

## **Gender-based violence should and can be a major World Bank priority.**

To: Ms. Hana Bixi, World Bank Global Director for Gender.

From: The undersigned 94 activists from 51 countries leading civil society anti-corruption organizations and leading academics at the forefront of anti-corruption studies.

November 13, 2023.

A response to the World Bank's public call for comments on its: ["World Bank Gender Strategy 2024 - 2030 : Accelerate Gender Equality for a Sustainable, Resilient, and Inclusive Future."](#)

We applaud the World Bank for drafting the most ambitious gender strategy in the Bank's history. This dovetails so appropriately with the statement made at the recent World Bank annual meeting by President Ajay Banga where on announcing the Bank's new vision and mission he declared: "At the center must be women and young people. Without a focus on both we are fighting with a hand behind our back."

Accordingly, we would like to make the following proposals that we believe can make the WBG gender strategy more robust and effective.

**First:** The draft strategy does not mention corruption. A prominent inclusion of corruption is critical in seeking to achieve so many of the objectives of the proposed new gender strategy. For example, as the Bank moves ahead with its commitment to "end" gender-based violence (GBV) it needs to recognize the enormous harm caused to women and girls across the world by the crime of sextortion, where the victims are extorted to provide sexual favors as distinct from monetary bribes. Corruption, moreover, so often influences law enforcement actions that, in effect, denies justice to victims of GBV and so leaves them all the more vulnerable.

**Second:** While recognizing the deepening cooperation in recent years between the Bank's operations and in-country civil society organizations (CSOs), we encourage you to place significantly greater emphasis in the new gender strategy on building partnerships with CSOs. The Bank should boost its direct support for CSOs working in this area. There can be no sustainable progress without citizen engagement.

**Third:** We were most encouraged by the statement made by Axel van Trotsenburg, the Bank's Senior Managing Director, Development Policy and Partnerships, at the Bank's [September 12, 2023](#) event on gender-based violence (GBV): "We have to be very outspoken...We need to build a coalition to fight GBV."

Accordingly, in order to fully recognize that GBV so frequently undermines gender development across the board, we recommend a still greater focus on GBV in your list of top priorities. This can reinforce this priority for the Bank's own staff while building on the call by Mr. van Trotsenburg. We propose that the Bank should make curbing GBV the stand-alone single top priority of the 2024-2030 gender strategy. We recognize how this issue is inextricably tied to other gender challenges, but we believe that the opportunity should now be taken by the Bank to highlight this issue on its own as the lead of the new strategy to strengthen public understanding of the Bank's human rights commitment to end GBV.

Sincerely, *(signatures on the following pages)*

*NB: As an attachment to the signed letter, we provide a background set of comments that provide insights and recommendations in support of the three key improvements to the Bank's strategy that are proposed in this letter.*

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NB: All titles used with the above signatures were valid as of the date of signing as of November 8, 2023.  
*Please see the background information that starts on the next page in support of the proposals that are  
made in this letter.*

## Background Information to the Civil Society letter to the World Bank<sup>1</sup>

- Introduction and a Proposal
- Action the World Bank should and can take to implement the proposal
- Cost and trends in gender-based violence (GBV)
- Corruption and GBV - Sextortion

Across the globe the issues of violence against women are gaining greater public attention than ever before. Civil society organizations (CSOs) in scores of countries are mounting formidable campaigns, and building influential networks, to protect the most basic human rights for women and girls. The timing of a new World Bank gender strategy could not be better. The Bank's increasing emphasis on gender equality, and on seeking to end GBV, comes at an important time as across the world there is mounting attention to these issues. For example, an increasing number of governments have voiced support for [The Global Partner Network for Feminist Foreign Policy](#).

The Bank's 2024-2030 draft strategy advocates "bold" new approaches, including an upfront commitment to accelerate progress to end gender based violence (GBV). We encourage the World Bank Group to assign still greater priority to this topic. This proposal would involve not only a basic commitment to anti-corruption throughout the strategy, as well, for example, as a specific note on the links between GBV and corruption as highlighted in the draft strategy's Box 4.1, which is headed "Walking the talk: The World Bank Group has strong internal processes on gender equality." This proposed change in this particular illustrative case would then become part of the safeguard policies described in the strategy: SEA/SH – Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment. The WBG has the opportunity to make a positive difference here and thereby strengthen prospects for success for its gender strategy.

