



Crisis Coalition Gender Committee Chairperson speaks on gender based violence

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Police and army amongst the major perpetrators of violence against women

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## “Silence promotes violence against women and girls”



Netsai Marova in hospital following her abduction by state agents

On May 13, 2020, alleged state security agents abducted the MDC Alliance trio of Joana Mamombe, Cecilia Chimбири and Netsai Marova following a demonstration over the continued economic decline in the country.

Initially, the Spokesperson of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), Paul Nyathi had publicly confirmed that the trio were arrested and were in police custody only for the law enforcement agents to denounce their previous statement later on.

The trio were later found on May 15, 2020 dumped in Bindura, a town outside of Zimbabwe's capital, Harare. They had been tortured and sexually assaulted by state security agents.

The state went on to arrest the trio on charges of faking their abduction and after a lengthy stay in remand prison, the three were granted bail by the High Court on June 26, 2020.

The case is still pending before the courts.

Below, one of the MDC Alliance activists, Netsai Marova pours her heart out:

It has been seven months now since the most horrific days of my life.

The horror that no one should ever experience.

The agony that no pill can cure and the scars that will never heal. Life should never be this way. Society must never again allow this to happen.

Today I choose to speak out. You see me walk everyday, but what you might not know is how broken I am inside. I bear scars that can never heal. The wounds inflicted by ruthless men with no respect for human life.

They did whatever they wanted with us, simply because we were helpless and defenceless women. They never cared about our rights; women's rights which are human rights too. Yet these are the people whom society expects to uphold the values of the constitution of the land.

Even after we were rescued, society did not stop being

cruel. Some even called us all sorts of names.

When we were granted bail, we were given conditions to report to police three times a week. Three times a week, we would face the monsters who tried to kill the girl in us.

What is even more disturbing is the fact that of all the people who are alleged to have committed a crime by demanding food during the lockdown period, the perpetrators targeted women; young and defenceless women.

Worst of it all, the harassment is not only done by men. Fellow women are equally cruel. We have nowhere to turn to.

As the world commemorates this year's 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, it is time we must give a deep thought about cruelty to women and the girl child.

No one should ever carry the burden of wounds inflicted on them simply because they are physically weak. Society must never tolerate this kind of abuse.

Women should never be a target of molestation and harm because they are defenceless. The victims must never be silent.

Lets speak out.

But most of all let's all stand up united and defeat this monster before we all fall victim.

## 16 Days of Activism Against Gender based Violence – A special focus on teen mums

By Cheurombo Pswarayi

The Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked unprecedented havoc in Zimbabwe especially on teenage girls. The extent of vulnerability to this pandemic varies with age and gender among other things (Dhliwayo, 2020).

In conjunction with this, the UNFPA Covid-19 report titled Gender Lens promulgates that disease outbreak affects women and men differently. As such, the challenges usually associated with teenage girls have been socially, physically and psychologically exacerbated by the eminence of Covid 19.

According to UNICEF (2020) on GBV risks to adolescence, the pandemic risks not only reversing progress made in increasing equitable access to education but also leads to increased incidents of teenage pregnancy and early\forced marriage in the country.

Adolescents have remained sexually active thus divulging the preconditions necessary to avert the spread of Corona virus and thus become the most risky group to Covid 19 and teenage pregnancy.

Many teenage girls have fallen pregnant



A teenage mother in Zimbabwe (Pic credit Daily News)

during the lockdown period and most of these teenage pregnant girls are of school going age (Tapera, 2020).

Thus the coming of lockdown measures brought social strain as there were limited coping strategies to enhance a living during the lockdown period, thus subjecting them to low esteem, extreme poverty levels and other coping strategies such as sex commercialization (Davison, 2020). This has made them susceptible to more dangers of sexually transmitted

infections and to those who have contracted HIV/AIDS already, there is high risk for double infection and wilful spread of these sexually transmitted diseases.

Considering all this, it is clear that the coming of the Corona virus has snowballing consequences to teenage pregnant girls. Worse-still, the capabilities of these teenage pregnant girls to properly cater for themselves is curtailed by lack of resources to start their own project as well as lack of counselling.

Moreover, many teenage pregnant girls are prone to the usual problems of stigma, lack of schooling, and livelihood insecurity. According to the World Vision report (2020) on Covid-19 aftershocks, poverty-stricken parents may turn to exploitative means of reducing burden on household finances or supplementing it. In summation, Covid 19 brought a long standing problem to teenage girls since even girls who are now going back to school are also at risk of sexual exploitation and being impregnated by their peers and even teachers in order to afford extraneous costs of their education caused by the Corona virus. Being in such a vulnerable situation also unfortunately leaves the teens as easy gender-based violence victims.

