

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: Supporting Victim Empowerment in South Africa

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[Gender-based violence – a human rights violation](#)

Violence against women and children is a crime; a violation of fundamental human rights. Eliminating this is one of the priorities of UNODC's crime prevention and criminal justice strategy, and the issue of victimisation features prominently in the work of UNODC Southern Africa. To deal with this, Southern Africa office of UNODC is working in partnership with the Department of Social Development to assist the Government of South Africa's Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP). Through funding from the Embassy of Austria, the European Commission, and the Embassy of Japan, UNODC Southern Africa's support aims to contribute to building safe and peaceful communities, strengthening the human rights culture and providing more effective, multi-sectoral, coordinated responses to victims of crime and trauma.

[UNODC – Supporting Victim Empowerment in South Africa](#)

Several United Nations Resolutions have been passed recognising the critical importance of the special needs of women and girls from a criminal perspective. These include Resolution 2006/29 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council entitled "Crime prevention and criminal justice responses to violence against women and girls"; the 2007 General Assembly Resolution 61/143 which calls upon the UN system to discuss violence against women; the Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women (General Assembly Resolution 48/104); the Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (General Assembly Resolution 52/86, annex); and the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power (General Assembly Resolution 40/34, annex).

UNODC approaches the issue of victimisation and gender-based violence with the understanding that crime takes an enormous physical, financial and emotional toll on victims. However, in many criminal justice systems, victims of crime are often forgotten and sometimes even re-victimised by the system itself. They are rarely allowed to fully participate in decisions that concern them and do not always receive the assistance, support and protection they need. Redress for the harm they suffer as a result of victimisation is often not available and, when it is, it is often a case of "too little, too late".

In response to this, UNODC believes that a fair, effective, and efficient criminal justice system is one that respects the fundamental rights of victims as well as those of suspects and offenders. It focuses on the need to prevent victimisation, to protect and assist victims, and to treat them with compassion and respect for their dignity. For this reason, UNODC Southern Africa is proud to be associated with the VEP in South Africa.

UNODC's involvement in the VEP emulates UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's stance towards gender-based violence. In 2008, the Secretary-General launched a global campaign calling on Member States, the United Nations family, civil society and individuals to "focus on the concrete actions that all of us can and must take to eliminate the scourge of violence against women and girls." This consolidated approach towards eradicating violence against women is reflected in South Africa through the VEP by bringing together players in the Government and Civil Society. Through extensive consultation with the Government of South Africa, the project aims to:

- **Build institutional capacity within the South African Department of Social Development (DSD)**, at both national and provincial levels to lead, expand and sustain the VEP in South Africa;
- Improve **coordination and cooperation between Government departments and civil society organisations (CSOs)** to harmonise services to victims of crime. With the understanding that Victim Empowerment is a cross-cutting theme covering many Government departments on a national and provincial level, the project aims to assist in implementing mechanisms and practices in order to strengthen coordination and cooperation amongst all relevant victim empowerment role players;
- **Promote awareness of South Africa's Victim Empowerment policies.** A critical component of the VEP is sustained advocacy at both the political level and amongst the public at large. This will provide necessary political support, and develop public awareness of the rights of victims of crime, the assistance and services available to victims, and how to access these services; and
- **Build capacity amongst CSOs** to deliver Victim Empowerment interventions. As part of the programme, UNODC will work with CSOs dealing with victims of crime, trauma and violence. As established and emerging organisations play a major role in delivering services to victims, the project's contribution will ensure assistance from both a technical advisory and funding perspective through the provision of grants.

Assistance and shelters

While a tremendous deal has been done by the Government and civil society, there is a lot of work still to be done. As is well documented, women and child abuse in South Africa is a daily occurrence. Exacerbating the urgency to act in an expedient manner is the knowledge that in spite of the increased instances of violence reported, a large percentage remains undetected and hidden.

To tackle these challenges, UNODC Southern Africa, in addition to supporting the Government's VEP, has pioneered several projects aimed at curbing and eradicating violence and victimisation.

In 2008, in collaboration with international experts - including experts from South Africa's National Prosecuting Authority - UNODC published the first International Handbook for Effective Police Responses to Violence against Women. This Handbook aims to support the law enforcement officials with information that will enable them to recognise and identify key elements in defining violence against women, essential both in prevention of violence and in their role in cases of violence reported by women.

Furthermore, through the agency's partnership with the Department of Social Development, UNODC has devised an approach which brings together all Government services working in the victim empowerment sector under a single roof into One-Stop Centres for victims of gender-based violence. These centres have been established with the belief that victims should have access to judicial and other mechanisms to seek remedy for the harm they have suffered and obtain prompt redress. Additionally, victims should have access to specialised assistance in dealing with any emotional trauma and other problems caused by their victimisation. Situated in the most vulnerable areas, the centres offer a range of services including legal advice, counselling, medical attention, referral support to the survivors of violence, and rehabilitation services such as counselling and support groups for male perpetrators and potential perpetrators in order to break the cycle of violence.

In line with this, UNODC Southern Africa has worked with the Department of Social Development in building centres in Mpumalanga, the Eastern Cape, the Northern Cape, and the Western Cape. Aimed at initiating local-level changes within communities, the centres are proving critical in the fight against gender-based violence. Two additional centres are in the process of being established in the Gauteng and the North-West provinces, with additional projects planned for the Eastern Cape, Kwa-Zulu Natal, Limpopo and the Free State.

UNODC and the wider UN family is committed to ensuring victims of crime receive the necessary support. In his speech on the 2008 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Secretary-General noted that "...human rights violations do more than harm individuals; they undermine the development, peace and security of entire societies." With this in mind, UNODC remains steadfast in its assistance towards strengthening the Government's VEP and ensuring that victimisation and gender-based violence in South Africa is eradicated.

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