

**PROVINCIAL GENDER INDABA  
REPORT**

**25 – 27 NOVEMBER 2002**

**“Restoring the Moral Fibre in Society;  
Uprooting Gender Based Violence”**

## **FOREWORD**

The Provincial Gender Commissioner, Ms. Manana Tlake

The Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) is a Constitutional body established under the Commission on Gender Equality Act No. 39 of 1996 .

The mandate of the CGE is to promote and protect gender equality in a democratic state, through the conduction of public education activities; monitoring Acts of Parliament; investigating of gender related issues; liaising and interacting with organizations that actively promote gender equality; monitoring compliance with International Treaties; and monitoring & evaluating policies and practices of the organs of state at any sphere.

As a point of entry in monitoring gender equality and the evaluating Acts of Parliament, the CGE spearheaded the formation of a gender forum in the Free State Province. The Gender Forum consists of representatives from various government departments, institutions of higher learning, political parties, trade unions, NGO's, CBO's, religious bodies and those having an interest in gender transformation matters. The aim of the Gender Forum is to create an environment of common understanding of gender mainstreaming and to have a global insight into operations of gender based issues.

In order to prepare for the Gender Indaba, the CGE conducted a series of Public Education activities in the form of workshops and gender dialogues.

On 07 December 2001, the CGE held a gender dialogue at the Provincial Legislature, 4<sup>th</sup> Raadsaal Chambers, Bloemfontein. The aim was to interact with various stakeholders on the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) and to assess obstacles that victims of gender violence face at the various service points. As per the resolution from the gender dialogue, the CGE was mandated to facilitate workshops for local Municipal Councilors on the DVA. This was seen in the context of Municipal Councilors being the first layer of leadership in society and in continuous contact with communities.

Follow-up workshops with Municipal District Councilors, and community members were held in three (3) of the five (5) Districts. These workshops set the pace for public hearings which were held in all the Districts where community members raised their issues in relation to gender based violence as well as the problems experienced at service points. The CGE, together with the Independent

Complaints Directorate (ICD) facilitated these meetings and shared their valuable insights on their various roles on curbing gender-based violence.

This process allowed the CGE to establish valuable partnerships with the Councilors. There is however a need to workshop the Councilors further and on a more continuous basis.

These initiatives culminated in the Provincial Gender Indaba which was held from the 25 – 27 November 2003 at the SAU Conference Centre, Bloemfontein. The CGE and the Gender Forum hosted the Indaba.

The Gender Indaba provided a platform for the discussion on ways of harmonizing cultural practices with the provisions of our Constitution, in order to achieve gender equality. Conference also discussed International and Regional treaties on elimination of all types of discrimination against women and children.

The Indaba came at the time when the South Africa was celebrating the 16 Days of Activism on No Violence Against Women.

This report captures the proceedings of the Provincial Gender Indaba, and succeeds the implementation of the Annual Report Card (ARC), a gender monitoring tool set to ensure gender equality by monitoring and evaluating policies and practices of private and public institutions.

The CGE wish to acknowledge the role of the various government departments, civil society organizations and individuals who took time to make a contribution to the conference and the process towards achieving gender equality.

Finally the CGE would like to give a summary report on the Provincial Gender Indaba. Through this report, the CGE does not aim to be scientifically comprehensive, but rather seek to convey the vibrancy and interactions of the conference.

A special word of appreciation to the following guests, partners and sponsors:

- The Premier Ms. W I Direko for gracing the Indaba and receiving the resolutions;
- MEC L Tsenoli, from Local Government and Housing for their ongoing support;
- MEC B Marshoff, Department of Social Development, for hosting the second day of the Indaba;
- MEC B Kotsoane, Public Safety Security and Liaison, for providing the Indaba's merchandise;

- MEC O Tsopo, Department of Health, for providing stationary for the Indaba;
- MEC Z Dingani, Provincial Treasury, for the banners and refreshments;
- Clr. I J Mokoena, for hosting the banquet in honour of the Women of the Free State Province;
- Thuto Stationers for their financial contribution towards the Indaba;
- The National Public protector, Mr. L. Mushwana for gracing the occasion;
- Me. Lulu Xingwana, Chairperson of the Joint Monitoring Committee, for being our guest speaker;
- Minister of Health, Dr. Manto Tshabalala-Msimang for gracing the occasion.

