

# Communication Issues regarding Policy on Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Survivors of Domestic Violence



International  
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a Think Tank

## Marathon or a 100-metre dash?

Developments in 2017 indicate that timely and effective policy communication is as vital for the successful development, ratification and implementation of policies, legal regulation and social initiatives to prevent domestic violence and protect survivors of domestic violence in Armenia, as the capacity building of all stakeholders responsible for the implementation of relevant policies and for provision of respective services.

Indeed, the experience of promoting the famous bill on preventing domestic violence and protecting survivors of domestic violence, and the heated debates around it prove once again that the majority of state agencies, civil society organisations (CSO) and development partners do not duly perceive the significance of effective communication in the process of policy advocacy and policy implementation. Thus, state agencies essentially seem to shift the burden of policy communication to the CSOs, whereas the latter suppose that addressing public issues, including promotion of initiatives to legally regulate those, requires only manifestation of political will, and believes that the major obstacle to hinder such initiatives is the resistance of “some five people”. International organizations seem to consider that the outreach and activism of several CSOs, complemented with several external factors, will suffice for successfully preventing domestic violence in Armenia.

In the result, instead of mobilising the society for fighting against domestic violence and securing the support of various social groups, we once again end up with misinterpretations of the existing realities and polarisation of the society. Once again institutions that are not ready and often refuse to engage in a dialogue have prompted for confrontation characterised with a series of “You don’t get it!”, “You’re an idiot!” and “But mine is bigger!”, instead of trying to mobilise and bring together the Armenian society for addressing a grievous public issue.

Were the significance of policy communication, application of adequate instruments, knowledge and skills perceived duly, today we would have had a society that is committed to addressing the issue and already does so; we would have had a substantial momentum and potential for further actions. Whereas the racers almost at the finish line of the “100-metre dash” perhaps do not realise that they actually compete in a “marathon distance of 40 kilometres”, and even to make it to the end of such a distance, they need substantially more effort and resources to run the remaining “39 kilometres and 900 metres”. This is a marathon, which can be won and real changes in the country can happen only if all the racers for the “100-metre dash” consolidate their resources.

## Quo Vadis?

A wide spectrum of data on perceptions of domestic violence, its prevalence, types, reasons and consequences in Armenia are available through the qualitative study conducted by the International Center for Human Development (ICHD) in 2017, as well as the summary of opinions expressed at the Town Hall Meetings ICHD organized in the same year. These findings offer an opportunity to develop effective policy communication activities tailored to each target social group.



19 Sayat Nova  
Yerevan 0001  
Armenia

Tel.: +374 10 582638  
Fax: +374 10 527082

mail@ichd.org  
www.ichd.org

The goal of such a strategy should be uninterrupted and effective implementation of the policies, programmes, legal regulation mechanisms and other initiatives targeting prevention of domestic violence and protection of survivors of domestic violence.

The top-down communication issues should include the following: shaping a social environment conducive for the development and implementation of relevant policies, legal regulation documents and projects; securing the support of those responsible for the implementation of suggested initiatives, and of various social groups, including the major stakeholders and individual target groups; identifying the existing and potential risks of communicating on various initiatives in a timely manner and addressing those risks; clearly and concisely outlining the positive impact of the initiatives on the women and men having survived violence and raising their awareness about these initiatives, the progress, achievements and challenges, including continuous and consistent awareness raising of the stakeholders and target groups through effective policy communication. Meanwhile, it is essential to appreciate the importance of bottom-up communication issues as well, such as ongoing assessment and regular summary of the attitudes of various target groups of stakeholders towards the policy on preventing domestic violence, and towards various initiatives of legal regulation and relevant programmes, including their concerns, perspectives, recommendations, and pro and con arguments; assessment of the existing perceptions regarding the progress of implementing these initiatives and management of adequate response to these perceptions; inclusion of major target groups and stakeholders in the process of developing respective initiatives; and regular presentation of policy recommendations to the institutions responsible for the development and implementation of these initiatives.

It is important to analyse and describe the key results expected from the implementation of the policy communication strategy, according to the key stakeholders and target groups; the expected timeframes to achieve these results; and the success indicators.

In the communication strategy it is necessary to describe the objectives of the policy communication and key messages for each stakeholder and target group. Specifically, to frame the messages, it is pertinent to consider several factors. For instance, the messages should be few, simple and concise, free from professional terminology and slang, focused on positive outcomes and potential benefits. The messages should try to address a couple of questions, including;

- What would we like to change?
- What would we like each stakeholder/target group to learn?
- What would we like them to feel? What perceptions and expectations do we want them to form?
- What would we like them to do? What kind of action/inaction do we expect them to engage in?

It is important to identify and describe the main channels and instruments of communication tailored to each stakeholder and target group, including expert discussions and consultation sessions; open and off-the-record discussions of recommended policy and policy briefs; public participation events; media presence and coverage; extensive and intensive use of social media, including posting and commenting on the issue; video materials; radio and TV programmes; occasional public appearances of those responsible for the implementation of policy initiatives, such as the minister and other relevant state officials, as well as independent experts; press releases and press conferences.

And of course, it is necessary to develop the specific communication events and actions per each stakeholder and target group, respective phase of formation and implementation of policy initiatives, and to define the responsible institutions, timeframes and duration for each event.

It can be noted with a certain degree of confidence that today all the necessary prerequisites, significant information and data are available to develop such a communication strategy. Perhaps with the same degree of confidence it can be claimed that without such policy communication strategy, to overcome the challenge of the “marathon of 40 kilometres”, i.e. of effective implementation of the policy on preventing domestic violence and protecting the survivors of

domestic violence within an acceptable timeframe is practically impossible. The best evidence to support such a claim is the experience of a number of neighbouring countries, which have not recorded any significant success in addressing the issue of domestic violence and inciting a real social change after having won the “100-metre dash”.

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