

Employing Strategies to Combat Violence Against Women

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INTRODUCTION

Mankind's predisposition to violent behaviour is legendary, and for as long as men and women have inhabited the universe anger, frustration and annoyance with each other have had their sequel in assaults, woundings and death.

Under Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights; they are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood". This, it is submitted, includes respect for all persons regardless of gender. The pervasive problem of violence in all of its hideous forms perpetrated against women in every age group is a flagrant violation of this fundamental human right and has been breached with impunity continuously.

In every corner of the earth, in developed, developing and under-developed countries women are the victims of violence in domestic situations, at places of work or in the streets of cities and villages where they live or dwell. In most cases these acts of violence are largely unreported and undetected for a variety of reasons - embarrassment, protection of the family name, threat of financial deprivation, frustration, feelings of resignation, lack of choices, and in some cases the conviction that marital vows or conjugal duties include occasional corporal punishment from their spouses or mates. The violence encompasses not only physical abuse, but also mental anguish with the resulting psychological scars. Women who are the victims of such abuse are usually maimed for life, and very few ever have the desire or the financial means to seek therapy or sever ties with their abusers; they are trapped with no way out.

INCIDENCE OF VIOLENCE

The range of anti-social behaviour giving rise to violence within families extends from battery, sexual assaults including incest, acid-throwing, wounding, dowry disputes in some societies to harassment and abuse of the very young and the elderly.

The problem is widespread and its incidence not readily susceptible to precise assessment because of its inherent private nature. For this reason it is very often not reported to law-enforcement authorities, and is seldom the subject of criminal prosecution. An allied reason is, of course, that victims perceive it as a private matter, and are deterred by the consequential embarrassment and social ostracism. This attitude is probably more prevalent among the affluent than among low-income families who tend to be more open and less sensitive about publicity. However, even in this group there is reluctance to take action against the offender out of a sense of blind loyalty and feelings of guilt and betrayal.

Aged relatives nurture the additional fear of homelessness or destitution being often financially dependent on the perpetrator of the violence. Domestic violence (a

synonym for family violence) is pervasive embracing all classes of men and women and crossing all barriers of age, income, race, and culture. It is the most prevalent of all crimes in many societies, and its incidence varies according to the prevailing social and economic conditions in or cultural heritage of a particular community. Researchers have advanced the theory that low and moderate income families housed in cramped and over-crowded conditions are more prone to violent behaviour than families living in more spacious and well appointed accommodation the reason being that economic hardship and financial deprivation impose strains on the conjugal relationship. Release from these pressures is achieved by striking out at those closest and on whom one acts out all of the frustrations of daily living. However, this theory does not explain the reason for violent behaviour in families with high incomes and the absence of violence within some poor families.

Extra-marital relationships, financial neglect or extravagance, habitual drunkenness, inordinate sexual demands all take their toll on the emotions of partners in a relationship. This type of abuse is very often more serious than physical abuse as it is constant and unrelenting, the only relief in some cases being a cessation of the relationship. Unlike physical abuse, which is directed invariably at women and children, all family members are prime targets for mental and emotional abuse the scars of which remain throughout their lives. Children are particularly vulnerable to this form of violence being in some instances regular spectators of scuffles and quarrels between parents or between parents and older siblings.

In several countries in Asia, in addition to the well-known incidence of violent domestic behaviour women are subjected to violence arising out of dowry disputes. If the dowry is considered inadequate by the family of the wife, the unfortunate bride may be subjected to physical abuse resulting in disability or death. These disputes have also led to an increasing number of suicides among young brides although it is felt that some murders have in fact been camouflaged as suicides.

CAUSES

Hopelessness and despair, being the constant bedfellows of the poor and needy, many find comfort and temporary respite from their problems in alcoholism. Research has shown that there is a close relationship between domestic violence and alcoholism. Invariably women and children are victims of all forms of abuse (including sexual assaults) committed while the offender is heavily intoxicated; the use of habit-forming drugs has had similar effects. Although alcohol and drugs separately or collectively may be the spark which ignites the flame of violence, they are not always the sole reason for it. Incidents of violence occur in families where neither alcohol

nor drugs are used, and there are households where drug users and alcoholics are not violent.