A special thank you to all the other partners who made this event a success.

## **1. OVERVIEW**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

This report is a result of the Provincial Gender Indaba held by the Commission on Gender Equality – Free State on 25 – 27 November 2002 in Bloemfontein at the SAU Conference Centre. The report does not replace minutes nor does it attempt to give details of the Indaba proceedings. Instead, it uses the proceedings to arrive at strategic resolutions; recommendations and interventions in dealing with Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

In order to arrive at the proposed strategic resolutions, recommendations and interventions, this report will start with a brief description of the state and magnitude of the scourge of GBV in the country, and the Free State. It will proceed to look at the current responses and their limitations. This section will

be followed by proposed expectations of what various stakeholders should do to uproot GBV. The last section of this report is dedicated to resolutions and recommendations of the Indaba. Here an attempt is made to clarify how the various stakeholders should execute the tasks agreed on at the Indaba.

In all sections of this report an attempt is also made to refer to presentations of speakers on specific issues that were interrogated at this Indaba.

## **1.2. MANDATE OF THE PROVINCIAL GENDER INDABA**

The Gender Indaba was spearheaded by the Free State Commission on Gender Equality, led by Commissioner Manana Tlake, in collaboration with the Gender Forum. A resolution taken at the Provincial Gender Dialogue on the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) on 07 December 2001 at the Free State Provincial Legislature, gave CGE-Free State the mandate to further interrogate the extent of the manifestation of GBV in the Province. Further note that the Indaba was preceded by Public Hearings on GBV in the District Municipalities. The report on these hearings also provided insight into the deliberations of the Indaba. The Indaba strove to interrogate Gender-Based Violence and the **Domestic Violence Act No. 116 of 1998**. The primary objectives of this Indaba included, inter alia:

- \* To understand and perceive the realities of the different forms of violence against women in the Province, and attempt to make a connection of the different forms of violence that deny women the most fundamental rights of all – the right to be human.
- \* To deepen and analyze the root causes of violence against women by recognizing the intensification of the brutal forms of violence against women and children.
- \* To accentuate the human rights discourse from a gender perspective.
- \* To gather in dialogue across cultures, the knowledge and wisdom of women of the Free State, entering into a discussion that challenges the dominant worldview on violence against women and children.
- \* To assess the extent and impact, of the Domestic Violence Act in addressing gender-based violence, and the protection of victims of violence.
- \* To solicit to cooperative partnership with relevant stakeholders in providing proper support and rehabilitation of victims and perpetrators of gender based violence.

These principal objectives served as a premise for the Indaba's proceedings.

The event was attended by 286 delegates from the five (5) District Municipalities, National and Provincial Parliament, the Public Protector and his officials, other Chapter 9 institutions, provincial government departments, Non – Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organisations (CBOs), religious organizations etc. The number of delegates and cross – sectional representation proved a resounding success of this Indaba.  
[NB. See list of dignitaries].

### **1.3. SUMMATIVE IMPRESSIONS ON GENDER – BASED VIOLENCE**

Delegates agreed that Gender Based Violence (GBV) is a reality and a daunting challenge to government and Civil Society. The scourge is eroding the moral fibre of society, and has precipitating effects on the well functioning of families, and also challenges the sustaining pillars of community life. They further noted that GBV calls for integrated and coordinated strategic interventions to be uprooted.

Various speakers also echoed these sentiments, in attempting to explain issues.

Attempts made to synchronize the relationship between GBV with various factors viz.

- Cultural and religious perspective and GBV.
- HIV/AIDS and GBV.
- Poverty (socio economic realities) and GBV.
- Implications of GBV on learners and education.
- Role of the South African Police Service in respect of GBV.
- Role of Justice System in dealing with GBV.
- Role of community in uprooting GBV.
- Rehabilitation of perpetrators of domestic violence.
- Support service to victims of GBV.