GBV takes many forms and is deeply embedded in many if not most cultures. The Bank cites data that suggests that one-in-three women experience GBV in their lifetimes. The injuries and indignities that hundreds of millions of women face each and every day severely retard economic growth and the prospect of prosperity and a decent life in scores of countries. Household violence is widespread as is violence in public settings, especially in fragile and conflict settings, where rape and denigration of women are tools of oppression. GBV curtails educational achievement as it causes girls in many settings to fail to complete their education. GBV is linked to corruption through diverse forms of sextortion. Legal recourse against GBV is limited and even where laws are robust crimes against women are commonly ignored. GBV finds many links to corruption following natural disasters and as a direct result of armed conflict.<sup>2</sup> GBV is thus a horrendous black mark on any claims to sincerity in declaring respect for human rights.

The WBG has made impressive efforts to strengthen its work on GBV issues. Its recent report, ["Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response in World Bank Operations: Taking Stock After a Decade of Engagement \(2012-2022\),"](#) notes that: "Lending operations incorporating activities to prevent and/or respond to GBV increased more than 10-fold, from 38 in 2012 to 390 in 2022. These actions and results, however, have seen relatively limited public attention.

The proposals for improving the Bank's draft strategy, as noted in our letter to the Bank, call for placing curbing GBV as the single leading priority in the strategy; emphasizing the vital roles of anti-

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<sup>1</sup> This letter has been developed and support for it coordinated by Frank Vogl, a co-founder of Transparency International and the Partnership for Transparency Fund, with editorial guidance from Professor Katherine Marshall, Senior Fellow, Walsh School of Foreign Service, Executive Director of the World Faiths Development Dialogue.

<sup>2</sup> On sextortion, please see details in the latter part of this paper. On refugees and conflict please see, as one of many examples, [Gender Based Violence against Syrian Refugee Women in Turkey](#).

corruption in the strategy with a notable focus on sextortion; and promoting greater partnership and support for in-country civil society organizations. The extent of violence against women at this time demands an unprecedented response.<sup>3</sup>

At the United Nations General Assembly meeting in September 2023, representatives of more than 20 governments issued a joint statement titled [“Political Declaration on Feminist Approaches to Foreign Policy.”](#) where the first of a series of actions noted: “We DEMONSTRATE an ambitious commitment to advance gender equality and the empowerment and autonomy of women and girls in all their diversity, as well as women’s full, equal and meaningful participation at all levels in decision making, to prevent all forms of discrimination and violence against them and promote, protect and fulfill their human rights.”

This is exactly the time when the World Bank can prominently lead global efforts in middle-and low-income countries to counter gender-based violence. By making this the stand-alone, single lead priority of its new gender strategy, the WBG can have a formidable impact in the cause of universal human rights.

### **Actions that the World Bank can take to implement the approaches advocated in this proposal.**

The draft 2024-2030 strategy only devotes one page to GBV. This section needs to be expanded to reflect the WBG’s work and the importance of detailing how the three key areas proposed in our letter need to be supported.

**Data** - Few institutions have the comparable capacity to the WBG to gather and analyze data and the Bank has been developing research in this area.<sup>4</sup> A reason why GBV in general, and sextortion in particular, secures relatively modest attention on the economic development agenda (albeit more today than in previous times) rests in the paucity of current data on the dimensions and characteristic of the problems. A determined effort by the WBG to improve this situation could make a major difference over time. It requires the WBG to recruit and train staff with the expertise to pursue far higher numbers of surveys and detailed interviewing approaches than is currently being seen – the Madagascar example (see below) is a model that can be widely replicated.

**Justice** - The WBG has rightly noted in its reports that GBV prevention calls for comprehensive approaches that include GBV in projects that concern education, health, basic social services, transportation, business development and other sectors. Success in these areas can largely depend on whether there is a legal framework in the country that criminalizes GBV in all its forms and that ensures that justice is seen to be done. Absent such conditions it is all too probable that inclusion of GBV provisions by the WBG in many sectoral projects will fail to secure the priority attention, and implementation monitoring, that is essential to secure sustained change.

