

Title of Project: *Gender-Based Violence: #ItEndsWithMe*
Country of project implementation: South Africa
Sponsoring College: International House NY
Designated Project Leader: Lebogang Mahlare

The goals of the 'Gender-Based Violence: #ItEndsWithMe' project were to critically engage and tackle the issue of GBV in South Africa under three thematic areas:

- The history of institutional / structural violence and root causes of GBV
- The psychology of abuse in our society and breaking intergenerational patterns of violence
- Community service and activism against GBV, led by men

Other fund-raising efforts did not contribute to the project and thus the Davis Prize Projects for Peacefunding was critical to the success of driving this effort and delivering on its expected objectives.

The brainchild for this idea arose out of a dire need in South Africa's discourse to adequately tackle the scourge of GBV beyond just condemning it. It then became critical to better understand mechanisms of addressing this issue that are a) inclusive and b) encourage thoughtful dialogue and provoke action in both men and women as allies and also as community builders in whatever spaces they occupy.

The issue of GBV has existed through historical structures that pervade many systems in society. High levels of violent crimes are symptoms of underlying social, economic, and political strife. GBV in South Africa is no different. Wide gender inequality and inequity in gender power relations, in the context of South Africa's challenging political history and economic reality has begetted violent patterns that are reinforced by structural violence, eroding social mobility. This is reinforced by inaccess to health services, employment and adequate education. These structures have too perpetuated intergenerational violence and compounded a now, more complex issue.

As such, the choice of this project and tackling it in this manner had to go beyond lip-service and marketing but to also support community-based efforts, open discussions that create safe spaces for healing and also educational platforms that re-educate both men and women and also showcase how and where the patterns of violence arise, where they are endemic and how they are entrenched in culture, attitudes and institutions. The hope of using this approach was to create a workshop that would aim to make the process as interactive as possible, provide educational materials and facilitated discussion while also creating replicable models that can be carried out with little resources in other spaces.

The host sites that were selected to facilitate the workshops in person, to allow for in person conversation for a more impactful interaction, studying body language, tone and deep connection. The environment was also designed for breakaway sessions and down time, giving people space to share a meal, refreshments and enjoy social time, fostering an informal gathering for continued interaction. In addition to this, it was important to create video material and a model for replication away from the in-person engagement, in order to create discussion online for those who are unable to attend, but also give them the tools to carry this project out in their own private spaces should they not want to be in the physical space with people they do not know.

There were many moments when I thought the project would not work. This was mainly attributed to external reasons. South Africa went through a third wave of COVID infections which made life all the more challenging for a number of reasons. Shortly after arriving in South Africa, hard lockdowns were imposed

that restricted in-person gatherings and also imposed curfews that were extended and only eased slightly on September 12th, 2021 per the President's announcement. During the period of the third-wave, people's personal losses of family and friends, including my own, on such an unprecedented

scale made hosting such an event tone deaf. The country also went through an attempted insurrection in July 2021, which saw the country go through two weeks of arson, looting, anarchy and violence. This shook the nation up and saw SA deploy soldiers to enforce lockdowns. The availability of vaccines for civilians in the country only became open to most of the population late in August 2021. As a result it became increasingly pivotal to move the event entirely to when infections died down and the country moved into a more stable state, where vaccinations would also be more widespread to ensure people felt safe and also available (even online) to show up.

Communicating with people was difficult because everyone's priorities shifted to focusing on their immediate family and not taking on too many projects. The passion for the project was met with excitement and willingness to assist but less commitment. That was understandable given the times we are in. I believe the workshop itself also has the potential to give rise to heated moments, challenging conversation points and a need for vulnerability. Delicacy and a well-tempered facilitating will be critical to fostering healthy communication and creating a sense of safety in the sessions.

Defining peace: I believe peace is an absence of turmoil and violence that affords people their freedom to live without fear of persecution because of their belief system, way of life or identity. It is a state of being where one should be able to live in harmony with others in their chosen environment.

This project will contribute to fostering peace in South Africa because it tackles the problem of GBV based on an understanding of shared humanity, 'ubuntu', where at its core reaches out to our foundational values as people. It hopes to break down boundaries, educate people about history and current sociology and aid us to return to values of 'ubuntu'. In the short-term, it will provide a foundational baseline with new conversational elements that have not been used before in relation to this issue. It will impact its immediate participants and equip them with the tools to also share their knowledge and lessons in their communities. In the long-term, I hope to use the outputs of the GBV workshop in a shareable booklet, and a distributable video that inspires people to not only learn deeply about this issue but to also become allies in their immediate spaces, creating a chain reaction for them to replicate and pass on their lessons in similar workshops. The broader aim of this project is to reduce GBV in the country through a multi-faceted approach, and I hope that this project is the catalyst to achieve just that.

The project has seen no significant changes other than the additional elements to help bring this project to life, and also give it longevity. These include: paid sponsored pages on Instagram and Twitter to reach a wider audience, this also includes printing of t-shirts for facilitators, the purchasing of small prizes to incentivize people's participation in the workshop, publishing of a booklet that will also come in pdf format and also creating a video after the session that will continue to spread the message of ending GBV in the country.

This project has changed the way I look at the world by allowing me to further explore inequities that prevail through a gender lens. Moreover, it also allowed me to take the focus away from my experience as a woman alone and to also understand GBV from a transgender perspective. The prism of gender often gets polarized into a 'male and female' conversation alone and this project allowed me to better explore transgender violence in this conversation too.

The project faced many covid-related challenges (described above) that together with the attempted insurrection, made for a difficult execution of this project in a timely fashion. Advancing the project was still critical because of the rate at which GBV increased during the pandemic. Even in the absence of the pandemic, the issue still requires attention because it's an issue we still struggle with in the fabric of our society. The date of this project has shifted to 30th September 2021 with the same goals for execution. I would advise other future candidates to remain steadfast and unrelenting with their project goals because these times too shall pass. Moving beyond challenges requires strength of character and resolve and projects will still have impact, despite prevailing conditions.

I don't believe that this project would have had the same impact had it been remotely. This is purely from an internet availability perspective for many people in South Africa and also from achieving the desired objectives of the project and inter-personal connections.

"#Gender-Based Violence: ItEndsWithMe breaks down violent patterns in our society to end the war on women in our society. It hopes to foster education, changed perspectives and generate continued actions to end the scourge of GBV in South Africa."

Section II: Photographs

