

2ND SOUTHERN AFRICA SYMPOSIUM ON PREVENTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

UBOMI TRUST



CSVr
Centre for the Study of
Violence and Reconciliation



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Acronyms

Acronym	Full Form
AFLA	Africa Legal Aid
C190	Convention 190 (ILO Violence and Harassment Convention)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSV	Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex people
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
ROSC	Fórum da Sociedade Civil para os Direitos da Criança (Civil Society Forum for Children's Rights)
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SRGBV	School-Related Gender-Based Violence
SVRI	Sexual Violence Research Initiative
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Figure 1: Artistic Representation of Day 1 of the Symposium. Courtesy of Sonja Niederhumer



Conference Programme Overview

Day 1: August 22, 2024

The first day of the symposium focused on setting the context, exploring country situations, examining the United Nations' collective response to GBV, and discussing the role of men in breaking the cycle of violence.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/vNtBb3cBa1U>

Key sessions included:

- Opening remarks by ambassadors
- Keynote address on art as a tool to prevent GBV
- Country situation reports from Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Eswatini
- UN agencies' presentations on their approaches to GBV prevention
- Panel on men, boys, masculinities, and GBV

Day 2: August 23, 2024

The second day delved into emerging topical and innovative approaches to GBV prevention and lessons implemented across various countries.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/POHINmBPNpo>

Key sessions included:

- Presentations on innovative GBV prevention strategies
- Discussions on research priorities and civil litigation for GBV victims
- Multi-stakeholder approaches to ending GBV in the workplace
- Economic empowerment as a means to escape cycles of violence

Figure 2: Artistic Representation of Day 2 of the Symposium. Courtesy of Sonja Niederhumer



Introduction

The symposium brought together experts, policymakers, activists, and researchers to explore innovative approaches that will help address gender-based violence (GBV) through the lenses of gender equality, opportunity creation, and knowledge sharing. With a focus on Southern Africa, the event highlighted the need for collaborative efforts to tackle the pervasive issue of GBV, emphasizing the importance of inclusive, evidence-based strategies. Participants engaged in discussions around gender equity, prevention mechanisms, and innovative solutions while also addressing the barriers that hinder progress in combating violence against marginalized communities. This report captures the key insights, challenges, and emerging strategies shared during the symposium.

Gender Equality and Opportunities

Gender equality is framed as a crucial component in the prevention of GBV; the participants emphasized the need for gender equality as a cornerstone for addressing GBV. It was highlighted that **opportunities for marginalized populations**, such as women and girls living with disabilities or HIV, as well as LGBTQI+ individuals, must be prioritized. Participants emphasized the **need for equitable access** to resources, legal support, and representation in all spheres, including research and policy decision-making processes. The discussions emphasized that achieving equality is essential for creating a safe and less violent environment for everyone, especially women and children. This includes promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, men, and all genders. A significant focus was placed on the need to change social norms that perpetuate inequality and violence. Participants discussed the importance of engaging with traditional and community leaders to challenge and transform harmful norms contributing to GBV. This engagement is vital for fostering a culture of respect and equality.

Further discussions advocated for inclusive approaches that consider the perspectives and needs of marginalized populations. This includes recognizing the intersectionality of gender with other social factors, such as race, class, and sexual orientation, to ensure that all voices are heard and represented in GBV prevention efforts. Emphasis on empowering women and girls through various programs and initiatives were highlighted. This includes economic empowerment, legal support services, and capacity-building for service providers to ensure that they can effectively support victims and survivors of GBV. Participants viewed empowerment as a pathway to achieving gender equality and reducing vulnerability to violence.

Knowledge Management and Collective Wisdom

A core theme of the Symposium was transparent and participatory processes in knowledge management. A notable example was the African Shared Research Agenda, which gathered perspectives from over 500 global participants. This process included academic experts and **voices from survivors and frontline workers**. This inclusive approach helps avoid the dominance of privileged and powerful voices in setting research priorities and promoting a **democratic and participatory model** of knowledge dissemination. The need for timely data collection and evidence-based practices further underscores the urgency. Participants stressed that understanding the current landscape of GBV is crucial for informing immediate actions and ensuring that interventions are practical and relevant. The discussions reflect the collective responsibility among all stakeholders to act swiftly. The idea that "if you want to go fast, you go alone; if you want to go far, you go together" emphasizes the importance of collaboration while recognizing the need for prompt action to address GBV effectively.