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Professor Anne Marie Goetz and Nobel Prize laureate Leymah Gbowee have written: “Violence against women is common in many societies – with an average 35 percent of women (up to 70 percent in some countries) experiencing physical violence in their lifetimes from an intimate partner. In spite of the prevalence of human rights abuse, domestic violence is poorly policed and prosecuted, producing a sense of impunity for perpetrators. Social tolerance of violence against women deepens the constraints on women’s efforts to improve their lives – 82 percent of women parliamentarians in 39 countries, for instance, report being the target of physical and psychological violence, bullying and intimidation.

4 See also the World Bank’s [“Violence Against Women: What the Data shows us.”](#)

The WBG can support the above approach by promoting to governments passage and implementation of laws to protect women from violence. The WBG can muster the leverage to secure solid outcomes in this regard. It has the experience over many years of working with governments to improve their legal systems and judicial practices and it should now draw on this experience as it promotes actions to counter GBV in all its forms, including sextortion. (In many countries, the sexual extortion of women is not included in the criminal code under corruption, which is confined to crimes involving illicit financial payments.) in this regard, the WBG should develop projects that seek to protect women so they can report crimes. The perpetrators of sextortion know that they can act with impunity in most cases. Reducing that sense of impunity is important as a prevention measure.

The WBG should consider expanding its support for training, promoting incentive structures and encouraging judicial institutions to recruit more diverse personnel. Further, it could strengthen the systems, including through greater uses of technology that make poor citizens, and in most countries most women, far more aware of their ability to secure their rights and attain legal support. Importantly, the Bank should work with civil society to promote new laws. For example, in the Bank's September 12, 2023, web-event on GBV a human rights lawyer based in Uzbekistan, Dilfuza Kurova, detailed how very few GBV cases ever reach the courts. Strong public support, mobilized by local CSOs, culminated in 2023 in the government approving a law that explicitly criminalizes violence against girls and women. Ms. Kurolova noted that the additional support in the country to this action by civil society from the World Bank was of importance in securing the new law

**Citizen Leadership:** A prime conclusion of the WBG's report on taking stock of its 2012-2022 GBV projects is that: "The expansion and diversification of World Bank investments in GBV prevention and response over the last decade indicate that governments are willing to put resources toward addressing this essential component of reducing gender inequality."

Accepting that the trend is in the right direction, the critical issue is whether progress is moving with sufficient momentum so as to ensure formidable and sustainable declines in GBV in middle-and low-income countries.

This positive observation reflects experience in working in many countries with national and local governments and their agencies. Significantly, the report does not make a single mention of corruption. An increasing number of national chapters of Transparency International have deepened their work on sextortion in recent years and take the view that reforms can only come from grassroots actions, rather than by relying upon government and public officials to initiate and follow-through with effective sustainable actions. The WBG can play a vital role as a bridge in this regard between CSOs and government agencies. It can forge partnerships to replace confrontation. The example from Uzbekistan noted above illustrates the kind of action that can be effective.

The WBG's new strategy needs to recognize explicitly that that practical, sustained action to counter sextortion has to be led by citizens in their own countries. Expat international experts can help with technical issues, but they have little to no credibility as leaders in this sensitive area. The WBG needs to find ways to play supportive roles on a sustained basis in encouraging local CSOs and public officials to work constructively together to counter GBV, including sextortion. This may demand some change in the culture of the WBG's operational staff.

**Grants to CSOs and Media** – Success in curbing GBV demands increases in the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) operating in this area and the WBG should consider direct grants to CSOs to support such specific actions, while ensuring that it leaves project leadership to the CSOs. In seeking to empower citizens, we need to assist CSOs to increase their capacity and opportunity to use access to information rights to enhance their ability to obtain evidence essential for court actions.

The WBG should also be prepared to financially support investigative reporting and local media monitoring. Publicity of abuses, and about approaches to curb GBV at local levels, is essential to build public confidence that reforms are possible. Put another way, without media support, community groups may fail. Only through a well-educated media can there be a stream of news stories that name and shame perpetrators and contribute to essential education over time.

