



MASIMANYANE WOMEN'S SUPPORT CENTRE

Registration no: 97/03982/08

Contact details:

Postal Address: P O Box 565, East London, Eastern Province,
South Africa, 5200.

Address: 35 St Marks Road
Southernwood
East London
5201

Fax: +27 43 7439169

Telephone: +27 43 7439176

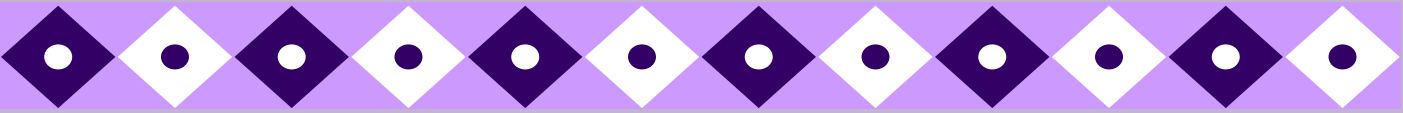
E-mail: maswsc@iafrica.com

Website address: www.masimanyane.org.za

Contact Person: Ms Lesley Ann Foster
Executive Director

Bank Details :

Bank : Nedbank
Account Holder: Masimanyane Women's Support Centre
Branch : Oxford Street, East London, South Africa
Branch code : 121021
Account NO. : 1210 371839
Swift Code : NEDSZAJJ



A Strategic Review on Gender Equality & Violence against Women in South Africa

Introduction

Every day, in many homes, women are beaten and abused. Many die from this widespread violence. Although the most common form of violence against women is domestic violence, women and girls face abuse and sexual violence at every stage of their lives. Violence against women is an extreme manifestation of gender inequality and leads to systemic human rights violations. It is a global problem, deeply ingrained in societies and has serious impacts on women's health and well-being.

In January 2010, an African Consultation was held with the main discussions being on violence against women. The current context in which this phenomenon is occurring was discussed and the following achievements were noted.

South Africa

It is 17 years since the dawn of democracy and more than a decade after South Africa has ratified the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) which provides a set of standards that governments have to work towards in order to ensure that women enjoy equality.

South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world in which equality of all citizens is guaranteed. The country has ratified and signed a vast range of regional and international human rights instruments. The South African constitution goes a long way in providing the mechanisms for de jure equality for women. The State has established an extensive human rights framework including an impressive National Gender Machinery (NGM) which has to ensure that the principles of Equality, Non Discrimination and State Accountability guide all state strategies to end discrimination and advance the rights of women and girls in the country.

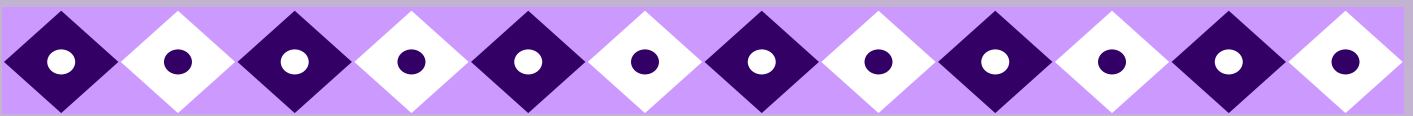
The State has taken measures to domesticate CEDAW and an extensive law reform process was undertaken since the ratification of CEDAW. This has ensured that most of the State's laws and policies provide de jure equality for women in relation to men.

South Africa is a strongly patriarchal society and is steeped in culture, tradition and religion all of which is underpinned by patriarchy. This deeply male centered society privileges men and boys while women and girls are subjected to many forms of oppression and discrimination.

Stereotypical views of women being subservient to men dominate society's view of women and influence all attitudes and behaviours of men and women.

The media is complicit in entrenching the low status of women through advertisements and story lines that are demeaning to women and which glorify the commodification of women's bodies. The media has yet to be held to account for failing to contribute to the eradication of discrimination against women.

South Africa is cited as having amongst the highest levels of violence against women in the world for a country not at war. The incidence of rape is extremely high with Human Rights Watch estimating that at one in every three women and girls will experience sexual violence at least once in their life time. One in every 4 women is said to be in a domestically violent relationship and research has indicated that a woman is killed every six hours in the country. Added to this are cultural and traditional practices which are harmful to women and girls. These include forced and child marriages, virginity testing, female genital mutilation and witch burning which occurs in at least two province in the country. Inheritance rights of



women are under constant attack and HIV/AIDS is fueling the negative effects of this cultural practice.