**Why I'm playing a part – why I'm joining the campaign**

I am a woman. My femininity is my pride, my armour and my identity. I do not wish to have this part of me be a reason for discrimination or be the reason why I should suffer abuse and victimisation.

I am a daughter, a sister, a friend. I wish to see the plight of my fellow women-folk respected. We need to have a system whereby we express opinions free from fear of victimisation.

I would like to have frank discussions which condemn gender based violence across all social strata. I would like these conversations to happen with the men and between the men. I would like it to become taboo to have men dating underage girls. I would like society to start to ostracise the men who impregnate underage girls instead of the girls themselves.

I am inspired by the conversations with women who have experienced GBV and have moved on and become activists and awareness champions.

I am inspired by the teens who still have hope that they can turn their lives around and become independent women after life has dealt the hard blows. I am motivated by the teens who at times are not aware of what they can achieve after...Contd on page 3



# Crisis Coalition Gender Committee Chairperson speaks on gender based violence

As the world commemorates the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, the Crisis Report spoke to the Chairperson of the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition Gender Committee, Margaret Mutsamvi on issues around gender based violence in Zimbabwe.

Below are excerpts of the interview;

**Q:** What would you say are the major drivers of gender based violence especially during this COVID 19 period

**A:** Harmful gender norms-This is an all time major driver of GBV in the Zimbabwean context and beyond. These mostly emanate from harmful cultural, religious and social practises that normalise and have all sorts of justifications on GBV against women and girls which includes rape, child marriages, physical and emotional violence and even death. GBV is a direct demonstration of the unequal power relations between the genders and women are on the receiving end.

Religion, culture and society continuously portray men as strong, superior, powerful and as a higher authority while presenting women as fragile subjects. These perceptions have given men so much power over women and have been the major source of Gender Based Violence and that deprives women of justice, agency and voice from within households to local and national institutions.

Poverty-The Covid-19 global pandemic came with a plethora of regulatory measures that primarily were supposed to ensure that the diseases does not spread. Some of the measures were however too harsh on the livelihood status of the majority of citizens whose survival is in the informal sector in the midst of an already existing economic crisis. The abrupt closure of the sector affected mostly women who dominate this sector threatening their social security and making them more vulnerable to abuse mostly at a household level. The lack of basic household provisions escalated the chances of this evil by increasing conflicts and disrupting mental health for many without income. The lockdown in itself meant that most GBV victims were trapped with the perpetrator thereby escalating the frequency of abuse. We also saw an increase in child marriages and pregnancies amongst adolescent girls as some poor families

gave up their little girls for livelihoods. Restricted movement made the reporting and resolving of most cases a pipeline dream with perpetrators taking advantage of it while survivors continued to live in unresolved trauma.

Political insecurities- The repression witnessed under the guise of enforcing lockdown measures saw the shrinking of the political space with fundamental rights such as the right to demonstrate and freedom of expression being undermined.

As a result, we witnessed our mothers and sisters suffering under the hand of insecure political leaders who view freedom of expression and freedom to demonstrate as a threat to their power. There is a classical case in which state agents abducted, tortured and sexually assaulted Joanna Mamombe, Cecilia Chimbiri and Netsai Marova after their demonstration against growing poverty. Nick Mangwana (Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services) and Victor Matemadanda (Zanu PF Political Commissar and deputy Defence Minister) were among high profile political leaders **dismissing the young women's claims as fabrication** thereby pre-empting the justice process of the case. There is also the case of the victimisation of two young women Namatai Kwekweza and Vongai Zimudzi, the incarceration of the seven activists that included Rita Nyamupinga, Farirai Gumbonzvanda and Stabile Dewa on trumped up charges of trying to overthrow the government yet the case clearly lacked evidence. There was also the case of Tsitsi Dangarembga and Fadzai Mahere who were among the many other activists who were arrested for standing up for what is right.

**Q:** Critics say in some instances, the State has been complicit on violence against women. What is your comment on this?

**A:** I agree with these critics to a greater extent by virtue of failure by the State to fully implement its commitments to the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the provisions of the 2013 Zimbabwean constitution.

We have also seen the heavy handedness of the police on female traders or activists exercising their constitutional right to demonstrate. In January 2020, UN CEDAW gave recommendations to the effect that Zimbabwe moves with speed to implement the laws that protect women



CiZC Gender Committee Chairperson Margaret Mutsamvi

**Q:** What do you think should be done to promote gender equality and fight violence against women in marginalised communities?

**A:** Respect and enforcement of the rule of law in this regard  
 -Full implementation of **the constitution's provisions** on gender equality at all levels of governance  
 -Acknowledgement of unpaid care work  
 -Preparing and implementation of gender policies and strategies in all development processes  
 -More awareness and empowerment of both the

and girls and we have not seen much on this front.

