

# Beyond **X** the status quo

**W**e salute the Government for the establishment of a Ministry of Gender Equality And Child Welfare, a National Gender Policy (2010 – 2020) and a National Plan of Action Against Gender-Based Violence (2012 – 2016) – in addition to the Constitution and all the other laws aimed at protecting and advancing women. The reality of the status of women and children as it relates to gender-based violence (GBV) unfortunately evinces the need for implementation. Laws and policies are only worth the paper they are written on if not put to serious and concerted action.

An acknowledgment of the statistics on GBV from January - June 2014 led President Pohamba to call for a National Day of Prayer and Rosalia Nghidinwa, Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare to admit that programmes meant to address the GBV have failed (The Namibian 19 February 2014). Parents have admitted they have failed their children in their upbringing, teachers and the clergy have admitted their failure to do more to instill values that could have prevented GBV crimes. There are many other stakeholders who would admit their part in not doing more to address at least one of the root causes of GBV in Namibia. Namibians carry corporate responsibility for the state of our society.

Media campaigns and newspaper reports continue to inform the public of acts of GBV. Civil society continues to run awareness campaigns such as our 16 Days of Activism from 25 November – 10 December each year; our Black Thursdays, which invite men to wear black every Thursday of every week of every month of every year to show their solidarity with the fight against GBV; and our Orange Day awareness days, which are every 25th of every month. Every kind of women's and children's day also our radio shows, TV programmes and social programmes raise awareness and express intolerance of GBV.

But nothing changes.

Let me correct myself. Not enough changes.

All the reasons – from the need for male involvement to the need for men to be allowed to be vulnerable, from women signing their own GBV warrant through their materialistic relationships with men or their dress, the role of alcohol and drugs, the lack of employment, police inefficiency, the inaccessibility of the legal system, the targeting of vulnerable groups such as those people living with HIV/ AIDS, fatherlessness, violence in the home, patriarchal customs that treat women as less than men, illiteracy and many more reasons – are already known.

What we now need is improved co-ordination and implementation - and monitoring - of the laws and action plans. This means fly-by-night campaigns and aborted initiatives will become something of the past. A holistic approach, involving all stakeholders from parents to Government, from big shot NGOs to grass roots workers and unaffiliated ordinary citizens should be taken. And here I salute the Legal Assistance Centre for equipping ordinary citizens to assist in streamlining legal processing. The current catch-22 situation will keep us trapped in the middle where the rot of GBV will continue to fester unless we find solutions to the numerous contradictions in our society. If the minimum wage is such that parents need to

work extra hours to provide for basic needs, they cannot be expected to sufficiently assist with schoolwork and instill values. As long as shebeens owners need to buy food and send children to school, shebeens will thrive at the lack of other opportunities. Without investing in education and job creation, merely advocating for people to stop drinking and abusing their families will continue to have little effect.

For change, Namibia needs its citizens to take up their communal ownership of problems and responsibilities, follow a holistic approach to address the ills and advance the strengths and have visionary leadership to coordinate this in huge task before us - beginning with the implementation of the wonderful laws and policies we already have.

By Vida de Voss