Another reason for domestic abuse can be found in deep-rooted traditions and out-dated beliefs held particularly by and about women who are the ones most frequently abused. In some communities customs and traditions as well as religion emphasise the subservience of women and children to the male of the household on whom is conferred omnipotence and omniscience with regard to all decisions affecting the

welfare of the family. He is entitled to administer corporal punishment to those under his charge as he sees fit, and any protest is perceived as a form of rebellion to be suppressed forthwith. The corollary of this is that the woman and children under his control believe implicitly in his infallibility, and regard it as their duty to endure stoically any physical punishment meted out to them. This attitude also manifests itself in cases of sexual abuse, particularly incest, which some children believe is a parental prerogative not to be questioned or divulged to any one even within the family.

In communities within the Caribbean region there is a myth which thankfully has been exploded that most women enjoy physical violence and regard it as an expression of male passion and ardour; if not administered periodically it is an indication of waning affection or the woman's diminished sexual appeal or attraction.

EFFECTS

The trauma of physical abuse particularly if it is frequent and severe can destroy the victim's self-esteem, self-confidence and faith in humanity itself. The victim is convinced that somehow he or she is to be blamed for the violent reactions of the perpetrator. This is particularly so in the case of female victims or children because they are conditioned to accept their role in the family as being subservient to the head of the household. The battered spouse or abused child feels that he or she must deserve that beating for some wrong committed. They cannot conceive that the offender would inflict corporal punishment on someone he or she loves unless that person had transgressed in some serious way. Self-confidence and self-esteem are replaced by self-pity, guilt and recrimination. In the case of a child or young person this burden of guilt and loss of self-worth is his/her constant companion throughout life, and stays on even when he/she becomes a spouse or parent.

In a strange way which only psychologists and psycho-analysts can explain a male victim seeks to recapture his self-confidence by asserting authority over those in his immediate household in the only way he knows and has been taught. He strikes out physically and abuses those around him giving credence to the theory held by some that the abused child whether male or female becomes the abusive parent or spouse. Violence becomes so entrenched in the psyche that it is regarded as normal behaviour. There is also another dimension to the effect of prolonged violence inflicted on female children. They carry into marriage or into any relationship the conviction that they are destined to be abused, and accept it as an inevitable part of their existence in the same way that their mothers before them did. Human nature is such that no one can come to positive conclusions about reactions; therefore theories about the effects of domestic violence will vary and proliferate depending on the viewpoint of various theoreticians expatiating on the subject. Some may argue that research and data are insufficient to support the conclusion of a “cycle of violence”. Be that as it may, it is accepted that family violence if perpetrated over a period of time could cause irreparable psychological damage to the victim in some form or other, and should be discouraged as soon as it rears its ugly head.

INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIES

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women adopted by the General Assembly in 1979 did not specifically address the problem of violence as it affects women. Over the years this gave rise to grave concern among the members of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which is a group of twenty-three (23) experts elected to serve for a period of four years and whose mandate is to monitor compliance with the Articles of the Convention by states who have ratified it. Such states are obligated to submit a report to the Committee every four years indicating measures taken to eliminate discrimination against women. I had the distinction of serving as Rapporteur and Chairperson of CEDAW over a period of twelve years. At this juncture I shall digress to note that all member countries of CARICOM have ratified or acceded to the Convention, and have complied with the treaty obligations of submitting initial and periodic reports. I am informed that Trinidad and Tobago will soon be preparing its combined fourth and fifth reports.

I wish to state further that in 2000 an optional protocol to the Convention was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, and all countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are urged to ratify the Optional Protocol which provides a mechanism for individual women to approach the Committee with complaints as distinct from a state party with whom the committee has dialogue. This is not the forum to expand on this Protocol, but I wish to inform you that UNIFEM based in Barbados has undertaken a project involving myself and Professor Jocelyn Massiah, former Head of UNIFEM with the mandate to travel to CARICOM member states in order to persuade governments to ratify the Protocol. The Ministry of Gender Affairs will be informed of this later.

My apologies for the digression. I shall now return to the substantive topic of violence.

