

Building confidence in GBV survivors

WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA – Over the years, Namibia has enacted legislation and policies to protect the rights of all citizens. However, despite a fairly developed legislative and policy framework, gender-based violence has become the norm rather than the exception for the country's women and girls, many of whom have been raped, maimed or murdered in gruesome circumstances.



Namibia's Prosecutor General Martha Imalwa says Gender Based Violence is a huge challenge in the country, with one in three women in Namibia being in a violent relationship. However, survivors tend to be quiet about GBV due to lack of faith in the criminal justice system and fear of reprisals.

Where the crime is reported, some victims withdraw the cases, thwarting successful prosecution.

Now, a mock trial documentary has been produced highlighting challenges and barriers that victims of GBV face in the quest for justice. The mock trial play, which was launched in Namibia on 18 April 2019 with support from UNODC, provides guidelines to criminal justice practitioners on how to handle reported GBV cases and survivors with due sensitivity.

The mock trial depicts how relatives compel a wife that opens a criminal case against her abusive husband after he physically and sexually abuses her, to withdraw the case.

On one hand it shows how inequality, patriarchy, lack of privacy and protection as well the attitudes of service providers who include police officers can become barriers and make GBV survivors apathetic. On the other hand, the mock trial, shows what can be done to empower and protect GBV survivors to stand up for their rights and seek justice. In that sense, it restores hope.

The office of the Prosecutor General, the Ministry of Justice, the Namibian Police (Nampol) and social workers within the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare produced the documentary, which officials say will be a resource as

Namibia acts to end GBV. Attorney General Dr Albert Kawana says GBV has reached “embarrassing” proportions in Namibia.



Similarly, the Inspector General of the Namibian Police, Lieutenant-General Sebastian Ndeitunga, said: “The lessons (from the mock trial) will assist law enforcement and the criminal justice system to adopt the right attitudes and tools in their interactions with victims and perpetrators of GBV. Our magistrates, prosecutors, police officers and social workers should always be at the forefront of demonstrating that GBV is unacceptable.”

The Deputy Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Ms Lucia Witbooi, says Namibia aims to reduce GBV cases from 33% to 20% by the end of 2025.



“We prioritised care, protection and dignity,” she said.



UNODC Regional Representative for Southern Africa, Ms Zhuldyz Akisheva, says the documentary highlights typical challenges experienced by most victims of GBV.

“People don’t report abuse due to stereotypes, cultural and religious beliefs, as well as lack of confidence in the Judicial System. Very often victims seek Justice and don’t find it,” she says.

The actors and actresses in the mock trial are criminal justice officials who include a magistrate, a prosecutor, police officers and social workers dealing with GBV cases in Namibia.

Sustainable Development Goal 5 exhorts Member States to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Similarly, SDG 16 advocates for, *inter alia*, access to justice for all and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.