

Report on Training for Venetia Mine (De Beers Group) in Gender-Based Violence Counselling of Lay Counsellors



Introduction

In July 2020 Phaphama Initiatives responded to a Request for Proposals of Venetia Mine (De Beers Group) to train the lay counsellors of the centres supporting victims of gender-based violence in the Blouberg and Musina areas and to help them develop the necessary skills required to counsel victims of gender-based violence. After due diligence, Phaphama Initiatives was formally appointed on 6 October 2020 as a preferred service provider to deliver on this important work. As is detailed in the following sections of this report, we implemented this work within a three-and-a-half week period, between 27 October and 20 November 2020.

Stakeholder Engagement

The stakeholder engagement process was a fruitful process that involved different members of the community who are actively involved in the day-to-day implementation of community development programmes.



Musina Stakeholder Engagement

The Musina stakeholder engagement process took place on 27 and 28 October 2020. The stakeholders involved in the process were:

- SAPS (Social Crime Prevention, Communications, Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Unit)
- Victim Empowerment Centre Musina
- Department of Social Development Social worker
- Christian Women Ministries children's project (CWM)
- Save the Children

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- Thuthuzela Care Centre (NPA)
 - Lawyers for Human Rights
 - Isibindi (NACCW)

All these stakeholders expressed gratitude for being able to share together the history of the cross-border community they live in. Through the engagement we learnt that the community of Musina has been challenged by many issues that affect the well-being of the community. These issues are gender-based violence, lack of support from the prosecution authority in ensuring that justice is done, the high rate of unemployment, influx of foreign nationals seeking asylum, poverty, covert violence and abuse towards foreign nationals by the South African authorities and community members, the lack of resources in providing support for victims. These issues have been a challenge since the law is not strong enough in dealing with perpetrators, leading to more victims getting abused. The community has not been able to be self-sustaining because of poor leadership and governance, giving rise to aggressive and, at times, destructive protest action, demanding support. Companies like Venetia mine have become a source of change and are called upon to fill the gaps left by local government in providing a wide range of support for the needy.

Just from this engagement, the stakeholders involved in support of the victims saw that they are not collaborating as well as they could, which hinders the progress of the victim being assisted. They mentioned that their referral system is a challenge because they all work in silos, yet they want to see change in the community. They are overwhelmed by the work they need to do to bring about change in the community and identified for themselves the following skills and knowledge needs:

- Psychosocial support
- Training about laws and policies of governance
- Leadership empowerment for local government, traditional and religious leaders
- Shelter movement
- Male empowerment
- Victim support
- Child trafficking
- Restorative justice
- Accreditation of skills training.

Blouberg Stakeholder Engagement

The Blouberg stakeholder engagement was held on 12 and 13 November 2020.

From these meetings, it was clear that the Blouberg community has different dynamics to Musina. This community is so disempowered that community members feel helpless in doing anything about issues that affect growth and progress in the community. Community members feel that they cannot resolve any conflicts on their own, and rely on the SAPS to sort them out. Gender-based violence issues include the abuse of men because of unemployment, abuse of women and children because of male superiority, the lack of

shared power between traditional leaders and community members, high rate of unemployment for the youth, and corrupt governance. In dealing with most GBV issues the CPF would take the first stand and be stigmatised by community members for making themselves heroes. In turn that puts their lives in danger. The prosecution system is not following through with arrests. The Senwabarwana Victim Empowerment Centre covers 126 villages, whilst Malebogo Victim Empowerment Centre covers 100 villages. There isn't enough capacity to cover the entire area resulting in many cases not being attended to or resolved. The community needs empowerment on the below:

- Capacitation of lay counsellors
- Leadership skills for traditional leaders
- Trauma counselling and training
- Psychosocial support
- Hubs for youth empowerment
- Victim support.



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Stakeholders who attended the sessions:

- SAPS (Social Crime Prevention)
- Senwabarwana Victim Empowerment Centre
- Department of Social Development (Social Worker)

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- Maleboho Victim Empowerment Centre
 - Lefa la Baswa Development Initiative

Training Process

The five-day workshop is a combination of learning nonviolent conflict resolution skills (based on the Alternatives to Violence Programme); immersing in the principles of gender equity and reconciliation work; and community coaching. As such, the training achieves a balance between a strengths-based practice (what assets and strengths can we tap into, that can assist us in addressing complex social challenges?), and unflinching, honest self-reflection of personal and societal gender conditioning.