Resolutions of recommendations that were raised at various commissions were based largely on the aforementioned correlations. Processes of the different commissions involved interactive discussions based on well-informed perspective around the subject of discussions.

## **2. CONCEPTUALIZATION**

### **2.1. DEFINITION**

The state and magnitude of the scourge of GBV in this country is complicated by mixed reference points of what constitute domestic violence. Speakers provided various interpretations that linked domestic violence to a myriad of issues. However, sentiments from speakers alluded to the fact that domestic violence is not necessarily an emerging phenomenon. It has a history, however due to intensified awareness campaigns and the entrenchment of the Domestic Violence Act, this scourge is gaining momentum and eroding the social and moral fabric of society.

Commissioner B T Ngcobo contended:

***"This Indaba came at the most opportune moment when people are willing to listen and talk about violence on women.... Violence against women is one of the most common violations of human rights. Even though acts of violence and abuse can be performed and directed at anyone, it is women and children who are victims..."***

Although this is an impression created; delegates maintained that violence against men is also emerging, since men victims are "coming out."

In her speech, Ms. T. Keikelami contended that, the United Nations Declaration on Elimination of Violence Against Women, defines violence against women as:

***"Any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether in public or in private life." She further maintained that "Violence becomes gender-based whenever particular acts are directed predominantly at either men or women."***

By its nature, the concept gender refers to both men and women; and domestic violence in reality affects both men and women. Directly and indirectly!!

However, for the sake of the discussions of the Indaba, reference was made from the Domestic Violence Act, which defines violence as:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- emotional, verbal and psychological abuse
- economic abuse
- intimidation
- harassment
- stalking
- damage to property

- entry into the complainant's residence without consent, where parties do not share the same residence; or
- Any other controlling or abusive behavior towards a complainant,

Where such conduct harms, or may cause imminent harm to, the safety, health or well being of the complainant.

**NB: The complainant in this regard refers to victims.**

## 2.2 DYNAMICS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE V/S LEGISLATION

The right to equality is the most important right in the Constitution.

***"It is important to note that section 9 of the Constitution does not only guarantee equality before the law, but provides for equal protection by the law. It further recognizes the difference between sex and gender by listing both as independent grounds upon which it is impermissible to discriminate unfairly against any person."***

Contended Adv. Jaco de Bruin in his presentation.

The realization of this right is of profound importance when dealing with gender-based violence. Section 12 of the Constitution deals with the freedom and security of a person. This include the right to be free from all forms of violence from both public and private sources.

Irrespective of these legal protective measures, it was apparent that GBV is on the increase. Evidently, speakers and delegates agreed that:

- A variety of myths and misconceptions are associated with domestic violence, viz. male power; male domination; women's vulnerability.
- Gender inequality is one of the remaining vestiges of discrimination, irrespective of the successful democracy in South Africa.
- Slowness and slag ness in fast tracking gender transformation, in order to add value to women empowerment.
- Myths such as: - perpetrators of domestic violence are often times uneducated; unemployed, so working class men.
- Victims, like their batterers, come from different educational backgrounds. Further that, women often provoke assault and deserve it. Women provoke rape by the way they dress or act.



# **VIOLENCE OF ANY KIND CANNOT BE JUSTIFIED**

**As humans we have to learn to put back  
into life before we take what we perceive  
to be rightly ours.**

### **3. HIV/AIDS AND IMPLICATIONS ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

*Presentation by Mr. Nathan B Motang, Director of LAMP*

Undoubtedly, there is a correlation between gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS. Numerous discerning facts point that sexual abuse and rape, render women vulnerable to be infected by the HIV virus.

***"What is certain ..... is that South African women, living in one of the most violent countries in the world, are disproportionately likely to be victims of that violence."***

- Human Rights Watch 1995:44

***"South Africa has the fastest growing rate of HIV transmission of anywhere in the world, and of the people infected are women"***

– (World Bank 1997a, 1998b)

***"Until August 12, 1998 there was no visible nor active link made between these two very disturbing facts, not only are women prone to be victims of gender-based violence – there is a very high risk of women being infected with HIV"***

quoted Mr. Motang (LAMP) Speaker on the subject.