Pace and Urgency in Action

A common concern throughout the event was the **slow pace of progress** in addressing GBV, and overall inequalities. Despite increased commitments by African Union member states, participants urged the need for **faster implementation of evidence-based interventions**. They stressed that building momentum and maintaining accountability for gender equality is critical in accelerating progress on the ground. The following suggestions were made with accelerating the pace.

- **Immediate Action Required:** There was a clear acknowledgment that GBV is a persistent and urgent issue that requires immediate and concerted efforts. Participants emphasized that the ongoing crisis of GBV necessitates rapid responses and (long-term) interventions to mitigate its impact on individuals and communities.
- **Crisis Response Framework:** The concept of a "100 days challenge" is introduced, which highlights the need for intense collaboration and rapid innovation in response to crises. This framework suggests that when faced with urgent issues like GBV, stakeholders must act immediately, adapt strategies, and implement solutions without delay.
- **Long-Term Commitment:** While there is a focus on immediate actions, there is also an understanding that sustained efforts are necessary for long-term change. This dual focus on pace and urgency, combined with a commitment to ongoing engagement and adaptation, is essential for creating lasting societal shifts in the fight against GBV.

Innovative Approaches to Addressing GBV

Several speakers underscored the importance of **innovative methods** to tackle GBV. These included:

- **Mixed-method participatory processes:** Combining surveys, focus groups, and key informant interviews to gather data from underrepresented groups.
- **Legal strategies:** Civil litigation was highlighted as an **alternative approach** to criminal justice, providing victims more autonomy to define their justice outcomes (e.g., protection orders, maintenance orders). The speaker from Malawi emphasized that **civil remedies** could serve as a deterrent and provide the **reparations victims often need**, which criminal proceedings may overlook.
- **Strategic litigation:** The use of **strategic civil litigation** to set broader legal precedents was discussed to address systemic issues of GBV across communities.

Community Engagement and Societal Shifts

Integrating cultural frameworks like **Ubuntu** was proposed to foster **communal responsibility and empathy** in addressing GBV. Ubuntu encourages a collective shift in societal norms where violence becomes **intolerable**, and survivors are supported at all levels. The discussions highlighted the necessity of involving local communities, particularly marginalized populations, in the development and implementation of GBV prevention and response strategies. Engaging with traditional and faith leaders is vital for addressing social norms and fostering acceptance of interventions. There is a recognition that societal norms play a significant role in perpetuating GBV. The discussions call for interventions that focus on changing these social norms, which are often deeply rooted in cultural practices and beliefs. The need for a multi-stakeholder approach was emphasized, suggesting that societal shifts require collaboration across various sectors, including government, civil society, and the private sector. This collective effort is necessary to create a comprehensive social compact that addresses GBV holistically.

Outcomes and Possible Action Items

The following outcomes and potential action items emerged from different individual presentations, based mainly on the participants' work with their respective organisations. The report synthesised the outcomes and action plans based on the individual presentations and the symposium participants' broader engagements.

Strengthening Prevention Strategies

The symposium resulted in a strong emphasis on prioritising prevention strategies in addressing GBV. Key action items include:

1. Develop and implement comprehensive, multi-level prevention programmes that address the root causes of GBV.
2. Increase funding and resources for prevention initiatives, recognising that prevention is more cost-effective and impactful than response alone.
3. Integrate GBV prevention into existing programmes and policies across sectors, including education, health, and economic development.
4. Create and implement evidence-based prevention programmes that can be adapted to different cultural contexts within Southern Africa.

Enhancing Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Recognising the complexity of GBV and the need for coordinated efforts, some symposium contributors stressed enhanced multi-stakeholder collaboration. Action items include:

1. Establish or strengthen national and regional coordination mechanisms for GBV prevention and response.
2. Develop partnerships between government agencies, civil society organisations, international bodies, and the private sector to address GBV.
3. Create platforms for regular dialogue and information sharing among stakeholders working on GBV.
4. Implement joint training programmes to build capacity across different sectors in addressing GBV.