**Breaking the Silence:** Many people have said this before, yet it needs repeating, we must find ways to break the silence by victims of GBV so that meaningful data can be secured, that the true impact of the problem can become far better known. The WBG needs to promote success stories in this area to build the confidence among victims of GBV to come forward. In pursuing such work, the WBG should strengthen its partnerships with CSOs that have experience in this area at the national level (see the example from India below).

### Costs and Trends in GBV

As methodologies improve to gather data on gender-based abuses, so a picture emerges that should ring alarm bells across the globe. Recent analysis by UN Women, part of the United Nations, in a report [Facts and figures: Ending Violence Against Women](#), shows increasingly concerning trends in a large range of categories, from technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, to trafficking in women, and to sexual violence against women and girls.

The World Bank in redefining its overall mission has placed far greater priority on environmental issues. As the UN Women's report noted: Climate change and environmental degradation are increasing gender-based abuse. For example, In Ethiopia there was an increase in girls sold into early marriage in exchange for livestock to help families cope with the impacts of prolonged droughts. Then, to take another example, Nepal witnessed an increase in trafficking from an estimated 3,000–5,000 annually in 1990 to 12,000–20,000 per year after the 2015 earthquake.

Then the UN Women's report underscored the economic costs of violence against women and girls by noting: "Violence against women can result in significant costs to the state, victims/survivors, and communities. Costs are both direct and indirect, and tangible and intangible. For example, the costs of the salaries of individuals working at shelters are direct tangible costs. Costs are borne by everyone, including individual victims/survivors, perpetrators, the government, and society in general.

- In Viet Nam, both out-of-pocket expenditures and lost earnings represent nearly 1.41 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). More importantly, regression results for estimating productivity loss due to violence indicate that women experiencing violence earn 35 per cent less than those who are not abused, pointing to another significant drain on the national economy.
- In Egypt, some 500,000 working days are lost each year due to marital violence, and the health sector bears more than USD 14 million in costs to serve just one quarter (600,000) of survivors.
- In Morocco, the total cost of physical and/or sexual violence against women was estimated at MAD 2.85 billion (around USD 308 million) a year.
- In 2021, gender-based violence across the European Union was estimated to cost around EUR 366 billion a year. Violence against women makes up 79 per cent of this cost, amounting to EUR 289 billion.

## GBV and Corruption

CSOs in an increasing number of countries are now engaged in projects to counter corruption in GBV. The evidence is overwhelming: a sharp and unfettered focus on GBV can attain constructive results if CSOs take the lead, adapting approaches to local circumstances which they know best, and raising public education and public pressure.

For example, a pioneering project that may serve as an important model in India, is being supported by the [Partnership for Transparency Fund](#). An 18-month project is currently underway titled [Building a Coordinated Response to Prevent and Reduce Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\) in Kishangarh Block, Ajmer, Rajasthan India](#), that is being implemented by a local CSO, the Centre for Advocacy and Research, India (CFAR). The project has aimed to shape a systemic and grassroots response and solution to GBV. The overall project goal is to strengthen the readiness and capacity of the administrative and legal system and the community to develop the mechanisms including standard operating procedures and grassroots structures to address GBV in a timely and decisive way. The project aims to reach out to all women, girls, and groups affected by GBV in 33 Gram Panchayats (GPs) or Village Council of Kishangarh Block, a total population of 68,397 of which 20,526 are women.

The project has completed one year and initial results are promising. The initial baseline showed only 8% of the community were aware of the government programs for available for women. By reaching out to over 60% of the 20,526 women, there is now better awareness of women's and child rights, the need for public safety and redressal mechanisms and, more importantly, the systemic ills of school dropout by girls and child marriage. The community is now also more aware of, and accessing, government programs, including the SpeakUp App that provides immediate access for women fearing violence to police, women's forums (created under the project) or to family.

The project has established 8 gram sakhis (village helpers), young women trained as paralegals, who work with local government and district officials to improve facilities for women, such as CCTV cameras and road lights in public spaces, help desks and help lines, and handbills promoting them. With the Gram sakhis accompanying GBV survivors to police and medical services, they are now officially recognized as 'Suraksha (or Security) Buddies'!