Reasons sighted by the speaker include inter alia:

- Mostly, women are economically dependent on their husbands or partners, and are therefore in a less powerful position to negotiate protective sex.
- The skin of the women's vagina is very delicate and can tear easily, especially during dry sex – rendering her more vulnerable for infection.
- Women victims, often submit to the perpetrators / rapist in order to survive. In many cases, fighting back or screaming can endanger the women's life.

In addition, delegates and the report from the commission on this subject, provided the following scenario:

- ☛ Often, victims of sexual abuse and rape are likely to be injected by the HIV virus
- ☛ Cultural stereotypes are often the reason behind the high rate of HIV infections among women and girls living in rural areas
- ☛ Women often do not know their rights to consent to sex
- ☛ Women often give in to sex because of emotional blackmail

A report from the presentation, revealed that:

- Many women are not aware about their reproductive and sexual rights
- Deprivation and lack of access to information deny women the knowledge to these rights.

These rights provide women to:

- > Make their own decisions regarding reproduction
- > Security and control over their body

However, indications point that, women by virtue of being married, do not necessarily enjoy these rights nor are their partners aware of them.

Sexual rights provide women, regardless of age, the power to

- Choice on contraception
- Choice on sterilization

- Have knowledge about sexually transmitted illnesses including HIV/AIDS
- Be able to say "no" if not ready for a sexual relationship
- Decide whether and when or not to marry and to start a family

Further misconceptions that were sighted to exacerbate the upsurge of the HIV/AIDS scourge, included:

- \* Rape of young girls, aged women, heals AIDS
- \* Women are by nature spreading the HIV/AIDS virus
- \* Witch-craft
- \* Sex without a condom is more enjoyable

Other related dynamics that impacts on this correlation includes:

- > The booming commercial sex industry
- > Men are in most instances reluctant to take HIV/AIDS tests
- > Women become exposed due to lack of choices
- > Cultural myths and misconceptions
- > People who are not disclosing their HIV status are putting home workers at risks

In view of this, the Indaba came up with resolutions and recommendations that are contained in a "Conference resolution document" (See attached) Further recommendations include:

- Active involvement of Local Municipalities through training of Ward Councilors to disseminate information to the public
- Government departments to support NGO's and CBO's who are actively in training of lay councilors
- SAPS to train and empower more Police members to deal with cases of domestic violence more effectively
- NGO's and CBO's are empowered to train women in rural areas on their sexual and reproductive rights.

“Men’s own freedom is dependent on that of women....  
When you have your feet on someone else’s neck  
you are not able to move and get on with the  
business  
of living and loving ”  
**- Henry Ford**

#### **4. CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

Presentation by Rev. B A Golelelwang, Director ADRA

Understanding, culture and religion are pillars that sustain morality and sanity of the society. Traditional practices and religious beliefs are subject to change due to the unfolding transformation processes in the current society. This draws from the premise that culture is not static; it evolves due to various environmental factors. Religion is also not escaping the daunting challenge of transforming to instill virtuous doctrines.

The challenge of cross-cultural diversity also exists more pressure on society. There are risks of cultural diffusion, rendering other cultures weak. Religious fanaticism also provide for obsessive behavioral practices characteristic of bigotry. It was said that these behavioral practice exacerbate gender based violence. Women are often times victims of bigotry, and as such vulnerable to abuse.

Conservative Cultural practices which usually provide for misconceptions were sighted as follows:

- \* Men are heads of families, irrespective of his socio-economic status
- \* Women are not good financial managers of households as opposed to men, and as such are unable to handle financial affairs of households
- \* Married women should dress in certain prescribed manner. They do not have options and choices as to how they should dress.
- \* Women are not afforded reproductive and sexual rights in marriages. In-laws are often putting pressure on women to bear children.
- \* The traditional interpretation and perception of lobola has lost its initial meaning. Currently lobola is commercialized
- \* Often times, women are blamed for their husbands deaths
- \* Widowed women are subjected to rigid practices to mourn their deceased spouses
- \* Girls and boys are socialized differently, thus providing for stereotypes in terms of gender relations.