The concerns of the Committee about the pervasive scourge of violence after an examination of reports of states parties from all geographical regions over a period of ten years was manifested in the adoption of two recommendations, first, General Recommendation No. 12 adopted at its eighth session in 1989 and General Recommendation No. 19 adopted at its eleventh session in 1992. The Committee was of the view that “not all the reports of states parties adequately reflected the close connection between discrimination against women, gender-based violence, and violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms”, and after a detailed commentary on specific articles a multi-faceted recommendation was adopted in 1992 which, inter alia, urges states parties to report on all forms of gender-based violence including in such reports all available data on the incidence of each form of violence and its effects on women who are victims. The Committee also recommended that states parties ensure that laws against family violence and abuse, rape and other sexual assaults give adequate protection to all women, and respect their integrity and dignity. The Recommendation further urges states parties in their reports to identify the nature and extent of attitudes, customs and practices that perpetuate violence against women, and measures taken to overcome these attitudes and practices.

NATIONAL STRATEGIES

(a) LEGAL APPROACHES

As strange as it may seem, some legal systems did and still do, give husbands the right to chastise their wives; forced and excessive sexual acts were and are still not always regarded as rape; in fact the thinking that informs this right is that upon marriage a wife impliedly gives her consent to any form of deviant sexual behaviour. In many systems the courts also enforce a husband's right to redress against anyone who commits adultery with or seduces his wife on the ground that he is defending his honour, and if he chastised his wife he was never punished or the sentence meted out to him was invariably light.

The sum total of all of this was the inferior position women held in these societies, and the proprietary rights which men enjoyed over them. Sad to say these attitudes still persist in many societies today. Violence within the confines of the home is generally regarded as a family matter to be settled privately, and not to be aired publicly in courts of law. Law enforcement officials intervene with undisguised reluctance when an abused wife makes a report against her husband at local police stations, and she is very often dissuaded from instituting proceedings. However, the justification for this reluctance is always reinforced when a frightened and enslaved wife with few options pleads with the court not to imprison her husband or is too terrified to testify against him which results in the charges being dropped.

With this in mind one wonders whether acts of violence against women particularly in the home should be classified as criminal offences in the legal systems of those countries which so classify them. Those who seek to decriminalise such violence suggest mediation and conciliation as a means of dispute resolution with therapeutic treatment and counselling for both abuser and abused. Fostering respect and tolerance of another's point of view, and encouraging self-esteem have also been advanced as alternatives to criminal classification of domestic violence. Very rarely before or after trials are abusers or the abused encouraged by court officials to engage in counselling or mediation sessions. The cases are dealt with in a cold and impersonal manner, and treated as any ordinary criminal matter. The system is regarded as punitive rather than rehabilitative, and the punishment more often than not has a devastating effect on the female victim physically, psychologically and financially if a term of imprisonment or fine is imposed.

On the other side of the coin are those who advocate a retention of criminal justice for abuse against women, and posit that this is the only effective means of combating its escalation. What is defective is the process by which the system is set in motion and its ultimate conclusion. Criminal justice is condemnatory of violence of all forms on all persons regardless of gender, but differences sometimes arise in the punishment meted out to the perpetrator depending on gender. Advocates insist that criminal justice for violence from arrest through prosecution to conviction and severe sentencing is the most effective mechanism for deterring further acts of violence. Of course, in preferring one system over another one ought to have regard to the historical, cultural and economic conditions of the particular society. A system found to

be effective in one society may have disastrous consequences if applied in another with different mores and traditions.

(b) LAW ENFORCEMENT

The role of the police in enforcing criminal justice for violence perpetrated against women cannot be ever overstated. In the United Nations report of 1989 on Violence Against Women in the Family it is quoted from “Domestic Violence and the Police: Studies in Detroit and Kansas City” by M. Wilt and R.K. Breedlove that one study revealed that police had been called at least once before in 85 percent of spousal abuse and homicide cases and in half of the cases where homicide ultimately occurred, the police had responded previously five times or more.

However, though effective in some instances in temporarily halting violent spousal attacks, many women display little confidence in police intervention. They sometimes feel pressured into pursuing cases when all they desire is a stern warning for their abusers, and when such cases do reach the courts they are badgered and humiliated by defending counsel or judicial functionaries which give rise to feelings of guilt and remorse at having initiated the charges, not to mention in some societies ostracism by relatives and friends for having aired “dirty linen” in public.

