutional accountability. Provincial and local authorities must have the mandate, staffing, and resources required to carry out their roles, including rural areas, conflict-affected regions, and informal settlements where barriers to protection, support, and justice are often greatest. In decentralised systems, responsibilities must be accompanied by adequate funding, technical support, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure consistent implementation across jurisdictions.

Because EVAWG is a cross-sectoral issue, this coordination must extend horizontally as well as vertically: shared definitions, referral pathways, case management protocols, and information-sharing systems between justice, health, education, and social development ensure that women and girls can move through services without encountering gaps in support. Policymakers should track implementation against the targets and key performance indicators contained in laws, policies, and NAPs, using departmental reports, service delivery data, and implementation reviews to identify bottlenecks and ensure that resources are reaching frontline services.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE - Nepal[16]

Through Executive Order in 2010, Nepal created a GBV Elimination Fund aiming to operate under the legal authority and resources respective to each of the government's three levels (federal, provincial, and local). However, the legal framework used to create the fund did not clarify each level's powers, duties, and responsibilities because the federal regulation that created the Fund was enshrined in legislation, and regulations on their own cannot clarify these roles for provincial and local governments. Due to this confusion, the GBV Elimination Fund currently exists at the federal level, with a steadily declining budget.

Nepal's experience shows how implementation is affected by fragmented institutional arrangements. It is vital to clarify the roles and responsibilities of personnel in respective governmental departments that operate these funds, and consult with CSOs, women's rights leaders, and local activists, on their roles in engaging the government to operationalize the funds.

4. Oversight

Governments have a wide range of oversight tools available to assess progress. These include departmental annual performance plans and annual reports, NAP progress reports, mid-term budget statements and expenditure reviews, budget execution reports, administrative and service delivery data, programme evaluations, parliamentary hearings, and audits conducted by Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI).[17] Progress can be compared between annual reports and NAP updates against the NAP's targets and key performance indicators contained. Mid-term budget statements and expenditure reports can be reviewed to determine whether resources are being spent as intended. Audit findings, evaluation reports, and service delivery data can identify implementation bottlenecks, gaps in performance, and areas requiring corrective action. In some places, national human rights institutions and other independent oversight bodies can provide additional scrutiny of implementation and results.

A government that has run training sessions, published guidelines, and held campaign events can issue reports, but may not provide answers to the questions that truly reveal whether the system is working. Questions such as – Can a survivor in a rural district access legal aid? Are protection orders processed within statutory timeframes? Do referral pathways between police, health, and shelter services function? — are rarely asked, rarely answered, and not required. Without asking these questions, monitoring frameworks fail to address whether women, girls, and gender non-conforming people are safer. Effective oversight therefore requires outcome-focused indicators: survivor access to services, response and processing times, investigation and prosecution rates, safety outcomes, and changes in social norms.

Several governments have shown that tracking EVAWG expenditure transparently is both feasible and politically consequential. Mexico's federal budget includes an annexed statement (Anexo 13) tracking gender equality spending across all departments, which is used by WROs to compare year-to-year allocations and expose underspending.[18] In Rwanda, ministries incorporate gender priorities into budget planning through Gender Budget Statements to identify gender-responsive priorities and associated resources.[19] South Africa's open budget portal Vulekamali (developed by National Treasury with the International Budget Partnership) allows feminist coalitions to track allocations against the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence in real time. Effective gender-responsive expenditure tracking provide civil society actors with tools to monitor whether public commitments are matched by adequate financing.

Administrative data, population-based surveys, and shared data standards across sectors enable institutions to identify whether progress is reaching women, girls, and gender-diverse people, or whether gaps are being hidden by aggregate reporting. These mechanisms create a common evidence base across justice, health, social services, and other sectors responsible for preventing and responding to violence.

Parliaments should scrutinize government commitments through formal oversight mechanisms that connect NAP objectives, budgets, and implementation outcomes. The IPU/UNDP Global Parliamentary Report 2017[20] found that effective oversight depends on legislatures having access to timely information, institutional authority, and procedures to challenge gaps between commitments and delivery. Yet only 47% of surveyed parliaments debate priorities before the budget is drafted and 42% receive no receive regular in-year expenditure updates.[21] South African's experience shows what functioning oversight looks like in practice (Box 22; Watson, 2016). Under the Money Bills Amendment Procedure and Related Matters Act (2009), National Assembly committees produce annual Budget Review and Recommendation Reports (BRRRs) comparing departmental commitments against actual performance and resourcing. When the Department of Justice announced the establishment of dedicated sexual offences courts but failed to fund the additional prosecutors required to operate them, the BRRR process identified this "commitments without financing" and required the government to respond, with the Minister of Finance obligated to report on how recommendations were addressed. Mechanisms such as interpellation procedures, opposition-chaired Public Accounts Committees, and mainstreaming gender considerations across all oversight committees further strengthen this model.[22]

