

**WOMEN OF ZIMBABWE ARISE (WOZA)
16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE
REPORT ON COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS NOVEMBER 2011**

PROGRAMME INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims. Gender based violence (GBV) also reinforces gender stereotypes. It encompasses a wide range of human rights violations, including sexual abuse of children, rape, domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment, trafficking of women and girls and several harmful traditional practices such genital mutilation. Any one of these abuses can leave deep psychological scars, damage the health of women and girls in general, including their reproductive and sexual health, and in some instances, results in death. Because gender-based violence is sustained by silence, lack of political will and societal behaviour, norms, values and expectations.

Issues that came from both Bulawayo and Harare were the same with both areas noting that GBV is prevalent in all spheres of society. They agreed that gender-based violence is a universal reality existing in all societies regardless of income, class and culture. While it was agreed that some men were at the brunt of GBV it was unanimously agreed that it affects women and girls disproportionately. It would be difficult to find one woman, whom at one time or the other in her lifetime had not been afraid merely because she was a woman. Those women who are particularly vulnerable to violence are those who live in extremely unstable conditions and in most instances do not have avenues to expose such abuse thus depend on civic organisations for help. The report will be structured under different topical issues that were discussed during the roll out in both areas.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the workshop were the following:

- (a) To equip our members with the necessary knowledge concerning the international theme for 16days of activism against GBV. To assist members to come up with their WOZA theme for this year's commemorations.
- (b) Service Member's needs: In line with the proposed activity the need will be an informational one and thus they are made aware of what the 16days activism entails and the SADC protocol, broadening understanding of the concept, therefore motivating them to come up with community based activities that conscientise and raise awareness on GBV in a development framework.
- (c) Recruit new members: Once our members begin community awareness activities on GBV, these activities can then be used as recruitment tools to add growth to the movement and mature the discourse on GBV.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS-BULAWAYO AND HARARE

Baseline study was conducted before the focus group and the community roll out. This was necessary as the international campaign dealt with very theoretical principles and for an effective campaign WOZA would have to understand the entry point.

Focus group discussions on the 16Days of activism against gender based violence were held both in Harare and Bulawayo. The workshops were successfully held for both areas though they were a few challenges; these will be highlighted later in the report. A total of 80members attended the focus group discussions. 69 Females and 11males. The regional breakdown being Harare 30 females and 4 males while Bulawayo had 39 females and 7 males.

Of topical importance to the participants was the definition of gender and how this differs from the definition of sex. There was a lot of discussion and debate surrounding the definition of sex and gender as all participants defined gender as sex. However, after explaining and using everyday examples understanding was eventually established.

The different types of abuse were categorised for the benefit of the coaches who would have to train communities on 16Days of Activism against gender based violence. These types of abuses were categorised as psychological, emotional, sexual and financial. Participants identified that women in

particular are vulnerable when it comes to emotional, sexual and financial matters. This they attributed to the social standing of women in society and how they are valued by their spouses hence resulting in the abuses. It was noted that people who were abused kept quiet about the abuse because of fear, shyness, and lack of solid support structure from family and society, pride, desperation, lack of knowledge and seeking advice from wrong people.

Of importance to the workshop was the cycle of abuse that tends to be established over time between families down to generations and the effects of domestic violence. Chief among them was death and disability. This then affects society as children who grow up in violent backgrounds also tend to behave in a difficult fashion at school causing problems and eventually growing up to be violent individuals themselves. This then becomes a cycle thus the need and importance of stopping all forms of gender based violence was stressed.

CONTEXT OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

One of the objectives of the discussion was to build a strong organisational structure. The focus group discussion was necessary to plan for the 16days activities. The discussion sought to equip our members with the necessary knowledge pertaining to gender based violence with particular emphasis on the 2011 theme that says Peace in the home Peace in the World. The SADC protocol on gender was used to stress the importance of activism against gender based violence. Of particular significance to the activism against gender based violence was article 20-25. While some sections of article 20-25 are already in existence in our country such as the enactment of laws against gender based violence, members noted that Zimbabwe already has such laws. One such law that was used during the discussion was the Domestic Violence Act which has all the provisions stated in the SADC gender protocol. Participants noted that the law needs serious enforcement and buy in of all relevant stakeholders to make it viable. Participants noted that the police were very important players in the enforcement of the law.

One member cited that reporting issues of gender violence the police is a sheer waste of time as the police always demand that the abused bring the abuser. Participants noted that the police needed education on how to handle such issues as they have from time immemorial victimised the abused.

The discussions sought to service member's information needs in line with the proposed activity. This objective was of major importance as we sought to inform our members and arm them with the necessary skills and information concerning gender based violence. Information sharing was done through participatory discussion and printed materials with the relevant information. As a result it was hoped that information sharing would motivate members to come up with community based activities that would members be aware of gender based violence in a development framework.

This would be achieved through training other members of the structure thus coming up with themes for the 16days that resonate with the aims and objectives of the organisation concerning gender based violence.

The focus groups discussions also sought to recruit new members. It was agreed that once members begun community awareness activities on gender based violence, these activities would then be used as recruitment tools to add growth to the movement.