Through the Constitutional Amendment **Bill Number 2, we have seen the State's intentions** to reverse the gains made towards ensuring gender equality. If we also look at the compositions of influential institutions, we will realise that there has been less and less nominations of women to powerful positions from the presidium, cabinet, critical ministries such as the ministry of finance and agriculture.

Through the failure in our national policy framework, the state continues to largely contribute to gender based violence.

**Q:** Do you think Zimbabwe has done enough to fight violence against women and girls?

**A:** I think more can be done to end violence against women. Recent statistics (ZIMSTATS and UNICEF) show that 22 women are being raped daily or one woman is being abused every 75 minutes and an average of 646 women are being sexually abused every month. According to UNICEF, one in every three girls is raped or sexually assaulted before they reach the age of 18. This era of COVID-19 has been the worst phase in this narrative with research conducted by Zimbabwean civil society organisations indicating that physical violence went up by 38.5% from April to May 2020 while reports of emotional violence went up by 80%. Our 2013 constitution is founded on the values and principles of human rights and freedoms and gender equality but its provisions are largely just in black and white and invisible in practice.

girl and boy child to bridge the power gap created by culture, religion and society and their stereotypes that leave women and girls more vulnerable. We need to raise a new generation that acknowledges women as an equal force at all levels.  
 -Our leaders need to walk the talk on gender equality  
 - More pressure from civic bodies in monitoring and pressuring for reforms.

**Q:** What are some of the cases of abuse of women that you have recorded during this Covid 19 period?

**A:** We have recorded the assault of women in informal trade (*vendors*) during the lock down period as well as cases of assault of women living in informal settlements around Harare.  
 -Attacks and shaming of women and young girls on social media and various digital platforms.  
 - Revenge pornography  
 - Rape of a minors  
 - **Increased child 'marriages'**  
 - Sexual extortion - some women (in the informal sector) were requested to pay through sex by members of the police force or ended up as girlfriends to the manning officers to be allowed to continue their businesses, otherwise they would be threatened with exorbitant fines or imprisonment.



## In pictures-Police, army amongst the major perpetrators of violence against women



The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition is a broad based civil society network of over 72 active members comprising churches, women's groups, social movements, residents associations, labour unions, human rights lawyers, and health professionals. It was formed in August of 2001 to focus on democracy, human rights, good governance and sustainable development issues – working locally, regionally and internationally.



## Crisis Coalition Statement to commemorate the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence

As the world commemorates the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition notes with great concern a spike in cases of violence against women and girls during this era of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This years' commemorations are running under the global theme, "Orange the World: Fund, Respond, Prevent, Collect!".

Zimbabwe has witnessed a spike in cases of domestic violence with several cases of physical and emotional abuse of women being recorded during the lockdown period at household level.

According to a research conducted by Zimbabwean civic society organisations

this year, reports of physical violence went up by 38.5 percent from April to May while reports of emotional violence went up by 80 percent during the same period.

Zimbabwe's economic meltdown has continued to worsen the plight of women and girls who have also not been spared from the brutality by the police and the army who have apparently taken advantage of the Covid-19 regulations to silence dissent.

We take with great concern that the State apparatus in Zimbabwe continues to be among the biggest violators of women's rights with the most recent case being that of the opposition MDC Alliance trio of Joana Mamombe, Netsai Marova and Cecilia Chimhiri who were

abducted, tortured and sexually assaulted by state agents for staging a demonstration against economic hardships in May 2020.

On another note, Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition implores the government of Zimbabwe to move with speed in implementing the February 2020 recommendations by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to the effect that Zimbabwe must improve on implementation of laws to protect women from violence.

The Committee also called for full implementation of laws contained in the country's constitution adopted in 2013 on the protection of women.

It is also imperative for the Zimbabwean government to ensure full domestication of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women as well as to periodically review legal systems and build institutions that protect women's rights.

Commemoration of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence is an opportunity for the government to reassert its commitment to the protection and upliftment of women and girls.

Gender equality is a cornerstone of economic and sustainable development hence women and girls should be placed at the centre of development efforts.

Ends///

## Gender Based Violence affects women participation in elections

By Sandra Musakasa



negatively influences women's capacity to participate in electoral processes. Having open and frank discussions addressing GBV in an electoral environment will promote citizen participation especially women in democratic and electoral processes; strengthen policies protecting girls and women's rights in elections.

Due to GBV which finds its way in politics and the electoral sphere in Zimbabwe, few women find themselves participating in mainstream politics. To that end, women are still underrepresented in positions of leadership ranging from the Executive, National Assembly and even at local government level.

Violence against women in elections is a threat to a free and fair electoral environment and negatively impacts on the integrity of electoral processes and the participation of women in elections.