Conservative religious practices that provide offer misconceptions and render women vulnerable to abuse were sighted as follows:

- \* Women cannot be ordained as priests, and cannot make good preachers. Preaching is the domain of men.
- \* Bigotric interpretation of the Bible, rendering women lesser persons
- \* Lay preaching women, cannot preach when menstruating. They are regarded as dirty.
- \* "Woman is created from a man's rib" as such woman is dependent on a man.

These conservative cultural and religious practices contribute to the abuse and oppression of women. Directly and indirectly, these kinds of practices are derisive to the normal functioning of families and society.

In view of this, recommendations for strategic interventions include among others:

That –

- The CGE convene a seminar for church leaders, specifically to provide information on issues that relate to gender transformation
- The Department of Education package a curriculum that embraces cultural diversity; gender relations; moral and human values.

- The CGE monitor gender transformation at religious institutions.  
(Resolutions are contained in the Conference Resolutions document)

**“The emancipation of women is not an act of charity, the result of humanitarian or compassionate attitude. The liberation of women is a**

**fundamental necessity for the revolution, the guarantee of its continuity, and the pre condition of its victory. The main objective of the revolution is to destroy the system of exploitation and build a new society, which releases the potential of human beings reconciling them with labour and with nature. This is the context within which the question of women's emancipation arises"**

**- Amilcar Cabral**

"Not all the books in all the shelves, nor all the equipment in all the labs can make the learners good citizens – but what educators are themselves, can make the difference"

## **5. Socio-economic realities of rural and farming communities v/s gender-based violence**

Presentation by Me. T. Keikelami, from Free State Rural Development Association

The rural poor, who live in abject poverty conditions, are the most vulnerable to Gender-Based Violence, Ms. T. Keikelami speaker on the subject, contented that:

***"These groups are often most affected by poverty and experience a number of barriers that block their access to resources, opportunities and services in society. They experience unfair discrimination and social exclusion because of a number of overlapping grounds or reasons."***

Poverty and traditional gender roles render black women in rural areas disadvantaged more than men. Deprivation and lack of adequate basic social, health and other services render them more disadvantaged.

Speaker further contended that:

***"They spend long hours collecting water and fuel to meet the household needs, making it difficult for them to find time to take advantage of employment and development opportunities."***

Conditions of rural and farming communities deny women of the socio-economic rights. Socio-economic rights afford all human beings access to resource; opportunities and services needed for adequate standard of living.

The right to have access to land provides human beings an opportunity to access natural resources for sustained livelihoods. However, most historical accounts of the dispossession of land in South Africa are gender blind and reinforce the patriarchal stereotypes.

Furthermore, the current socio-economic and political realities of poor rural women do not contribute to promoting their access to, and control over the productive land.

***"The increase in the casualisation of the labour force in the agricultural sector has meant that more women are employed as temporary and casual workers. This in turn leaves them with insecure tenure rights which are inextricably linked to their relationships with men."***

Other related dynamics of these conditions, as listed by the commission on this subject were mentioned as follows:

- > Children who live on farm areas, often walk long distances to and from school. Thus render such children prey to rape by motorist and other such perpetrators.
- > Government is slugging in accessing resources and services to such communities, thus increasing poverty levels.
- > Inadequate health services in such communities, does not provide choices to women in order to access sexual and health rights.
- > Literacy conditions among farm workers and farm dwellers are such that people are unable to access and utilize information to their benefit
- > Farm workers are entitled to join unions; should they do so, they are expelled by their employers.
- > SAPS are not effective, are under resourced and therefore do not provide meaningful service to victims of gender-based violence.

- > Magistrate Courts in rural communities are under resourced and are not effective in dealing with domestic violence cases.

In responding to these confrontational views, the following respondents contended:

### **5.1. SAPS: Commissioner M. Gaobepe**

- \* That the Domestic Violence Act is providing members of the SAPS to intervene in matters of domestic violence
- \* SAPS members who are attached to community service centers are provided with one-day training workshops on the Domestic Violence Act.
- \* SAPS and ICD (Independent Complaints Directorate) are working jointly in improving the quality of service by SAPS members to victims of domestic violence.
- \* Gender coordinators have been appointed at stations and Provincial office level to ensure and monitor gender equity and gender relations' matters.
- \* There are three (3) family violence units in the three areas established specializing in the investigation and prevention of gender-based violence.
- \* Victim support centers are in place at most police stations throughout the Province – for victims of rape and domestic violence.