The project is spreading awareness on law/legal recourse as well as the services available to those both vulnerable to and affected by GBV. Simultaneously, CFAR is identifying potential change agents and leaders within the community, enabling them to form Gender Forums led by women, and then support them in collectively reaching out to and engaging key stakeholders in shaping an enabling environment and key processes to both prevent and reduce GBV. These processes of both self-organizing and working with the governmental system will enable Gender Forums to collaborate with multiple levels of local service providers, duty-bearers, and decision-makers to ensure that the justice system not only becomes gender sensitive but also responsive and willing to use administrative and legal address systems.

The critical message from this successful project is that leadership is coming from the community. External expert development organizations, be they a small one like PTF with its volunteer experts (many of whom are retired World Bank senior officials) or the WBG, can be very important with financing and advice, but need to recognize that they should look to local community civil society for implementing leadership – something that the Bank finds difficult to do.

The impact of a project like this one, for example, was reported in July 2023 by The [Hindustan Times](#), noting:

“Violence against women thrives where a combination of factors ranging from isolation, shame and patriarchy combine to ensure a culture of silence. Change can be effected when women come together to put up a joint front. A perfect example is the coming together of *gram sakhis* and women’s forums in Kishangarh, Ajmer, promoting helpline numbers to deal with violence. These agents of social change are undaunted by the patriarchal environment they live in, now covering 33 villages in the district.

In a remarkable effort, they have formed survivor support groups, trained themselves to be paralegal volunteers, and are tirelessly working to raise awareness about violence against women. Each *gram sakhi* is responsible for one gram panchayat with a know-how of legally and socially addressing the issue of violence, empowering those who have suffered and holding the perpetrators accountable.

Saraswati, a *gram sakhi* from Roopangarh, is also a *suraksha sakhi* (protection buddy), designated by the Roopangarh police station. She says, “I was able to gain knowledge on laws and redressal mechanisms, which gave me the confidence and motivation to spread awareness in my village. Now, I am sharing information on helplines and providing self-defense training to school-going girls.

These women feel that despite comprehensive laws to protect women, many still face violence. One reason is the lack of knowledge of the available redressal mechanisms. “We have launched an intensified door-to-door awareness campaign to inform women about the helpline for violence against women. This helpline serves as a crucial resource for women who may be experiencing violence or abuse. By spreading the word about this valuable tool, we hope to empower women,” says Sakina, member of the women’s forum and a survivor of violence from Chundari village. “We were unaware of any mechanisms to lodge a complaint or reach out at the time of need or in trouble, and if we are told verbally, we forget the numbers. But now that they are pasted on the walls of our houses, it is easy to remember,” says Lali Rao, a Scheduled Caste woman from Roopangarh.”

### **Sextortion:**

A complicated anti-corruption challenge, one where progress has been slight, relates to the issue of sextortion. Women in poorer countries face corruption challenges when they lack the cash to meet demands and are frequently extorted for sex. This is true in educational institutions, jobs, and many other situations. Poor women and sometimes men are powerless to resist the demands. They may be falsely arrested and the police or prosecutors will demand sex in return for dropping charges.

A 2014 [policy brief](#) by Marie Chene and Craig Fagen (staff of Transparency International--TI) emphasized that women are especially vulnerable to the negative effects of corruption in countries where they lack control over resources. Because they are unable to pay bribes they are denied basic social services and jobs. Inability to pay bribes compounds the impoverishment of women in countries (especially in South Asia) where poor families tend to invest in quality education for boys with girls relegated household work. Securing police protection and obtaining justice from the courts depends heavily on the ability to bribe. Where women lack resources to bribe, they are especially vulnerable. Other scholars highlight similar patterns.