Violence targeting women affects women's participation as voters, candidates, election officials, activists, and political representatives and undermines free, fair and inclusive democratic processes.

Through increased attention to women's participation and women's voices in democracy, narratives of violence against women in electoral, political and social spaces have become more visible.

Gender Based Violence as a practice

This is despite the fact that there are more women than men by population statistics. Zimbabwe is a signatory to various international and regional statutes which call for gender equality in every sphere of life including governance and politics. However, the situation on the ground is not pleasing.

In this digital age, the fight against GBV should also focus on online violence which include hate speech targeting women. A lot of women especially female politicians have been harassed on social media by their male counterparts.

To that extent, most of them have de-

cidated to 'hibernate' from social media at the detriment of their digital rights to seek, receive, impart information and ideas of all kinds through the internet and all digital technologies regardless of frontiers. In addition to that, many female candidates in elections are not allocated adequate and equal opportunities by the State media during their political campaigns. This is against the dictates of the Constitution which mandates the state media to grant equal opportunity and access to all political parties and candidates regardless of gender. These factors will weigh against women and reduce their participation in politics.

It should be acknowledged that men are also victims of GBV, therefore policymakers should not lose sight of this when crafting policies for the purposes of addressing the vice.

Violence and GBV have no place in the electoral process as it will affect the level of citizen participation in politics and electoral processes. The net effect is that the credibility of the electoral process will be compromised once there are incidences of violence.

By fighting against GBV, we expect to see more women taking part in politics, leadership and governance issues to the betterment of humanity. As noted by Alex Magaisa, *'Humanity might find salvation in having more women in leadership'*

## Male students challenged to join fight against gender based violence

By Female Students Network Trust

Female students have urged their male counterparts to join in the fight against gender based violence.

The female students contend that their male counterparts are an important stakeholder in dealing with cultural norms and values which encourage violence against women and girls.

Speaking during an event hosted by the Female Students Network Trust (FSNT) to commemorate the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence in Harare on November 27, 2020, Tanatswa Zimani, a student from the University of Zimbabwe emphasised the need of male to male engagement against GBV.

*"Men have the power to convince other men to end the behaviour of beating women because men on their own they tell each other the truth. The ego of some men will not allow them to listen to whatever women say so if we could have more men being champions of gender equality, we can achieve our goal"*, said Zimani.

This was also supported by the FSNT Board Chairperson, Sibongile Gwanzura who called for educative programmes aimed at educating the perpetrators of domestic violence on the dangers of violence against women.

In 2014, the UN Women launched the HeForShe campaign aimed at inviting men to support initiatives by women in their quest for gender equality.

Feminist organisations have since adopted this idea and have started implementing it in their various programmes.

## 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence: Spare a thought for rural women

By Crisis Report

Rural women have largely been at the receiving end of gender based violence and this has mostly been driven by cultural and traditional norms that view women as subjects rather than equal individuals who are entitled to equal opportunities.

Resultantly, empowerment of women and the girl child is lagging and this is a clarion call to government and civic society organisations to up efforts on empowering women and girls.

Cases of forced marriages and teenage pregnancies which are reported in rural

areas have mostly been as a result of harmful traditional practices and cultural norms while in most of the cases, the victims have no recourse.

Access to education has also been a challenge for the girl child while in most cases, the rural folk consider it a taboo for women to be afforded employment opportunities.

It is essential to ensure dissemination of knowledge on women's constitutional rights and there is also need to make deliberate efforts to educate men on the need to ensure that women have equal opportunities and are put at the centre of development efforts.

Traditional leaders have a key role to play in women empowerment as well as fighting gender based violence hence the imperative need to ensure they are actively involved in programmes aimed at ensuring gender balance.

Rural women deserve equal access to and control and ownership of resources and thus it is essential and mandatory to implement support mechanisms and policies (as enunciated in the Zimbabwean constitution as well as other regional and international statutes to which the country is signatory to) aimed at uplifting the status of women and girls.

## A Special focus on teen mums...From page 1 having been victims.

I am aware of the dynamics which exist in our communities which, more often than not, work against these teen moms and I want to play my part in the campaign.

## How I am playing my part

I have embarked on an ambitious project that addresses the psychological and social consequences of teenage pregnancy through interventions targeting teenage girls combined with interventions focusing on their social environment. Several studies and reviews suggest a comprehensive, community-based, and socio-ecological approach.

I am committed to a comprehensive, socio-ecological approach that focuses on relevant intrapersonal, interpersonal, community, organisational, national, and global levels of influence and interaction and moves beyond change of individual behavior. It recognises and addresses the structural contexts which shape and limit people's agency and therefore ability to act.

I proudly do this with partners who share the same empowerment vision and recognition that self-empowerment is a crucial step to ending tolerance of gender-based violence.

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