

**Enhancing state and community response to violence against women:
A mural on citizens rights and the role of the community, police and government in addressing
violence against women, Khayelitsha**

Report by Claudia Lopes, Heinrich Böll Foundation

In South Africa, a woman is raped every 26 seconds; 1 in 4 women are victims of domestic violence and every 6 hours a woman is killed by her intimate partner. These are the statistics that are depicted on a mural in Khayelitsha that was unveiled at an event on the 31st of May 2013. The event, which commenced with a march from Khayelitsha Wetlands Park to the mural location at Makhula Crescent, was attended by a little over 70 community members; civil society organizations Free Gender, Triangle Project, Social Justice Coalition, Mosaic and Mali; religious leaders; police officials; and local government representatives.

The mural was developed by the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF) and the Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre (TLAC) as part of their “Enhancing State Response to Gender Based Violence” project which is funded by the European Union. The project seeks to promote more just outcomes for survivors of rape and domestic violence through enhancing the capacity of civil society to hold the state accountable for delivering services to women at the forefront of rights abuses.

The development of the mural follows a town-hall meeting held in this community in partnership with local Khayelitsha organization Free Gender in 2012. The town-hall meeting sought to enable collective engagement between community members and their leadership on strategies to address violence against women.

Khayelitsha, despite vast infrastructural growth over the last few years, remains an area that is marred by significant under-development and high rates of crimes. In 2008 research conducted by the City of Cape Town rated Khayelitsha as having the fourth highest number of reported cases of rape in Cape Town. The latest police crime statistics reveals that Khayelitsha remains one of the highest contributing areas to violence against women and children. While the current statistics indicate a minor decrease (by 1.2 %) in sexual crimes in comparison to the previous year, increases in other types of crime (under which domestic violence may be classified under) are significant: attempted murder rose by 43.9 %; common assault by 32.2 %; murder by 28.8 % and assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm by 2.6 %.

At the town-hall meeting in Khayelitsha last year, community members were unconvinced by the police representative’s assurances that addressing violence against women was a priority for the police and government. They were further outraged by a local ward councillors’ statement that violence against women was not a problem in his ward, as a young girl had recently been murdered in his ward after having been sexually assaulted. The girl’s father had been unsuccessful in seeking support when he approached the councillor’s office for assistance.

The town-hall meeting reinforced yet again that violence against women is a significant problem in Khayelitsha, and that continued awareness-raising as well as the development of a multi-sector action plan were some of the strategies required to address the high rates of violence against women, including hate crimes perpetrated against lesbian women and gay men, in Khayelitsha. Ward councillors were advised to empower themselves to deal with these social issues by attending training on domestic violence and sexual offences. Councillors were also encouraged to strengthen relationships with community members and with civil society organizations in their wards; while the community too needed to ensure that councillors were kept abreast of problems in their wards. The town-hall meeting concluded that it was crucial that everyone took responsibility and stood together to fight the scourge of violence against women.

The mural, titled “*domestic violence and rape are not just family problems...in the fight against violence*”

against women it is everyone's responsibility", was developed in response to these outcomes. It serves to advocate that an effective response to violence against women requires a dynamic relationship between the community and government. Each has a specific but interconnected role to play:

- Government has an obligation to deliver services. In response to domestic violence, for example, the South African Police Services is mandated, amongst others, to record incidences of domestic violence; to protect victims of violence from harm; to assist victims to find suitable shelter and to obtain medical treatment; to assist victims to collect personal property from the abusive home; to seize dangerous weapons from perpetrators of domestic violence and rape; to enforce Protection Orders and to keep the victim informed on cases.
- The responsibility of local government, amongst other duties, is to develop knowledge of the community and understand their issues, concerns and priorities. They are tasked to provide effective access to justice for victims and to hold civil servants accountable for failure to follow obligations.
- Community members, in turn, have a responsibility to advocate for their needs; actively participate in the community; to support victims of domestic violence and rape, and to hold government accountable to its mandate and its promises.

President Zuma, in his State of the Nation Address earlier this year said "the brutality and cruelty meted out to defenceless women is unacceptable and has no place in our country". While there are many reasons and interlinking factors as to why the rates of violence against women are so high in our country, we cannot allow secondary victimization, challenges in accessing justice and lack of efficient adequate services for survivors of domestic violence and rape to continue to play a role in the perpetuation and violation of women's rights and freedom.

It is hoped that the mural will serve as a daily reminder of this.

Speakers at the event included: Ruth Silika from Mosaic, Vuyisani Dala from Treatment Action Campaign, and representatives from the Community Police Forum, the SAPS and the Salvation Church of the Revival of Faith, Makhaza

The event was facilitated by Sindiswa Thafeni from Triangle Project and Funeka Soldaat from Free Gender.

Photography by Lindeka Qampi

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