Transparency International surveys for its [Global Corruption Barometer \(GCB\)](#), included the issue of Sextortion, for the first time, in its 2019 Latin American survey. The central finding was that one in five women surveyed said they had either experienced Sextortion or knew someone who was a victim. Data is exceptionally difficult to obtain in this area. In many cultures and countries, women run enormous personal

risks of being seen as the villains, not the victims, if they report these crimes and publish details about them. Sextortion is, in fact, a largely taboo topic.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, former World Bank Managing Director and current Director of the World Trade Organization, in a [lecture in June 2007](#) in Washington, told the story of a 21-year-old university student in Nigeria: “Rose, from a poor rural family, could not purchase the series of class notes sold by her lecturer to students as part of the reading material for her class. The lecturer, who used these moneys to supplement his income, noticed that Rose was not purchasing the notes and penalized her through low grades for her work. When she explained she couldn’t pay she was asked to make up with other favors which she refused. The failing grade she was given was instrumental in her withdrawal from the university which put an end to her higher education. An individual and an entire family lost their hope and pathway to escape poverty. When I followed up on this story, I found that it was by no means an isolated case. It was part of a systemic rot that had befallen what had once been a very good tertiary education system in Nigeria.”

Transparency International has noted with regard to Latin America and the Caribbean that it is working with 17 of its national chapters to advocate for women at the highest levels of government and among global, regional and national policymakers.

In addition, 10 chapters launched a multi-country research project to review legislative frameworks related to sextortion, identify improvements and make policy recommendations. For example, in Guatemala, the TI chapter, [Acción Ciudadana](#), trains women leaders in tackling corruption, exercising social audits, and other forms of advocacy and citizen participation.

Major initiatives have been taken by TI chapters under the heading [“Corruption as a form of gender violence.”](#) In Peru, the TI chapter, [Proética](#), conducts research to better understand the linkages between gender and corruption at a national level.

In Argentina and Mexico, TI conducts case studies to evaluate the impact that women in politics have on anti-corruption efforts. Initiatives such as these could all be strengthened by direct World Bank support.

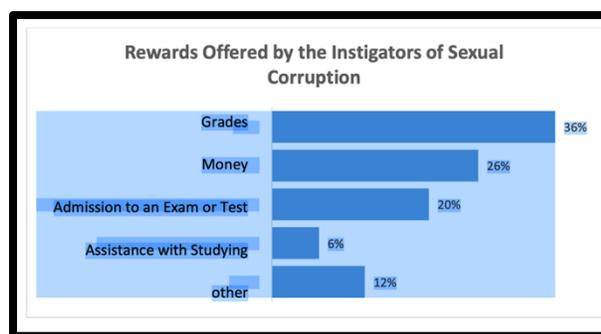


Local civil society organizations in many countries need to build new spaces for citizen engagement on GBV and establish collective action groups. There is power in numbers. When groups of 20, 30, or even more women come together in forums of survivors of sextortion and activists, they can change the power dynamics in communities and reduce the control of entrenched patriarchal systems.

### Example: Madagascar

The findings of focus groups and interviews related to surveys in Madagascar in 2021/'22 may well reflect conditions in many countries. In its report [\*“Sexual Corruption in Schools and Universities,”\*](#) Transparency International Madagascar found: “ At university, sexual extortion remains the currency of exchange in return for better exam grades... The study involved focus groups and 8,501 people were interviewed during the survey phaser of the research. Of all the respondents, 4,936 recognize the existence of sexual corruption in the educational or university environment, i.e., 62% of them.”

Respondents defined sexual corruption as the practice of sexual relations for interest. Among these interests are mentioned: improving grades, admission to an exam or competition, the provision of various work (homework, exam tests, etc.), exemption from obligations relating to studies (presence, tuition payment, etc.), communication of exam subjects in advance, etc. After this first definition comes sexual violence. In some cases, it was found that it intervenes in retaliation for a refusal of the request formulated upstream by the instigator. In others, it takes the form of rape or assault. These two definitions combined more than two-thirds of respondents' opinions.



Good grades are the first area of extortion offered by the instigators with more than one in three cases of sexual corruption involving grades (36%). Money in the form of financial aid is the second most often implicated (26%). Admission to an exam or competition comes at 20%.

#### *A few testimonials from the Madagascar report:*

== “Since I was in 10th grade, one of my teachers made advances to me, promising me that if I agreed to sleep with him, I would pass without any obstacle in 11th grade. Of course, I never accepted his proposal. One day I was among the last to clean our classroom. The teacher in question came by and raped me. I was desperate because I lodged a complaint with the Management, but without any follow-up. I was even expelled from this establishment because I could not prove this rape. I gave up and now I stopped going to high school, I do odd jobs.”

