

# Enabling environment created to deal with gender-based violence

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PRETORIA: An enabling environment has been created to deal with gender-based violence against women and children in South Africa, through the enactment of specific legislation and the development of policy framework programmes.

This was one of the findings contained in the National Action Plan (NAP) on 365 Days Report to End Violence Against Women and Children, undertaken by the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) presented on Friday.

The CGE recently undertook a project wherein the implementation of the 365 Days Programme of Action to End Violence against Women and Children was monitored.

The purpose was to, amongst other things, examine efforts and strategies instituted to adequately deal with the scourge of crime against Women and Children in South Africa.

The 365 Days NAP to End Violence against Women and Children is a result of deliberations undertaken in May 2006 at a conference in Kopanong, Johannesburg, which resulted in the Kopanong Declaration.

The declaration came up with a strategy to end gender-based violence (GBV) against women and children and also acknowledged that the 16 days of activism was not sufficient to address GBV, but that a more comprehensive and sustained approach is necessary, including prevention, support, and response.

The objectives of the study were to determine the extent to which the 365 days campaign has been implemented since inception, identify key constraints and gaps in the implementation of the NAP as well as establishing the effectiveness of the programmes in place.

The report acknowledges policy framework including the Sexual Offences Amendment Act, Child Justice Act, Integrated Victim Empowerment Policy, national policy guidelines for victims of sexual offences and national policy guidelines for victim empowerment, as enabling environment to deal with GBV.

It also highlighted measures including the Victims Charter and the Victim Empowerment Programme, which have been in place since before the 365 days plan, which contribute to the prevention of violence against vulnerable groups.

According to the Victims of Crime Survey (VOC) 2011, more than 40% of households believed that the levels of both violent and non-violent crime have decrease in their areas of residence during the period 2008 - 2010. Less than 35% believed

that crime has increased, while 25% believed that crime had stayed the same.

"Assault and sexual offences cases are difficult to capture in a household survey because of their sensitivity and they remain the most under-reported offences. Most perpetrators are known to their victims, about 29.9% of victims of assault were attacked by people known to the area and 20.9% were attacked by a spouse or a partner with only 10.5% attacked by unknown people," the survey revealed.

It further revealed that the vast majority of households knew of places where they could take victims of crime to access medical services but almost half of households did not know where to take someone to access counselling services and only 16.7% knew where to take a victim of crime for shelter or a place of safety.

The report recommended that the National Council for Gender Based Violence, established by the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities, be pursued and concluded.

"Key legislation, policies and programmes protecting women and children from gender violence in South Africa should be widely communicated. This will empower the beneficiaries and enable them to access assistance when they need it," the report recommended.

CGE CEO, Keketso Maema highlighted that the NAP has got its own difficulties including allocation of resources, interdepartmental Management Team, which operates in silos.

"We hope that the report will encourage debate, remind all participants that our commitment to end GBV is a collective commitment. It's on-going and therefore, we really need to sit and have meaningful dialogue to be partners on a way forward," said Maema.

She also stressed the need to review the action plan and for the interdepartmental to be given a clear mandate on how to use the NAP, using adequate resources.

Acting Director-General of the Department for Women, Children and People with Disability, Thembeke Mxenge encouraged mutual partnership from business, faith based organisations, traditional healers, political parties and communities as the government cannot do it alone.

"It would be nice to hear in churches pastors talking about campaign against GBV. Concerted effort is required to promote the reach of the campaign to rural areas including farming and mining communities, we know that these are the most severely affected by violence and in most cases they don't even know the cost they have and service that are available to them," said Mxenge.

She added that the department will want to get a sense as to who is doing what within government regarding the 365 days campaign, and it's also confident that the establishment of the council will see through the review and adoption of the NAP.

She said that the department is looking forward to working with the CGE in this process especially in the development of the National Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.