In January 2010, Masimanyane co hosted a regional consultation on violence against women. 23 countries participated and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women made a presentation on her mandate and listened to the presentations made by each country. Many achievements in respect of gender equality and in respect of violence against women were noted. They included the following:

- Women's human rights is an accepted concept throughout the world.
- Most countries across the world had now ratified or acceded to CEDAW.
- There has been an increase in the number of women who participate in decision-making resulting in better state responses to VAW.
- Many states have effected legal frameworks which address sexual violence.
- However, implementation lags behind in all countries and most members of the community still lack knowledge and awareness of the existing laws and policies.
- In some countries governments have realised the need to provide medical care for women who face violence.
- Religious authorities have started to talk about violence against women although religious and cultural institutions are not in harmony with the laws or human rights frameworks of countries.
- Recognition of the need to diversify responses to addressing violence against women. There is a need to include economic, psychological and social support in the process.
- There has been a marked increase in reporting rates of crimes of sexual violence.
- There is a stronger voice of marginalised populations e.g. lesbian women.
- More NGOs have been formed to address violence against women.
- Awareness programmes have led to a reduction in discrimination and stigmatization attached to sexual violence.

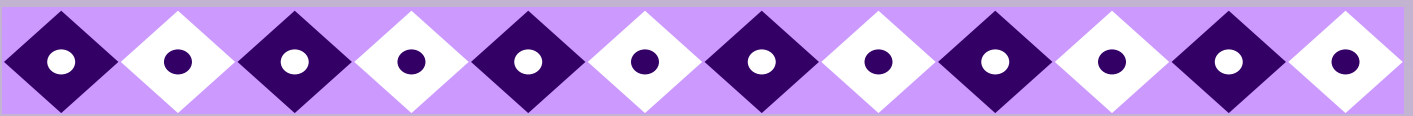
The African consultation also found that there were a number of emerging issues that contribute to the high number of women and girls who experience sexual violence globally and those which affect the promotion and protection of women rights which have emerged in recent years.

These include:-

- Conceptual clarity has been eroded by governments co-opting then modifying the concepts and language of gender equality.
- Many countries have adopted dual legal systems which include traditional, religious or cultural laws
- A culture of impunity for sexual violence has increased fuelled by poor sanctions and a lack of political will.
- The economic crisis globally has led to an increase in violence against women and a retraction of support for NGO's and survivors of VAW
- There is an Increase in levels of trafficking of women and girls, early marriages and harmful cultural and traditional practises and new forms of violence through the internet
- There has emerged new thinking on how to engage male members of the communities in the prevention of violence against women which has shifted the focus.
- There has been tendency of non implementation of international obligations through a lack of domestication of the instruments
- The media influences the commodification of women's bodies and entrenches stereotypes and thus contributes to women's oppression.

There was acknowledgement that violence against women appears to be "*everywhere*" but in reality, it is "*nowhere*" meaning that there seems to be political will and government responses when in essence those





are not adequate or appropriate. This poses a real concern for those working to end violence against women and girls.

Where are we now?

There is strong recognition that government has not achieved de facto equality for women as their lived realities bear testimony to widespread violations of their rights in all aspects of their lives. Violence against women is the most pervasive form of human rights abuses that women experience.

Why is this so? The reasons are numerous but include the following without being limited to these factors

- The dilution of gender equality as a concept and an ideology and the reduction of the focus on disparities and inequities – e.g. the current argument that “gender” is about men and women and not women only
- A lack of true political will of government and its agents.
- A lack of a deep analysis of the phenomenon and the drivers behind it.
- A limited view of the problem
- A lack of evidence and the monitoring and evaluation required to obtain evidence
- A shift to a technical and managerial mode of addressing the problem which limits the focus on social determinants of the problem
- Inadequate resource for a comprehensive and integrated response from policy makers and services providers.

Discussions and dialogues are required to reframe the debates and discussions and re infuse all responses from government, civil society and the donor community from a gender equality and social justice perspective.