The training methodology is underpinned by 14 foundational principles (AVP International, 2018):

1. Teamwork: Workshops are facilitated by teams of facilitators who practise and model the participatory attitudes, skills, processes and knowledge we aim to transfer to the participants.
2. Shared power and leadership: We share leadership roles and we commit to drawing on the strengths and wisdom of everyone in the group.
3. Alternatives: The workshops are built on a belief that people always have options and choices, and choose how they respond.
4. Inclusiveness: We make a conscious effort to be inclusive and to seek common ground while identifying and embracing differences.
5. Good within everyone: We recognise that there is something of value in everyone and, when we affirm and connect with the capacity for good, the potential for nonviolent, caring relationships are increased.
6. Journey of personal exploration: We value many different paths and respect people's right to choose their own path.
7. Experiential Learning: The workshops are built on experiential exercises and the belief that "everyone has knowledge and experience to share and can learn from the experiences of others".
8. Community: We help build a sense of community within the workshop.
9. Personal nonviolence: We encourage people to take personal responsibility for not harming oneself or others.
10. Consensus: We work towards consensus in making decisions within workshops.
11. Safety: We work hard to create a safe environment that is conducive to collaboration, personal growth and taking risks.
12. Accessibility and consistency: While there is a great deal of variation around the world, these workshops are recognisable anywhere in the world due to established practices and processes.
13. Mutual respect: Respect for self and others is at the heart of the workshops.
14. Transforming power: We believe we all have the power to positively transform ourselves and the situations we find ourselves in.

Of course, a more rigorous evaluation would need to be done to assess the longer-term outcomes and impact of the training, but the course material is carefully designed to deepen:

- An understanding of the root causes of gender-based violence
- Greater emotional intelligence
- An awareness of how nonviolent and GBV guiding principles intersect
- The ability to implement a multi-sectoral response to GBV, both on the interpersonal and community levels.

Both groups (Musina and Blouberg) received the training with maturity, earnestness and eagerness. Attendance and punctuality were excellent. Participation never lagged, and quieter members found the courage to bring their voices in too. Within the first day-and-a-half of the workshop, participants were beginning to speak honestly about the unhelpful things they were doing in their work, that were weakening the collective response to gender-based violence. They also spoke of how they were sometimes not living up to their professional commitments in the referral system. Towards the end of the workshop, comments such as the following arose: “We have never attended a training like this before: usually we have to sit and listen to lectures and PowerPoint presentations, and we fall asleep!”

It was the opportunity to introspect, speak one’s truth and be listened to without judgment, and take care of self that was, undoubtedly, valued the most by participants. In a work environment where one is constantly expected to ‘be there’ for others, the importance of sometimes being able to step back and reflect on one’s personal journey cannot be underestimated. Some participants shared life stories for the first time. A sample of stories is given below.

My 61 year old mother, to this day, is still being beaten every weekend when my father is drunk and high on dagga. These are the only two things he buys with his pension money. The police have spoken to him. Family members have spoken to him. It helps for a while, and then he goes back to the same abuse.

My niece was gang-raped by three men when she was 10. Her womb was damaged so badly that she is unable to have children. She is now 31 and is my responsibility. She is unable to run her own life: the other day she lost her money and could not tell us how it happened. The perpetrators are still walking around these streets, there have been no arrests because they are members of your (looking at the SAPS members in the group) families.

My father was a bully and used to beat my mother and us children. One day, when I was 10, he woke me up early, saying I should go and fetch my aunt. When I came back with my aunt, I saw my mother lying in bed. He had beaten her so badly she was unconscious. I asked him what happened and he wouldn't say. The police came, the pastor came. My father said she had tried to overdose. They believed him and did nothing.

As a man at home I feel useless because I cannot comment or make any suggestions because I am unemployed. I am told how can a man fail to look after his family when there is work out there?

I was once shamed for doing laundry on behalf of my sisters, since that day I conditioned myself in believing that a man does not do any chores at home. Our responsibility is to go out and work. I am not allowed to share my feelings, and so I express them through shouting at my children and beating my wife.