Engaging Men and Boys

Some contributors accentuated the crucial role of men and boys in preventing GBV. Action items in this area include:

1. Develop and scale up programmes that engage men and boys in challenging harmful gender norms and promoting positive masculinity.
2. Integrate gender equality and GBV prevention into school curricula, focusing on educating boys about respectful relationships.
3. Create male ambassador programmes to promote positive role models and peer education on GBV prevention.
4. Implement workplace programmes that engage men in preventing and addressing sexual harassment and violence.

Addressing Intersectionality

Recognising the intersections between GBV and other societal issues, some presenters called for more holistic approaches. Action items include:

1. Conduct research to better understand the intersections between GBV and issues such as climate change, conflict, and economic inequality in Southern Africa.
2. Develop integrated programmes that address GBV alongside other development challenges.
3. Ensure that GBV prevention and response strategies are inclusive and consider the needs of diverse groups, including LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities.
4. Incorporate GBV prevention and response into climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies.

Improving Data Collection and Management

To address the identified need for better data on GBV, some contributors proposed the following action items:

1. Establish or strengthen national GBV information management systems, following the model of Eswatini.
2. Develop standardised indicators and data collection methodologies for GBV across the region for comparative analysis.
3. Invest in capacity building for data collection, analysis, and use among relevant stakeholders.
4. Ensure ethical and safe data collection practices, mainly when gathering information from GBV survivors.

Strengthening Legal and Policy Frameworks

To build on existing legal and policy initiatives, some presenters highlighted the following actions:

1. Review and strengthen national laws and policies on GBV to ensure comprehensive protection and align with international standards.
2. Advocate for ratifying and implementing regional and international instruments on GBV, such as the ILO Convention 190.
3. Develop mechanisms to monitor the implementation of GBV laws and policies effectively.
4. Provide training for law enforcement, the judiciary, and other relevant professionals on GBV-related laws and sensitive case handling.

Scaling Up Innovative Approaches

Building on the innovative approaches presented at the symposium, action items include:

1. Establish a regional innovation fund to support creative approaches to GBV prevention and response.
2. Create platforms for sharing the region's best practices and lessons learned from innovative GBV programmes.
3. Integrate arts-based approaches into mainstream GBV prevention and healing programmes.
4. Develop partnerships with technology companies to leverage ICT for GBV prevention and support services.

Enhancing Education and Awareness

To build on the discussions about education and awareness, some participants and presenters proposed the following action items:

1. Develop comprehensive, age-appropriate curricula on gender equality and GBV prevention for schools at all levels.
2. Launch national and regional awareness campaigns on GBV, utilising various media platforms.
3. Train community leaders, including traditional and religious leaders, on GBV prevention and response.
4. Integrate GBV awareness into workplace training programs across all sectors.

Improving Support Systems for Survivors

To enhance support for GBV survivors, the symposium recommended:

1. Establish or expand one-stop centres for GBV survivors in all countries in the region, providing comprehensive services, including medical care, legal aid, and psychosocial support.
2. Develop and implement minimum standards for GBV response services across the region.
3. Increase funding for survivor support services, including shelters and long-term rehabilitation programmes.
4. Implement programmes to support the economic empowerment of GBV survivors, recognising the link between economic dependency and vulnerability to violence.

Conclusion

The Second Gender-Based Violence Symposium provided a platform for crucial discussions on GBV prevention in Southern Africa. It brought together diverse stakeholders, from international diplomats to grassroots activists, fostering a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to addressing GBV.

Key takeaways include:

- The urgent need for action, given the high rates of GBV in the region
- The importance of prevention strategies and engaging men and boys
- The value of multi-stakeholder, culturally sensitive approaches
- The potential of innovative and creative methods in GBV prevention
- The crucial role of data and research in informing effective interventions

The symposium reinforced the commitment of participating individuals and organisations to combat GBV, providing renewed hope and momentum for this critical work. As the title "Reason to Hope" suggests, while the challenge of GBV remains significant, the collaborative efforts and innovative approaches discussed at the symposium offer pathways towards a future free from gender-based violence. Continued collaboration, resource mobilisation, and sustained focus on prevention will be key to translating the insights and strategies discussed into tangible progress in the fight against gender-based violence in Southern Africa and beyond. The suggestions mentioned in the discussions/symposium may be limited in nature and they do not serve as the only solution to addressing GBV. There are many other interventions and efforts that were probably not listed here, the report only reflects discussions from the symposium