The Commissioner further responded that, members of the SAPS are also victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence and that, services are provided likewise.

### **5.2. Department of Justice: Magistrate Jeanette Lerotholi-Rakau**

- There is one Domestic Violence Court in Bloemfontein to mediate cases of domestic violence.
- The court is handling an average of forty (40) cases per day.

It was reflected that courts in small towns and rural areas are not familiar in dealing with domestic violence cases.

### **5.3. Department of Education: Mr. Walaza**

The respondent contended that:

- Schools have not escaped the vicious cycle of violence that has gripped society.
- Learners, particularly the girl children are increasingly becoming victims either of sexual abuse or physical abuse including corporal punishment.

- In some instances, even boys cannot escape such abuses.
  - Circumstances at home also aggravate the situation. He further cited factors mentioned hereunder, as militating abuse of children viz.
    - Abject poverty that compels parents to succumb to the abuse of girls by educators in order to have financial gains.
    - Mono parental families
    - Parents with little or no education
    - Lack of responsibility and guidance
    - Power relations based on violence

In view of the above mentions responses, various recommendations and resolutions were adopted. (see resolutions document)

## 6. REHABILITATION OF PERPETRATORS

Much as there are strong sentiments to oppose and abhor gender-based violence, the delegates at the Indaba noted that there are inherent psychosocial dynamics related to reason for perpetrators to commit acts of violence.

The cycle of violence has certain eminent elements of re-occurrence during later stages of life. It is the believe of speakers that violence evolve around a cycle viz. If a child is exposed to an abusive environment, his behavior is likely to be fashioned and reinforced around violence.

Further, the Indaba came up with a strong position that, perpetrators who are willing to change, should be afforded an opportunity to rehabilitate.

The Commission proposed strategies for rehabilitating perpetrators, postulated the following:

### (1) Identification of Perpetrators

- Perpetrators have no mark that can easily make them identifiable
- They do not show any sign
- Police records on information about perpetrators will provide such profiles
- Through public hearings, where victims provide testimonies; perpetrators can easily be revealed
- Closer contact with potential abusers, provide information about the character of such individual
- Social workers are the other main source to provide information about potential perpetrators
- A public register for perpetrators of abuse and rape to be kept at all police stations after being found guilty by a court of law.

Proposals for rehabilitation were articulated as follows:

- Pre-counseling phase
  - Perpetrators need to do a proper introspection
  - They need to be ready for counseling
  - They need to acknowledge their behavioral pattern
  - They should be empowered to deal with their inner self.
- Counseling phase
  - Trained counselors should do this viz. Social workers; psychologists, lay-counselors, etc.

- Attempts should be made to build a counseling relationship based on trust, empathy and confidentiality
- Elements of counseling will include e.g.
  - o Anger management
  - o Conflict resolution
  - o Assertiveness building
  - o Communication
  - o Setting life goals

Counseling will depend largely on the readiness of individual clients. Its effectiveness will be based on the agreement / contract signed between the counselor and client.

However the commission further postulated that, to minimize the high rate of gender based violence, all active role players should:

- Embark on massive awareness campaigns
- Involve men in seminars, conferences and all community meetings that seek to address domestic violence.
- NGO's and CBO's to train young couples on effective parenting
- Provide life skills training for youth
- Introduce restorative programmes at prisons for convicts of gender violence.

**"ONE WOMEN'S PAIN  
IS MY PAIN"**

## **7. SUPPORTIVE SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF GENDER VIOLENCE**

The commission that dealt with this subject proposed that; there is need to provide adequate support, and to empower victims of gender-based violence. Often times, victims of domestic violence isolate and withdraw themselves from the community. They suffer serious psychological, emotional and physical trauma.

The Department of Social Development, Free State, has started with the victim empowerment project. In most major towns there are victim empowerment centers that can accommodate victims for a period of 48 (forty eight) hours, whilst awaiting further intervention.