The humiliation often begins at the investigative stage by insensitive police officers who sometimes hold the view that the abused woman probably provoked the violent reaction of the abuser in some way or that there are insufficient grounds for intervention. The police need to be sensitised to the plight of abused women. They need to be educated to regard any form of violence against women particularly in a domestic situation as a crime like any form of violent assault committed by a man against another man, and not as a purely private and personal matter. The police in most countries are the only recourse which abused women have when battered and assaulted. They need to understand that the reluctance of abused women to press charges against their male abusers or to testify against them after charges are laid may be inspired by fear of recrimination, family pressure, inability to cope psychologically or financially, low self-esteem or just fear of the criminal justice system with its awe-inspiring court officials. They need to reorient their deep-seated thinking nurtured in traditional male dominance that men are entitled to inflict beatings on their womenfolk now and then to keep them in line and assert their authority.

Young inductees into the police force in most countries do not receive any training whatsoever in handling and investigating reports of violence committed against women whether in the home or as the result of sexual molestation, and so they are ill-equipped to render assistance when confronted with the problem. Consequently they tend to take the least difficult course by trivialising the reports, by not pursuing investigations or persuading the abused woman to return home and mend fences with her male abuser, or in the case of sexual assaults insinuate that she in some way encouraged the attack.

Against this background one should take a long hard look at legislation pertaining to the investigation, prosecution and sentencing of the perpetrators of violent crimes against women.

This was emphasised at the 1985 End of Decade World Conference; paragraph 288 of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women urged Governments to “intensify efforts to establish or strengthen forms of assistance to victims of (gender-specific) violence through the provision of shelters, support, legal and other services”.

It also urged them to “undertake to increase public awareness of violence against women as a societal problem, establish policies and legislative measures to ascertain its causes and prevent and eliminate such violence, in particular by suppressing degrading images and representations of women in society, and finally encourage the development of educational and re-educational measures for offenders”.

Apart from the provision of forms of assistance for victims of gender specific violence the above stressed the need for raising public consciousness and seeking to ascertain the causes of such violence with a view to preventing it as well as encouraging the rehabilitation of offenders of such violence.

(c) POWERS OF ARREST

Since the police are the first rung up the ladder of prosecuting offenders in the criminal justice system, one has to ascertain whether the legislative powers granted to them in investigating reports of gender-specific violence are adequate.

In most countries the police have statutory powers of arrest, but which may be circumscribed being utilised only if a breach of the peace is threatened or an actual offence has been committed since arrest involves deprivation of the liberty of a person which ought not to be embarked upon lightly. It has been advocated that the police be given wider powers of arrest in cases of domestic conflict based on the fact that arrest is the most effective remedy against a persistent pattern of abuse. It provides the woman with immediate relief from further assaults and brings home forcefully to the abuser the seriousness of his actions and that it will not be treated lightly. Of course, there is always the danger of misuse of this power, and a close watch must be kept to ensure that it is used responsibly.

(d) POWERS OF ENTRY

However, before an abuser in a domestic situation can be arrested by the police they have to enter the premises where the abuse is taking place, and this raises the issue of police powers of entry. In most countries these powers are limited based on the conception of a person’s home being his castle and private domain to be entered only upon invitation; any unlawful entry is a trespass and a crime not to be lightly encouraged.

In many jurisdictions the police are given powers of entry on to private property if a breach of the peace is being committed or if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that it is about to occur, but then only with the co-operation of members of the household who alerted them, or if armed with a warrant.

However, some countries like Australia have made it easier for the police to enter premises in cases of domestic violence by introducing legislation extending the powers of entry of the police to include situations where an officer has reason to believe that a person on those premises is or may be under threat or attack or has recently been under threat or attack or an attack on such a person is imminent and is not expressly forbidden entry by the occupier. (Crimes Act, 1900 NSW).