During the focus group discussions there were some participants who dominated and overpowered some in the discussion which led to low self esteem to those who didn't participate much. Jocelyn Chiwenga's case was used as a case study during the discussions. Samples of the stories used have been attached at the end of the report. Her case was used to show that gender based violence has no class and that signs of abuse of women or men manifests in different ways given that she used to abuse other people such as Tsvangirai's photographer and journalists alike. Members also noted that national resources were being abused as her husband would take her to Malaysia for treatment after beating her up.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP ROLL OUT BULAWAYO AND HARARE

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|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Byo Female 3845 | Byo Male 436 | Hre Female 2415 | Hre Male 242 | Total Female 6260 | Total Male 678 | Total Participants 6,938 |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|

A total of 6902 people participated as part of the rollout in the two regions Byo and Harare, 6061 females and 841 males. The regional breakdowns being Harare 242 males and 2415 females while Bulawayo a total of 436 males and 3845 females were trained. Training was done by coaches under the watchful eyes of cluster leaders, coordinators and field officers.

FACTORS PROMOTING GBV

Members identified different of factors promoting GBV and these include;

Wife battering which they attributed to cultural practices that glorify men's violence against women. They indicated that according to culture, it was acceptable for a man to discipline his wife and the wife to accept it as the norm. Members also looked at the role played by tradition in GBV. Traditionally women are regarded as inferior to men and this attitude has the ability to restrict a woman's ability to exercise choices that would enable her end the abuse. This however has changed though some men still cling to such traditional norms and demand respect from women as their due.

They also identified patriarchal structures in society that maintain unequal power relationships between men and women. They said patriarchy directly supports domestic oppression and violence against women thus women suffer in silence as they have no avenues to make their voices heard. Members noted that in most instances this is the norm in certain religions where women are to be seen and not heard. Thus when these women are not heard then they remain abused for a long time as they do not have platforms to share their dilemmas with the rest of the society.

The recent changes in gender roles in societies regarding expectation and realities of women's lives have produced men's fear of power loss and have increased violence against women. Men thus fear that their power and stature as household heads is threatened by women emerging as independent. This then causes the men to be violent and abuse women. They opined that if a man cannot establish his authority intellectually or economically, he would tend to do so physically.

Gender role socialisation was also pinpointed as another factor that contributes to GBV. Men's attitude towards women, which men have over the years learned during gender role socialisation contributes to GBV. Members attributed this kind of violence to socialisation in the homes, schools, churches and other institutions of socialisation, boys are taught not to trust women. This then is duplicated when they are adults and take their frustrations on the woman who most times that not are defenceless.

Members also identified men's competitiveness, their desire for control and power also contribute to GBV. Where men are power hungry they tend to want to exercise the levels of their power over women which usually tends to lead to GBV. Participants also identified men's unidentified and unexpressed emotions (i.e., hurt, pain, shame, guilt, powerlessness and dependency) are expressed as anger, rage and violence against women. They noted that men are unable to express their feelings due to ingrained societal expectations where it is considered unmanly to cry or to appear soft and sensitive.

Under relational factors members noted that the inability to appreciate and understand the context of each other's gender roles no matter how diverse and dynamic, usually leads to men being violent towards women. Socialisation experiences were also identified as factors contributing to GBV. This they said happens when children grow up in violent environments they tend to be violent adults themselves as they tend to view violence as a normal way of communication and expression. They noted that experiencing domestic violence in the family of origin increases the possibility of violence against women.

Members opined that economic power imbalances also contribute to GBV. They cited that in relationships where the man earns less than the woman, there is high likelihood of violence. They justified this saying that men usually do not want to have their authority challenged thus a woman who has more disposable income than them becomes a threat. They also identified poverty as another root cause of GBV. They noted that in places of acute poverty there are more cases of domestic violence than there are in places of affluence.

Members unanimously agreed that the prevalence of GBV in a given society, therefore, is the result of unspoken acceptance by that society.

GBV AND CHILDREN

The members noted that the impact on their social development is affected as they are not able to socialise with their peers. In most cases children from violence marred families tend to be bullies, stubborn and end up as social delinquents, eventually destroying the social fabric. Members noted that GBV tends to affect children as they are deprived of a conducive environment and the means to fully develop their potential.

Members highlighted that children become desensitised to suffering; they may learn to see the use of violence as a legitimate means to achieve their own aims. They also agreed that all these risks of impairments to the development of children into adults affect society as a whole, constraining their contribution to its development.

It was agreed that children who grow up under the influence of GBV tend to resort to prostitution, early marriages and or become street children.

GBV AND MILITARISM

Members stressed that physical, sexual and psychological violence are too often perpetrated or tolerated by the state as it at times prioritises custom or tradition over the respect of fundamental freedom. They agreed that violence against women also exercised as a weapon of war in situations of armed conflict and is used to subdue and dominate women. In times of war and conflict women and children tend to be the most vulnerable groups in society. They are defenseless and unable to confront and retaliate. GBV in war and conflict tends to take many forms including murder, rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy.