== “I agreed to sleep with my supervisor because he didn't want to give a grade to my dissertation. I really regretted it but I couldn't help it: I had the choice between getting good grades or repeating my course.”

== “A psychologist recounted during discussions with the association's team the case of a brilliant student who had decided to abandon the career she had envisaged overnight, for unknown reasons. It was only after a thorough psychoanalysis that this student understood that she had been the victim of sexual harassment (which turns into sexual corruption if the victim agrees with the request of the instigator) but that she had repressed this painful episode of her life. This is the reason why she had decided to abandon her dream outright.”

== “A teacher who gave a two out of twenty (02/20) to a female student. As a result, she completely missed her year. He suggested that she add a 1 just in front of the 2 so that she would have 12. And like that, she would be able to pass. For that, she “simply had to sleep with him.”

== “The female teaching staff, even with diplomas in the field of education superior to the others, are not eligible for any promotion in the event of refusal of sexual favors.”

### **Example: Nigeria**

Transparency International - Nigeria’s Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) - is working with TIMBY (which describes itself as “a collaboration - We are a mash-up of filmmakers, techies, security experts and designers interested in breaking divides to tell stories that change the world”) to counter widespread sextortion in schools and in universities. In a report - [Using Timby To Fight Sextortion In Nigerian Universities](#) in April 2023, TIMBY noted that public pressure on the Nigerian government to act to criminalize Sextortion increased sharply after the airing of a remarkable undercover [BBC documentary](#) in 2019. In 2022, the Nigerian Senate approved and sent to the House of Representatives the “Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Education Institution Bill.”

Over the last two years, CISLAC has conducted training sessions, workshops, radio programs and other sensitization events to educate individuals about what sextortion entails, the negative impact it has, and how to protect oneself and others from this type of violence. It understands that legislation alone will not be sufficient and that there not only needs to be consistent public pressure to ensure enforcement of the law, but there also needs to be direct action to assist victims. As CISLAC has noted, at universities: “there are several fundamental challenges that contribute to the prevalence of sexual extortion, particularly within universities:

1. Stigmatization of victims and wide-spread impunity which has resulted in a culture of silence.
2. The perpetrators are mostly high profile individuals who are either lecturers or non-academic staff who have some level of influence or power with the institution and society.
3. Lack of awareness among students and society that sextortion is a form of corruption. Even if someone did want to report on an issue, most people are not aware of the appropriate channels to contact for support.
4. There is distrust between citizens and public institutions. Survivors of these crimes fear that even if they jump through all the hoops to report what happened to them, it is unlikely that appropriate justice will be served. Oftentimes, perpetrators go unpunished.
5. Few victims, mainly women, report incidents of sextortion and other human rights violations, and even when they do, anti-corruption agencies and other public institutions aren’t very effective at managing the cases, if they are ever even managed at all.”

TIMBY has created an App to show students how to anonymously report crimes. The App can be downloaded for free from the Google Play Store by students or others on campus. It offers a safe and anonymous way for sextortion survivors or their loved ones to submit questions or seek guidance before or after an incident has occurred.



Grievances, questions and reports sent via the App are received by CISLAC. They work in collaboration with legal and mental health professionals to triage and solve issues. Those seeking legal advice are supported by TI-Nigeria's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC). By providing the option to report anonymously, individuals can receive the assistance they require while feeling secure in the knowledge that their reputation, educational pursuits, and well-being are being safeguarded.

Reports from people seeking mental health or psychological support such as counseling, therapy or group support are managed by a separate non-governmental organization. These professionals communicate with them anonymously through the App. If they reach a point where they feel safe and comfortable, they may choose to share their contact information for further in-person support. The process prioritizes the safety, anonymity, and care of those reporting.

These kinds of innovative approaches, developed by CSOs in an increasing number of developing countries, can be all the more effective with direct World Bank support. Partnerships of this kind with CSOs and media organizations can raise the bar on what the WBG can achieve in seeking to end GBV.

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For further information, please contact the coordinator of this response to the World Bank.

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