

STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE ON TRANSFORMATION

OUR GENDER PERSPECTIVE



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INTRODUCTION

Undeniably South Africa is a violent society. Each day body bags fill the morgue, scars adorn the once beautiful faces of our mothers and sisters, the violent deflowering of our children, the sexual violation of women, the deadly attacks on the LGBTI+ community are all the hallmarks of the modern society.

The patriarchal and misogynous traits that define society refuse to die. These are the pillars upon which the violent and bloody society is predicted. As we strive for an equal society whose objectives is to pulverise violent foundations to create a country devoid of Gender Based Violence we are educated by the writings of Alexander Kollontai in her seminal work on the ramifications of a society fraught with acts inimical to the creation of a classless society that elevates the aspirations of women to the apex of the agenda of transformation of gender relations.

Kollontai postulates this in her work titled "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle. Dialectically aligned to her work is literary work by Karl Marx in "The Family, the Private Property and the State" where the family is placed right at the centre of development.

The Strategic Perspective on Transformation (SPoT) resides in the same family and societal matrix affected by acts that threaten human existence and a society enmeshed in Gender Based Violence.

It is within this context that SPoT, in its inaugural Conference of 21 November 2021 took a conscious decision to contribute towards the elimination of misogyny, abuse and gender based violence. This, includes the broader struggles against the vicious cycle of abuse of children which, if not addressed threatens posterity.



A VICIOUS CYCLE

The fight against crime in all its manifestations is part of South Africa's apex priorities. To urgently and systematically address this, the fight against gender based violence was considered one of the pressing priorities by designing various instruments and interventions. These amongst others entail:

- Establishment of special courts to prosecute offenders;
- Gender violence policy review;
- Enacting various regimes to stem the haemorrhage;
- 16 Days of Activism;
- Society's role in fighting and combating the scourge;
- De-culturation of society and transformation of the mind
- Awareness and education programmes.

This spurred government into action, triggering a plan to stem the tide of Gender Based Violence and Femicide.

The rise in deaths and violence puts these preventive instruments and measures to a test. A number of questions arise. Amongst others, whether our penal regime is effective enough in arresting the rise in gender based violence, or whether society is blinded by its cultural beliefs of women slavery, perpetual minority of women, the antiquated "*spare the rod spoil child*" adage, or the societal awareness and education programmes permeate deeply in the family value system for behavioural and belief change,

South Africa's value system is shaped and influenced by the family value system, hence Marx's elevation of the family above society and putting the family at the cardinal point of development.

All these considered and the number of interventions introduced, especially legislation designed to curb this malady, it appears that strides to fight gender based violence are a mirage which moves with every attempt to create the nature of society based on our value system and the Constitution.

The rise in deaths and harm inflicted upon children and women makes our efforts Utopian, and unattainable. The statistics exponentially rise by day. With far reaching implications on the country's finances, social cohesion, the family value system, amongst others.

These acts are deleterious to growth, stability and social cohesion. The massive resources invested in addressing this problem could beneficially be used in other areas of the economy and development, to create much needed jobs. This triggers another question and exposes poverty, unemployment as some of the contributory factors to the entrenchment and institutionalisation of gender based violence and its rise. Again, violence is normal and has become society's way of life and instrument in resolving domestic problems.

QUO VADIS

A number of instruments designed to curb these maladies were introduced but with little inroads in the strides to lessen the plague. Are the interventions listed herein potentially sufficient to eliminate gender based violence? What needs to be done?

The following can be gleaned and extrapolated from the *status quo* which is resistant and hostile to attempts to lessen Gender Based Violence. The scourge has become so septic that it has become cancerous to the whole country, threatening its growth, prosperity and social cohesion.

These acts contribute but are not limited to:

- Threatening societal fibre;
- Creation of child headed household;
- Erosion of the fiscus;
- Threatening social cohesion; and
- Negatively impact on social security, peace and security

The levels of Gender Based Violence and Femicide in South Africa are shocking. According to the Mail & Guardian 2020 report.

The KPMG report of 2014 points that the rise in Gender Based Violence statistics is one of the “*most expensive public health problems globally and has the fundamental impact on economic growth, which can span several generations*”.