My wife and I have been married for two years, I realised that social conditioning is affecting how our relationship operates. We were told what men and women can and cannot do, this has made it difficult for us to maintain a healthy relationship. She and I spoke about some of the decisions we took that were influenced by societal norms. An example is that I am not supposed to share my feelings or help her in the kitchen. I enjoy cooking but I cannot do it when we have visitors because I will be seen as a weak man.

As you read these stories, try to imagine them being told in a workshop environment where men are listening to women's stories, and vice versa. Also, whoever is telling the story is doing so in a non-blaming way: it is simply a sharing of deep personal emotion. But behind each story stand the similar life experiences of thousands of women and men who do not have the opportunity to express their voices in a safe spaces such as this. As such, this work creates a rare dialogue circle for men and women to jointly confront gender injustice and unravel the harmful knots of cultural conditioning and oppression relating to gender and sexuality. In this context, the 'undiscussables' of gender are confronted, as participants dig deep into their personal experiences and move beyond habitual ways of relating to discover new forms of healing and authentic intimacy between the sexes.

It was also interesting to note that the emotion most expressed by women was that of anger at how they had been treated by men, whereas the emotion most expressed by men was fear of inadequacy and the inability of being able to provide for a family.

To honour the deeply honest self-exploratory work that both the men and the women did, they created a ritual for one another at the end of the in the gender reconciliation sessions. Below are some photos of the affirmations each gender offered the other.



Our observations of the two groups is that the Musina group has worked more together to address gender-based violence in their town and surrounds. As such, some tensions had set in, as people had taken advantage of one another or let one another down professionally. The Blouberg group is yet to strengthen their collaboration.



An exercise about cooperation and

sharing

The role-plays performed by small groups brought into sharp relief the practical implementation challenges of supporting victims of violence in an overstretched, at best, or dysfunction system, which at policy level appears comprehensive and caring. One role-play showed a victim of domestic violence appearing at the police station. There she was asked whether she would like to lay a charge or secure a protection order. On requesting to lay a charge, she was referred to the victim support centre, which had the responsibility of providing her with safe, alternative accommodation. The role-play then picked up on a heated exchange between the coordinator of the victim-support centre and the SAPS Captain in charge of the case: “The victim has already been here for five days, which, as you know is more than the maximum length of time we can keep someone. We do not have the food, clothes, toiletries or money to keep someone here longer. What are you doing?!” An angry retort followed, “We are trying to arrest the man, but we do not know where he is. What do you want me to do? Take her to my house?!”



Another role play showed two young boys who were foreign nationals, housed at the local shelter, being bullied by South Africans. The two boys were coming out of their shower into the sleeping room, when the South African bullies began to demand their shoes and accused them of stealing. The two foreign boys fought back because they had not stolen. The caretaker, hearing the commotion, came into the room and asked what was going on. She was informed of the accusations and she decided to take everyone to the local police station. It was around 10 p.m. When she was busy explaining the situation to the police officer, the South African boys yelled at the foreign boys that they do not deserve to stay in the shelter and that they are thieves. As the caretaker was trying to calm them down, the police officer said, “Ma’m are you aware what time it is? In South Africa we sleep at this time, and you come here with your stupid foreigners. What do you want me to do with them? Come back in the morning, or I will arrest the boys!” On hearing this, and facing the consequences of arrest, the foreign boys ran away.



An exercise about the difference between Power With and Power Over.

One final role-play: an abusive husband did not look after his family, emotionally abused the wife and children by not giving them financial support, and always came home drunk demanding food. The wife decided to call her mother and the mother-in-law. When both mothers came for a meeting to try and mediate the issue, he did not show any interest and told them to leave his house. He said “I am the man in this house, no one can tell me what to do, it’s either they do what I say or they leave!” That was when the parents decided to escalate the issue by taking it to the local VEP centre. The social worker who was informed about the situation, followed the procedure in requesting a mediation session with the abusive father. During the mediation process the father shared feelings of not being understood at home, not being listened to, hence he goes out to drink with friends where he feels comfortable. The wife also shared the need to be united with him. They both listened to each other’s needs and pledged to check in with one another when they are hurt by the actions of the other. The social worker became a good resource in resolving this conflict.

