

International House NY
Lebogang Mahlare
Gender-Based Violence: #ItEndsWithMe
Pretoria, South Africa

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a profound and pervasive problem in the country where South Africa unfortunately holds the mantle for being one of the most unsafe places to be a woman. In 2019, the Women's Danger Index listed South Africa as the worst country for female travelers, citing high incidents of femicide, sexual violence, gender inequality and violent attitudes towards women. In a 2018 report, Stats SA cited rates of femicide in the country to be five times the global average. Adding to these alarming statistics, the United Nations Rape Statistics by Country 2020 listed South Africa as having the highest rape rate in the world, 41% of rape cases involving children. All of this means that South Africa has to deal with gender inequity and inequality urgently to prevent future trajectories tending in this direction.

GBV (Gender-Based Violence) is defined as "any violence that occurs as a result of role expectations associated with each gender, as well as the unequal power relationships between the genders." GBV unfortunately disproportionately affects women and girls and is deeply engrained in the fabric of South Africa's society; entrenched in institutions, attitudes, and culture. It takes the form of physical, psychological, sexual and/or financial violence and most notably committed by men. Under this banner fall identifiable categories of violence that come in different forms, namely, violence against women and girls, against LGBTQ people, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, sexual violence and structural violence. These all have a profound impact on social and developmental impacts for survivors, their families and the communities they form part.

Addressing GBV is a complex and mammoth task, requiring commitment from government, civil society and nongovernmental organizations alike. In order to do so, it requires addressing the root causes. High levels of violent crimes are usually symptoms of underlying social, economic and political challenges such as poverty, inequality, political strife and rampant unemployment and in a society that has emerged from a crime against humanity, namely, Apartheid. The Apartheid government fostered cultures of violence by using it as a political weapon, and helped embed unequal power relations within the society, thus, issues of in access still prevail in South Africa's new democracy. This latter form of violence, structural violence, still prohibits people from accessing adequate education, health services and employment opportunities and erodes social mobility, while also having the legacy of regenerating intergenerational violence.

In 2019, many women took to the streets to protest GBV, marching outside the World Economic Forum meetings where global leaders were discussing urgent issues of the world. The President of South Africa boldly stepped out of the meetings to address this issue, accelerating much needed policy changes to stop this scourge of violence. #AmINext, #MeToo, #EndGBV, #HerLifeMattered, #SayHerName are but a few of the hashtags used to challenge what has been now become widely accepted as a national crisis.

In 2020, the President declared that South Africa was suffering from two pandemics, namely GBV and COVID-19 saying that "men of our country have declared war on women". This was speaking to a sharp rise in domestic violence during the country's lockdown, going as far to adjust regulations to ensure women could leave their homes to report abuse without fear of punishment for violating lockdown laws.

The government has sought to combat GBV in the country by introducing three new bills to bring justice to the victims of GBV; this has been conducted through a \$100 million Emergency Response Action Plan

on Gender Based Violence and Femicide. Though these have been encouraging signs, the vehicles for addressing this issue have largely been punitive and as a result, there is a significant need to tackle this issue through counselling, rehabilitation programs and constructive dialogues to change attitudes and behaviors of the perpetrators, men.

The Davis Peace project would go a long way to funding educational initiatives centered around three thematic areas: the history of institutional violence and root causes of GBV; the psychology of abuse and breaking intergenerational violent patterns; community service and activism against GBV, led by men. Community leaders, historians and gender experts will be brought in to speak and facilitate workshops that speak to the themes by engaging in the following activities:

- **The history of institutional / structural violence and root causes of GBV:** a film screening of popular short films around gender and violence will be held in a public venue, followed by a panel discussion and workshop where men and women can speak about the role of structural violence and inequality. The definitions of GBV will be spoken to, namely, cultural violence, structural violence and direct violence. It will help people define GBV and its signs, as well as identify it in behaviors and attitudes. The aim of this workshop is to make it as interactive as possible, bringing into the room demographically diverse people. This will be facilitated in collaboration with experienced NGOs, or experts with background in dealing with these delicate situations.
- **The psychology of abuse and breaking intergenerational violent patterns:** the beliefs and messages that surround people every day are endemic in the society and will require re education to break down. Thus, the aim of this segment will be to tackle the mentality of men in society with a focus on cultural violence. After viewing two videos of rape culture in music, television and everyday pop culture, participants will break into facilitated groups and will be asked to perform small skits where participants switch genders, and women get to be men and men get to be women. This will hopefully allow each gender to engage these issues and foster empathy towards each gender.
- **Community service and activism against GBV, led by men:** After the workshop is concluded, a reflection activity will take place where men and women alike will write down commitments on how they can challenge stereotypes, norms, and perceptions prevalent in society to influence their communities positively and stand up when other men hold and perpetuate damaging attitudes towards women. The workshop will also encourage small support groups of people to keep engaging and educating themselves beyond the workshop on how to stop GBV when they see signs in the workplace, in the home, in communities or in public spaces.

The success of this project will center around how the abovementioned thematic areas are achieved. This workshop will need to be conducted in a manner that fosters empathy and understanding, while also maintaining respect of viewpoints that may be challenging. Education, role play, and reflection are the three key methods that will be used foster this exchange, with occasional ice breakers to lift the atmosphere.

Surveys will be passed around before and after the workshop to capture expectations and also reflections on whether people found the workshop helpful or not. These surveys will be scored quantitatively, in order to measure the feedback.

As this workshop hopes to be replicated, it would provide useful feedback on what was appreciated and what was not. Should this workshop achieve all its intended goals, the hope is to develop a toolkit, with facilitator contact details for others to take up the mantle and lead workshops in their communities.