

JOBURG REGION E – TODAY HE GAVE HER FLOWERS

The brutal murder of a participant by her husband coupled with a general acceptance that abuse is normal spurred the Community Work Programme in Alex to launch a campaign that tackles violence against women – and it is beginning to make a difference.

Alexandra, or Alex for short, is in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg on the banks of the Jukskei River. It was one of the first African townships where black people could own land in an urban area. Overcrowding, poor sanitation and inadequate electricity are persistent problems. Twenty-nine percent of the population is younger than 20 years old and unemployment is estimated at more than 60%. Almost half of the households in the townships are women-headed with HIV and AIDS and alcohol abuse cited as major health problems.

The township, along with Mayibuye and Klipfontein, became the CWP's Joburg Region E site in February 2010. CWP work at the site includes educational campaigns focussing on the Phuza Wize and the use and misuse of alcohol, hosting a radio show which reaches more than 1.2 million individuals through Alexandra fm, and collecting medication for the elderly from local clinics.

Other activities include cleaning schools and classrooms, grasscutting, trimming trees and cleaning open spaces. They also maintain and clean drains, and although available land is scarce, they are finding ways to develop food gardens, whose produce goes to vulnerable people in the community.

One of the social anchor programmes is the “2day he bought her flowers campaign”, which focuses mainly on rape and domestic violence. This CWP programme began with a public march in December 2010 and was officially launched this year.

The campaign is a reaction to the prevalence of violence against women, and the acceptance that this is normal.

“There is an apathy and sense of hopelessness,” says Aziza Modise of Seriti Institute, the implementing agent at this site.

Last December, however, CWP participants who were not on duty that day marched to the Wynberg court carrying banners and placards, to vent their frustration about the excessive violence against women in Alex. A husband had hacked his CWP participant wife to death in such a grotesque and gruesome fashion that all of the people who witnessed the aftermath were left traumatised.

The woman's eyes were gouged out, her lips and nose cut, her throat slit, and her intestines strewn all over her injured face. The CWP co-ordinator, who alerted people to the scene, found her 10-year-old child trying to push back the intestines into his mother's lifeless body. The husband coolly left the scene to go to his girlfriend in Mpumalanga, where he was later apprehended by the police. He was prosecuted, convicted and is now serving a jail sentence.

Although this was a particularly violent incident, many of the woman participants in Region E come to work having been brutalised the night before. There was a day when 12 beatings, two hospitalisations and one near-death were reported. The site has had three cases of women who have endured serious injuries and broken bones during the attacks.

“What is frightening, is that people are desensitised to these events, shrugging them off. A black eye is common place and raises no eyebrows. It is more of a banality,” says Aziza.



Don Malamba of SAME, the local implementing agent for Region E, tells the following story to show just how desensitised people are: “One day during the weekly meeting with a group of trainee co-ordinators, which consisted of a motley crew of 43 men and women of different generations who work for the CWP, I noticed that one of the participants in the discussion had bruised cheeks, her eyes were bloodshot and swollen, her lip had a gaping cut and she had bandaged herself. I asked her to come forward and stand in front of everybody, which she did. I then asked that they tell me what was amiss with this young lady. Everybody in the group looked at me with surprise.

“Most people kept quite and a few said they see nothing wrong with her. I asked that they look at her again and asked again if they see anything at all wrong. This time, even more people than before said they could see nothing wrong. Eventually I told them that she is hurt, bruised and in obvious pain, to which people then said ‘oh is that what you are talking about.’”

The CWP site manager, Kidibone, and Don have had to preside over numerous such cases involving male CWP participants who are perpetrators, some of whom were referred for counselling.

It became increasingly clear that these were not isolated incidents. In an exercise undertaken at the site, all of the 32 female respondents in one of the circle dialogues in which abuse against women was discussed, confessed to either having being abused or continuing to live in an abusive relationship. Schools have become breeding grounds for violence against girls and spousal deaths are increasing.

In addition resources are overburdened and overstretched. There is only one shelter in the townships for abused women, Bombani, and it is struggling to cope with excessive demands. As a result women are forced to stay on in hostile and dangerous relationships. ADAPT, a local NGO specialising in the prevention of violence against women, is also battling to cope on its own.

The criminal justice system is also overburdened, with only one police woman assigned to the Victim Empowerment Unit.

The court domestic violence unit is characterised of long queues and few personnel. The state social workers no longer do case work or counselling and the city of Johannesburg social workers focuses on community development only.

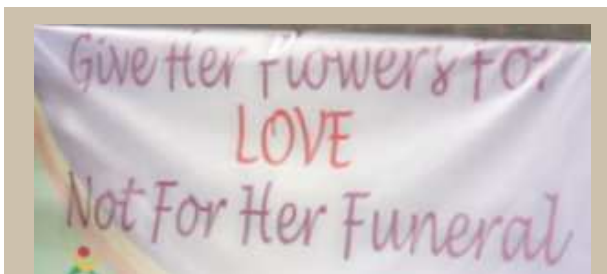
This spurred Region E to launch the “2day he bought her flowers campaign”. It became vividly clear that there needed to be a social mobilisation campaign that would mobilise society against the scourge of violence against women, while strengthening existing efforts.

The CWP felt that whereas the criminal justice system should be made accessible and consumer friendly, an emphasis should be more on prevention work. The CWP site therefore came with the concept of conducting workshops, circle dialogues and having marches every quarter that aim is to sensitise the community about the dangers of abuse. Circle dialogues are named after the circle people sit in for facilitated discussions. These include both men and women.

Since the launch of the campaign, people in Alex are talking about the escalating violence against women, children and the elderly. This campaign has touched a nerve and support is spreading to the broader community, with a number of taxi drivers now joining the campaign.

SAME has created partnerships with SAPS, ADAPT, and Bombani shelter, and 56 facilitators, both men and women, have been trained on how to run circle dialogues on the prevention of violence against women, children and the elderly.

Most important, however, is that more women are coming forward to report abuse and are even reporting this to the police after being referred by circle dialogue facilitators.



The campaign uses this story in various forms to get its message across:

Day one he beat her and apologised saying “I love you”.

Day two he beat her and apologised.

Day three he beat her, sent an sms saying “I am sorry my love, I will never do it again”.

Day four he beat her, but this time he killed her and on the day of her funeral he bought her flowers and knelt next to her coffin apologising.

This profile is part of a series that looks at local innovation in the South African government’s Community Work Programme (CWP). It was produced by Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS) for the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG). For more information about the CWP go to www.cogta.gov.za/cwp.