Closer to home members dwelt at length on the 2008 elections and the fashion in which women were abused by the police, militia and other state agents. Women were systematically raped by these groups in the name of elections yet there is little that was done for the victims by the government. Rape is used as a weapon to subdue victims and as a sign of dominance of one political party over the other. Effects of such violence on women are untold as homes are broken and individually are left broken.

The presence of small arms in the home was also discussed and they noted that small arms increase the risk of death in particular the women and children in homes of GBV. Members highlighted that military wives are the most abused among wives of security agents. These women have no voice or avenue to express their fears and share their ordeals as they fear reporting. This is because soldiers tend to treat themselves as above the law. They also attributed the fear to report to the fact that there seems to be a love hate relationship between soldiers and the police. Due to this relationship, women tend to think that it is of no use to report as the police never do anything about the abuses. They also noted that the police also abuse the victims of abuse through language and actions. Members reported that the police ask the abused to bring the abuser so as to open a docket. This is difficult to say the least, as the victim cannot go back home and ask the abuser to escort her to the police to make a report.

WHY WOMEN STAY IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Of topical value during the roll out was the issue of women failing to leave abusive relationships. They noted that women found it difficult to leave due to a lot of reasons chief among them being the future and security of children involved in the relationship. They noted it has become socially acceptable for women to stay for the sake of the children yet they will be losing a lot of self respect and dignity in the process.

Fear of societal expectations and judgments was also identified as the reason why women stay in abusive relationships. They noted that society judges a woman who leaves a marriage without really interrogating the reasons behind. This then makes the woman afraid to leave and prefers to stay in the abusive relationship.

Others noted that women stayed in abusive relationships because they would always tell themselves that the man will change yet the man never makes any real commitment to change. Culture was also identified as another major player in the reasons why women stay in abusive relationships. They noted that culturally women were expected to stay in their marriages and bear whatever would come their way. A woman who eventually leaves the marriage is viewed as weak.

Some women are forced to stay in abusive relationships as they do not have any form of livelihood and are dependent entirely on the man for a living. Thus the specter of them leaving the man and starting a new life on their own with no form of income makes them wary of starting anew and thus they prefer to stay. Despite the fact that divorced women with children are entitled to alimony, the current legal system does not inspire confidence in the women in question. The system is flawed thus they can spend long periods without receiving the alimony thus they no longer trust the system and prefer to stay in the abusive relationship. On this note members said women ought to have confidence in the own abilities and do away with the fear of the unknown. They said women have the ability to do far better than what they think themselves to be thus they have to leave abusive relationships and strike out on their own. They also noted that GBV affects both the physical and psychological integrity of women. However slight the violence may be in form, it has no less devastating effect.

WHAT SOCIETY CAN DO

Members noted that for there to be GBV free societies in the future major changes have to be done in the education curricula of children. They noted that the curricula ought to be broadened to encompass contemporary issues which exist in society. This was said would make children more socially aware, enable them to adapt and or change their life style to positive and effective social living in the event that they come from fragmented families marred by GBV.

There is need to include current issues in the education curricula so that students may be aware of issues of concern to the society so as not to be ignorant of issues, events and problems of their societies and seek rational solutions to problems created by them. This is because most of the problems of modern society such as ethnic and cultural intolerance, population explosion, family problems, conflict and gender issues of which gender based-violence is a part, peace education, amongst others anchor on absence of concerted multi-ethnic education, population education, gender education and peace education respectively.

They also noted that there was need for campaigns on GBV to be stepped up and move beyond what is being taught. It was agreed that GBV campaigning must also include children as they are the leaders of tomorrow. This also helps those children who are affected by GBV as they become aware of what is taking place in their homes and take measures to stop it.

Behavior change was also identified as another form of stopping GBV. Members opined that once society is transformed and certain myths, norms and values are done away with, those that devalue women, GBV can be reduced. Reform of the abusers was also cited as another important ingredient in the fight against GBV.

Society also needs to stop judging and discriminating abusers and victims of GBV. This is because discrimination and judgment usually strips away the confidence and faith of the victim while on the hand of the abuser, they fail to reform as they are afraid of how society will treat them. This is the same for women who leave abusive relationships as they are wary of the treatment they will receive and the manner in which society reintegrates them.

Members also recognizes that ending gender-based violence will mean changing cultural concepts about masculinity, and that process must actively engage men, whether they be policy makers, parents, spouses or young boys.

There was agreement that there is need for political will so as to enforce legislation that is already in place such as our own Domestic Violence Bill. Lack of political will gives abusers loopholes to do as they please and still evade the supposedly long arm of the law. The specific example that was used to highlight instances of lack of political will was the manner in which the law is vague when it comes to marital rape. They noted the police always claim that marital rape is complex and is tricky to ascertain. Members noted that in cases of marital rape women are at risk in terms of health and emotion.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHT

During the focus group discussions members managed to share true life situations and experiences on GBV. This helped make the discussions more lively and real to the members as they could identify with situations being used. In addition members got to know about the benefits of copying police reports and complaints to different police stations so as to ensure that the home police station does not sit on a case indefinitely for no apparent reason.