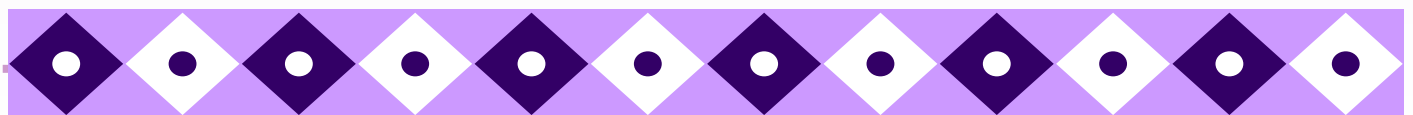
Masimanyane Women’s Support Centre, one of the three largest NGO’s in South Africa working to end violence against women and girls and the advancement of gender equality, is proposing a discussion to map out the current terrain as well as identify strategies and steps that will lead to transformation within the gender equality and violence against women movements. Given the severity of the problem and the current political environment, the discussion has to be given priority.

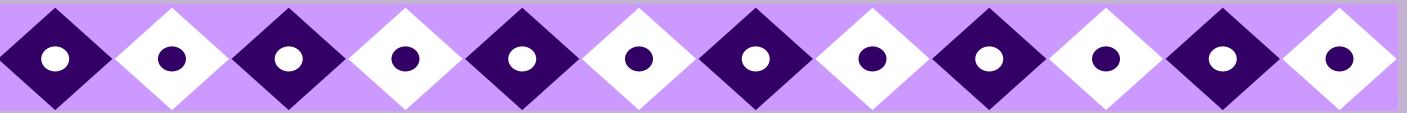
Masimanyane is proposing this discussion to take the form of a strategic review of gender equality and violence against women. The dates agreed on are 5th and 6th May 2011.

Organisational profile

Masimanyane Women’s Support Centre was established in 1996. It has nine offices and a staff of 43 people. The organisation is renowned for its work on violence against women and the advancement of women’s human rights. Masimanyane has contributed to naming the issues and framing them getting them acknowledged nationally. We have opened spaces for women and girls to share their experiences and have worked to get VAW recognised as a critical concern which government and civil society has to respond to. Masimanyane has a strong regional and global footprint. Some achievements include:

- Assisted in developing South Africa’s Domestic Violence Act of 1999.
- Assisted in having virginity testing made illegal
- Hosted women from 5 continents in a global conference on violence against women in (2009)
- Hosted the newly appointed United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women 2009
- Hosting an African Regional Consultation on Violence against Women 2010
- Hosting the pan African Amanitare Network Secretariat which has members in 26 African countries.





In a 2010 external evaluation of Masimanyane Women's Support Centre, it was found that the organisation has a strong track record of programme development and implementation. The organisation has had clean external audit reports which indicates sound financial controls and good governance. Some areas for development or strengthening were identified and the organisation is working on a strategy to address these. This proposed discussion is one of the mechanism being put in place to assist the organisation in the years ahead.

The Strategic review

Masimanyane is proposing to host a conference to review the current status in South Africa in respect of gender equality and the elimination of violence against women. The main aims of this conference are:

- To assess the current status with regard to gender equality within the country
- To analyse the current responses to violence against women from government and civil society organisations
- To identify new strategies that push for transformation in respect of gender equality
- To identify new models of working to end violence against women and girls around

Conference inputs

100 women and men will be invited to participate in this 2 day conference. Participation will be mainly from South Africa. A key note address will be made by Florence Butegwa, UNIFEM's representative to the African Union and the head of the Africa head of the United Nations Secretary General's End Violence campaign.

Some donors will be invited to participate to contribute to the discussions and to link up with women's groups with possible support for the work being done.

A panel discussion will have three speakers who make presentations on the global context, the regional context and the national context. Florence Butegwa who heads the United Nations Secretary Generals campaign in Africa to end violence against women, has confirmed her participation in the panel discussion.

Space will then we created for dialogue on the presentations. Small group discussions will be created to look at responses to each issue raised.

A process will then be developed to identify on strategies that can be taken up at country level for advocating for transformative change which will ultimately lead to eradicating violence against women and advancing gender equality.

Prepared by: Dr. Lesley Ann Foster

Executive Director:

Masimanyane Women's Support Centre

35 St Marks Road

East London

South Africa 5201

Tel: 27 43 7439169

Fax: 27 43 7439176

Email: maswsc@iafrica.com

Website: www.masimanyane.org.za