The study paints a picture of poor Black women as the face of inequity, putting Black African women as the most vulnerable with an unemployment rate of over a staggering 30%, according to Statistics South Africa (2010 Q1).

With the advent of the coronavirus epidemic and a contracted economy the numbers have steeply increased in 2021, thus necessitating a novel approach and thinking, policy and legislative review in dealing with the monstrous gender based violence

The prevalence of Gender Based Violence not only threatens social cohesion but has negative impact on the economy.

According to the National Development Plan (2030) one of the primary aims and immediate targets is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030 in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 5.

In giving impetus to this goal some of the immediate plans is to:

- forge links and collaborations with public and private sector organisations;
- Eliminate workplace gender based violence and *quid pro quo*;
- Advocate for women equality and representation in higher decision making structure and leadership position;
- Elimination of work place gender discrimination;
- Forging partnership and collaboration with community based organisations and gender advocacy groups;
- To educate society on the dangers of gender based violence;
- To break the silence within families and the workplace;
- To improve and tighten the penal regime for lengthy sentencing as a deterrent against Gender Based Violence and Femicide.
- To review gender and women empowerment legislation and policies;

- Focus education on boy children as a way of ameliorating perpetration of violence by men and to re-orientate and change gender stereotypes
- To engender and institutionalise the fight against Gender Based Violence and Femicide within society.

In addition to these proposals the Council of Europe Convention (2014) of preventing and combating violence against women proposed:

- **Prevention**

It is critical and incumbent for government to run education and awareness programmes, training of professionals, development of teaching material, non-violent conflict resolution and interpersonal relations, eradication of gender stereotypes, promoting mutual respect and partnerships with the media, the private sector and non-profit organisations.

- **Protection**

The state should ensure that perpetrators of domestic violence are restrained and that victims are provided with the necessary support and shelter, the establishment and equipping of victim empowerment centres, creation of twenty four hour helplines and user friendly helpdesks for confidence of victims in the system and protection.

- **Prosecution**

This necessitates the empowerment of the prosecution and investigative authorities. The judicial process should be implemented in such a way that the rights of victims are protected and that there is no secondary victimisation.

- **Development of integrated approaches**

This warrants the financial and political support of non-governmental organisations in the field of Gender Based Violence

These interventions are interdependent and when used effectively they would contribute in the achievement of the NDP (2030) on the eradication of Gender Based violence and Femicide.

Conclusion

In view of the cataclysmic impact of Gender Based Violence, the 16 Days of Gender Based are interpreted as mere ten days spanning for a shorter period from the 26 November and ending on the 10 December as opposed to long terms strategies.

Critics, or rather the urgency for intervention and the shocking statistics and the harmful impact of Gender Based Violence question government's

commitment towards addressing this malaise. This period is critical in that it is useful in exposing and lessening the gravity of the scourge. It further rallies and marshals society and resources in the obliteration of Gender Based Violence.

The fight against Gender Based Violence and Femicide is continuous. The integrated model and approaches adopted by the Council of Europe Convention (*ibid*) and other policy interventions and programmes advocated by the non-profit organisations, the public and private sectors should be enhanced and holistically used in a manner that is integrated and pointed to the obliteration of the scourge.

SPoT exists and operated within a community of organisations sharing common objectives. To hasten the fight against this crisis, which in view of the exponential numbers which have been on the rise despite a number of interventions SPoT should:

Advocate for a review in policy and legislation with regards to the penal code;

Lobby for more government funding and support;

Design education and awareness programmes and campaign; and

Partner and collaborate with civil society organisations and government in the fight against Gender based Violence.

This work is in support of government's key interventions in the following areas as identified by the National Strategic plan on Gender-Based Violence & Femicide:

- Response to victims and survivors of Gender Based Violence;
- Access to justice for survivors;
- Changing social norms and behaviour through high-level awareness raising and prevention campaigns;
- Strengthening existing architecture and promoting accountability; and
- The creation of more economic opportunities for women.

The country needs a coordinated strategy and a collaborative and integrated multidisciplinary approach to the address the problem of Gender based Violence and Femicide