Recommendations included amongst others:

- Providing on going support to affected women e.g. Counseling
- Economic empowerment of women, in order to improve their socio-economic status
- Establish support groups in communities, that will provide spiritual; psychological rearmament
- Government should consider establishing a women's specific development fund
- Stop the cycle of violence through awareness raising campaigns
- Mobilizing community police forums to vigilantly uproot violence and rape incidents in the community.

## **8. TESTIMONIES FROM VICTIMS**

There were eleven (11) people who gave testimonies about their experience of domestic violence. This was an emotional series that needed that the support of social workers.

These testimonies ranged from:

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Economic abuse
- Sexual abuse

It was apparent that the scars of any abuse of any kind take a longer time to heal. There is a need for an integrated and holistic treatment plan for such victims.

*A story of a woman told during the public hearings.*

The experience of domestic violence by “Nthabiseng” a 28 year old married woman, in the rural community of Qwa Qwa, highlights the problem of women in getting support during a crisis. The lack of shelter was compounded by her in-laws’ refusal to assist her:

***I was raised in Qwa Qwa, but moved from my home to stay with my husband and in laws when we got married. I was pregnant and my family could not help me support my child so I moved in with my boyfriend and his family before we got married. It was very hard from the beginning. Even when I was eight months pregnant they made me work. I used to clean and do washing of all the family members. We were both unemployed. My brother secured employment for my husband, which was a relief to the entire family. However this was very short lived for me, because after the baby was born, things went worse then before. When the child cried too much my husband would hit me and tell me that I did not know what I was doing ... that I was a terrible mother. His family would also be abusive. They would tell me to take my child outside till he stopped crying. This happened even when it was very cold or late at night. No one bothered to reprimand him when he abused me. I would often be told that if I could stop my baby from crying all the time he would stop bashing me. The more I was hit, the more the child cried and the more I was hit again and so it goes on. My husband then moved to another town and I had to only visit him during certain periods. I had to move back to my mothers place as things became unbearable for my child and I. My husband by then was no more interested in our well being. He would come and ignore us. I tried to talking to him to have the matter sorted out, but my mother-in-law has always been in between. Finally when I went to stay with him I was regarded as an obstacle by his family because he would not be able to support them. The place that we stayed in was very small, however it was good for me since I will be having a place of my own. My husband was drinking more and more at this time. I tried very hard to save my marriage but had to give in as the pressure from my in-laws was becoming unbearable on my husband. It came to a point where he had to make a choice between his child, his family and I. I tried to get a protection order against my in-laws and my husband but even this made matters worse. At one***

***stage my mother-in-law sprayed "Fast Kill" (insecticide) over the child and I when we were sleeping saying that she does not know what does these flies want in her house. When I reported this to my husband, he accused me of being disobedient towards his family. Whenever, I needed something he will tell me to ask my mother, even if I was sick I had to ask my mother for money to see a doctor. My mother bought clothing for both the child and I. As it is now, my husband has filed for a divorce, which I am not going to oppose as I do not have money for a lawyer and I feel it is better for both of the child and I.***

During these public hearings the women who gave testimonies for why they are kept in violent conditions offered a number of explanations.

- Kinship and community structures played a role in silencing domestic violence victims.
- The grip of "traditions" and poverty, poor access to services and instability made it difficult to change the situation in which they were trapped. Rural women's experiences of the family as agents of support in domestic violence situations were only marginally better than their experiences of "community" and the criminal justice agents. They emphasized the complexity of family interventions more than community avoidance.

A common problem raised by women interviewed was the inability of family members to provide financial support and adequate shelter for women who were in dire need of temporary relief. Family responses to domestic violence were defined as "traditional" and "reserved". While there was sympathy for abused women by family members, intervention in abusive situations was seen as inappropriate or meddling into personal affairs.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Speeches of the different speakers are attached to this report as addendums. The provincial Gender Indaba afforded the delegates an opportunity to explore dynamics of gender-based violence. The extent and intensity of discussions proved the level of commitment in uprooting gender-based violence.