COUNTRY EXAMPLE - Australia[23]

Australia's National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 demonstrates how to target women and girls differently depending on their circumstances and identities. The Plan includes specific attention to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, LGBTQ+ communities, women with disabilities, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women in rural and remote areas, and children and young people. Across all priority groups, the approach emphasises that effective implementation requires services, data systems, coordination mechanisms and accountability frameworks that are designed to reach those facing the greatest barriers. Australia's Monitoring and Report Framework applies this outcome-focused approach in practice, using a systems-based method to identiy barriers, track progress, and support reform across government and service systems.[24]

Australia's example illustrates that taking an intersectional approach to implementation and oversight means embedding inclusion into the VAWG prevention and response architecture through clear responsibilities, tailored services, community participation, and monitoring systems that measure whether all women and girls can access safety, justice and support.

Sustaining accountability across political cycles

Achieving lasting progress in EVAWG requires more than strong policies or well-designed NAPs. Commitments must be resilient to changes in political leadership, fiscal pressures, institutional restructuring, and shifting policy priorities. These actions help ensure that EVAWG commitments remain funded and effective.

Protect gains

Protect existing laws, budgets, services, and institutional mechanisms from erosion. During periods of fiscal constraint, prevention and survivor-centred services should be treated as core public services rather than discretionary expenditure.

Institutionalise commitments

Embed EVAWG commitments within legislation, departmental strategic plans, annual performance plans, budget frameworks, and performance management systems. Accountability is strengthened when commitments are integrated into routine government planning, budgeting, implementation, and reporting processes rather than relying on individual champions.

Anticipate and respond to backlash

Monitor efforts to weaken legal protections, reduce funding, or restrict the participation of women's rights organisations and civil society. Reaffirm commitments under national laws, CEDAW, and regional frameworks, and ensure that accountability mechanisms remain functional even in politically challenging environments.

Build cross-government ownership

Responsibility for implementation should not rest solely with gender ministries or focal points. Finance, justice, health, policing, education, social development, and local government institutions all have a role to play. Shared ownership strengthens implementation and reduces the risk that commitments are deprioritised.

Recommendations

Governments have established a strong foundation through laws, policies, and institutional arrangements, but sustaining progress depends on protecting those gains, embedding commitments in routine government systems, ensuring stable financing, and maintaining robust accountability even during periods of political change or backlash.

The following recommendations are grounded in existing obligations under CEDAW, regional frameworks, and governments' own commitments to end VAWG.

STEP	RECOMMENDATION	MECHANISM	RESPONSIBLE ACTORS
Policy design and NAP planning	Convert EVAWG commitments into enforceable government responsibilities.	Require each commitment in laws, policies, and NAPs to include a responsible institution, measurable indicators, implementation timelines, reporting requirements, and financing arrangements.	Cabinet, coordinating ministries, all implementing departments
Financing	Link commitments to sustainable financing and monitor whether resources reach intended programmes.	Integrate EVAWG priorities into budget frameworks, gender-responsive budget processes, expenditure reviews, and budget execution reporting. Use parliamentary committees, audit institutions, and oversight bodies to investigate persistent underspending or implementation failures.	Ministries of Finance; Parliament; Supreme Audit Institutions
Implementation	Embed EVAWG responsibilities into routine government management systems.	Incorporate EVAWG priorities into departmental strategic plans, annual performance plans, operational plans, staff performance agreements, and intergovernmental coordination mechanisms.	Line ministries and sub-national governments
Participation and accountability	Protect civic space and institutionalize meaningful participation.	Establish formal consultation mechanisms with women's rights organizations, survivor-led groups, and civil society throughout planning, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring processes.	EVAWG coordinating ministry, relevant line ministries, local government authorities, designated civil society engagement bodies
Oversight	Strengthen independent scrutiny of government commitments and spending.	Provide parliaments, audit institutions, national human rights institutions, researchers, media, and civil society with access to performance data, budget execution information, and reporting mechanisms.	Parliaments, Supreme Audit Institutions, national oversight bodies
Results Measurement	Assess success through outcomes rather than activities completed.	Use outcome indicators, administrative data, population surveys, evaluations, and disaggregated reporting to measure access to services, prevention outcomes, justice responses, and survivor safety.	National statistics bodies, ministries, oversight institutions

About This Brief

This brief draws on COFEM's Accountability in Action: State Obligations on EVAWG four-part series, developed through the ACT to End Violence Against Women Programme, co-led by the European Union and UN Women. The series draws on learning dialogues with women's rights organisations and covers national action plans, EVAWG financing, strategic advocacy, and access to justice.

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