On the second day of the Blouberg workshop, we arrived to find the participants boycotting what was, for them, an unsatisfactory breakfast. The mood in the group was aggressive, angry and blocking of any learning process. Accusations of tender corruption were quick to surface. We decided to use this incident as a way of practicing and consolidating some of the nonviolent conflict resolution principles learnt the day before. We explored with the group what alternatives they could have used to resolve this issue, and interrogated the underlying culture of victimhood that played out through the belligerence. We also questioned why the ‘mob mentality’ had not given a space for any dissenting voices in the group to be expressed. The group were quickly able to transfer the learnings from this occurrence to the manner in which they run their community affairs. While this episode led to much contrite self-reflection, we also held a discussion around how the lack of historical and current development of rural areas - the structural inequality - often places entire

communities at risk of operating from an internalised worldview of scarcity because there is no relief from the relentless struggle for survival.

Also in the Blouberg workshop, instead of teaching coaching, we did an introductory session on community mapping. We did this to increase the cohesion in the group, and to raise awareness of the assets the community already possesses to address social and economic challenges. It was a difficult exercise because, instead of bringing assets to light, it brought the neglect and hardship of the community to the fore again. For example, it showed how there is not a single play area for children in the whole community. There had been one, but after repeated vandalism, the municipality had refused to fix it again. A discussion ensued about the pervasiveness of corruption in the area, and how it is impossible for anyone to secure a piece of land for any kind of development without a kick-back being offered. To make matters worse, if anyone tries to speak up about corruption, they are putting their lives at risk. We wondered whether it would be possible for Venetia Mine to secure a piece of land for a safe park for children, or for sporting and cultural activities for the youth of the area?

The issue of corruption came up in Musina too when some of the SAPS members shared in confidence with the facilitators how they no longer care to make arrests of perpetrators of gender-based violence because criminal prosecutions come to naught when a bribe is paid to secure release and the quashing of the case.

Participant evaluations

What was valuable for you in this workshop?

- How to resolve problems non-violently.
- Self-confidence.
- Cast away fear and be responsible.
- Self-love. I am capable of greatness.
- Team-building.
- I liked our facilitators because they were patient with us.
- I learnt to resolve conflicts without being biased and reflecting what the other person said to get clarity.

What was difficult for you in this workshop?

- Telling my personal story.
- To tell the truth about myself.
- When we had to work together but not talk to each other.
- Hearing the stories of what others went through.
- When I tell people about my fear and anger.
- To look deep down into myself / introspection.
- To open up especially in front of women.

What did you realise about yourself during the workshop?

- That I am strong and I am capable of helping and understanding other people, and putting other people before me.
- I must think before I react.
- I have realised I am not perfect in my life, I have some weaknesses here and there.
- I still have a long way to go with counselling for myself and others.
- I still have fear of expressing my emotions and sharing my experiences. There are also negative things I've been doing, thinking they are right as they become my norm, like withholding and disengagement.
- I have realised that I was not open and honest towards others.
- I have strength to open up and speak my mind.

What would you have liked more of?

- To learn more about gender equity and reconciliation.
- Talking more about myself.
- Talking about killing each other.
- To learn more about escalators and de-escalators to eradicate GBV.
- To learn more about expressing my feelings without resorting to violent responses.

What are you taking into your workplace?

- The team toxins.
- I-messages.
- Sense of mutualism.
- Working as a team, knowledge and respect.
- The conflict resolution techniques, gender reconciliation.
- That teamwork is the best way to achieve our goals.
- Be responsible and help the community where possible.
- It is important to observe my colleagues well-being at work so I can be able to offer assistance in case they cannot perform to their best ability.

What would you like to see moving forward from here?

- To have more workshops of this nature in the near future.
- Having a sustainable programme.
- To work towards a work forum.
- Having community forums to engage on the issues of GBV.
- Collaboration of different community development organisations in making collective efforts to bring change to themselves and the community as a whole.

Way Forward

The comments above go some way in showing that participants have made an internal psychological shift, which will manifest outwardly in them being able to more successfully counsel victims of gender-based violence with heartfelt emotional intelligence, humility and compassion. The evaluations also demonstrate that the gain in nonviolent conflict resolution skills will contribute to a more peaceful community as a whole.

There is, however, still a great deal that needs to be done in these communities before it can be claimed that they are responding effectively to gender-based violence. At this stage, with the resources at hand, the professional and lay sectors are responding as best they can to victims of GBV who are proactive enough to seek help. But we are well aware that the severely limited nature of these resources and services are also barriers to an effective response to GBV in communities. In a recent webinar (7 October 2020) held by the Children's Institute of the University of Cape Town, the South African Medical Research Council, the Health Research Unit and Sonke Gender Justice, it was stated that, while the Domestic Violence Act appeared progressive in nature, the implementation of it remains flawed. Processes such as securing a protection order; finding alternative accommodation or medical and psycho-social assistance; or laying a charge are provided for by legislation, and yet are inconsistently implemented in practice, as we have heard from the stories above.

And what of the victims, often in remote villages, who do not seek help because they are not aware of their rights, or they do not have the means (emotional, financial, cultural) to ensure their rights are upheld? How many cases do not even make it to a victim support centre?

Then there is the question of prevention. Presently, the work in Musina and Blouberg focuses on response, understandably so, as response, while challenging, is still easier than the seemingly intangible work of prevention. It is imperative, however, that at some point we begin to turn our focus to prevention, or we run the risk of endlessly mopping up the water from a leaking tap, without ever turning off the tap. We believe that turning off the tap will only be possible through sustained local, regional and national collaboration, following a pathway briefly described below:

1. Community mapping and dialogues to identify and engage all the agencies and structures that could be targeted to respond to and prevent gender-based violence;
2. Organisation Work - while organisation work does not directly respond to gender-based violence, we know that one of the drivers of GBV is men's sense of frustration and shame at not being able to provide adequately for their families. Organisation work creates sustainable livelihoods and generates a circular economy in a region: research has shown that if money circulates three times in a township or rural community (rather than 'leaking out' to the major retailers supplying goods to the area), a community is able to begin to uplift itself and not be totally reliant on grants or jobs offered by government or the mine;

3. The establishment of a stakeholder forum comprising local, regional and national partners from government, academia and civil society, in order to extend the scope, legitimacy and sustainability of this work, and to address the issues of corruption that destroy many of the good local efforts responding to violence (note that a call for a forum was made in the participant evaluations, particularly in Musina, and note how many significant role-players already exist in the trained group e.g. Save the Children, the NPA and Lawyers for Human Rights). The purpose of the forum could be to create a platform of capacitation for different stakeholders, shared resources, and knowledge. The Violence Prevention Forum, of which Phaphama Initiatives is a member, could be called upon to assist in creating such a GBV forum, and ideally, for a forum of this nature to be well-run and productive, it should be resourced by a competent and dedicated administrative position;
4. Ongoing training and formation, particularly in the development of policy and legislative frameworks pertaining to this work, such as the National Strategic Plan outlining a ten-year (2020 to 2030) vision and action plan to address Gender Based Violence and Femicide in our country;
5. It is evident that from both communities there are far too few social workers because all the centres only have one social worker helping with victims.
6. There is also a need to understand how the law enforcement authorities operate.
7. Both communities are committed in dealing with issues of GBV and other community crimes, and are willing to work with Venetia mine in ensuring a progressive community.
8. Healing and self-care interventions for all involved in this gruelling work.

Each community also identified their own specific needs, as follows:

Musina

- Shelter needs for accommodation, security, food, running float, stipend
- Regular training for the forum members.

Blouberg

- Accommodation for victims at Malebogo VEP
- Boy child empowerment
- Lack of capacity of SAPS vehicles
- GBV awareness in communities.

Finally, in Musina the question arose about the accreditation of Phaphama's programmes. Phaphama's conflict resolution programme is accredited (US 9533 - Use communication to resolve conflict in the workplace, 3 credits) and, as such, we would be willing to discuss the process of accrediting participants, if this is something they would wish to do.

Conclusion

While the five steps listed above may appear daunting in terms of the commitment of time, energy, resources and organisational capacity required, there are two factors that make this commitment worthwhile. Firstly, a core group of dedicated and cooperative activists now exists in both Blouberg and Musina as a result of the Phaphama intervention. This seed is eager to sprout and flourish with the necessary nurturing.

Secondly, because both these communities are relatively 'contained', geographically, they could, with a well thought-out, collaborative vision, documented at every step of the process, form a blueprint for a successful intervention to address gender-based violence. This would be a first for our country.

Phaphama Initiatives Project Team
9 December 2020