(e) TRAINING

It has been found that the police in most countries are ill-equipped to handle cases involving violence against women. As stated earlier in this presentation they regard it as a domestic and private matter to be treated lightly. It is therefore imperative that all law-enforcement officials be given special training in investigating gender-specific violence from report to prosecution. There is need for training in relation to attitudes displayed towards victims who invariably are in a state of trauma, shock or hysteria after an attack. Sympathy and understanding should underpin investigations particularly in the initial stages. The surroundings where reports and statements are taken should be relaxing and such as to inspire confidence. Some countries like Brazil have established special police stations staffed by female officers to receive reports from abused women; while this is commendable it is an example of segregation, and can be regarded as an indictment against male police officers who may sometimes be equally if not in some instances more sympathetic to the plight of battered women than female police officers.

It is suggested that training of all police officers in handling reports of gender-specific violence be made mandatory by statute and for all who are recruited into the police organisation regardless of gender. Accurate record keeping and data collection should also form part of the training process as well as satisfactory evidence collection and detailed recording of statements from victims.

(f) COURT SYSTEM

The courts are the final rung up the ladder of the criminal justice system in securing a conviction of a person charged with violence against another and found guilty of doing so; for female victims this can be the most intimidating. They face gruelling and sometimes embarrassing cross-examination by defence attorneys in austere and awe-inspiring surroundings before judges and magistrates dressed in funeral garb and who see themselves dispensing justice in strict accordance with the law.

Most women who are called upon to testify in court about abuses committed against them find this a traumatic experience, and leave with a strong

impression that they were on trial instead of the offender, and in some way was responsible for their plight. They also face the humiliation of recounting the sordid details of the attack in cases of rape or the terror experienced at the hands of their abuser in other cases of assault before a courtroom of curious onlookers savouring the unfolding of a salacious soap opera.

Some countries have enacted legislation permitting hearings of rape and other sexual offences in camera with only those directly involved being present. This in some measure tends to make the victim feel a bit more relaxed. Commendably here in Trinidad and Tobago a family court has been established which is user-friendly, and well-equipped to handle delicate family issues. I take this opportunity to commend most heartily those responsible for this court for what I understand is a pilot project, and I hope that similar courts will be established in other areas of the state in the near future. It is indeed an example which should be followed in the rest of the Caribbean.

I am informed that training for the Judiciary is also undertaken, as well as emphasis on counselling and rehabilitation for both abused and abuser.

This raises the issue of whether the judicial system is adequately staffed to deal with gender-sensitive matters which are heard in the court particularly in the criminal jurisdiction. Victims of rape and other sexual assaults can find the courts particularly daunting and frightening. Efforts are being made in some jurisdictions to make courts more user-friendly, and less intimidating. There is provision for holding trials in camera, i.e. with only the parties involved present, and where the victims are children, provision for having their testimony given by video in order to avoid the trauma of face to face contact with their abusers.

It is hoped that these facilities will become the norm in every court, financial resources permitting.

In most countries of the world there is some legal remedy available to women who are abused. It could be either civil or criminal or both, and is invariably a creature of statute. So far in this presentation mention has been made mainly of criminal justice, but relief from constant abuse can also be pursued in the civil jurisdiction of the court system. The options include suits for damages for assault and battery, injunctions and protection orders which prohibit the abuser from harassing or molesting the battered woman or even visiting the matrimonial home, separation orders and ultimately divorce for those in marital relationships.

Whether the remedies available to women caught in violent relationships are civil or criminal their effectiveness depends on the officials who enforce them, e.g. the police or the judiciary. Legislative strategies must be developed to ensure that women who are victims of violence can have their causes fully ventilated and their abusers brought to justice by law enforcement and judicial officials who are sensitive to their plight and regard the violence perpetrated against them as being serious and not trivial.

(g) REFUGES AND SHELTERS

Another strategy in combating violence against women is the provision of refuges and shelters for abused persons including children and the elderly. To a very large extent these refuges have been established solely for battered women and children. Although not a problem of great magnitude domestic violence is also directed at men. It is true that male victims caught in such situations have options often not available to female victims, e.g., terminating the relationship giving rise to the violence or removing from the household; they are invariably in a stronger financial position and better able to cope. Nevertheless there may be instances where a male victim could require help and support in a moment of crisis. Similarly, the elderly who are always at the mercy of those on whom they depend both financially and emotionally should have access to shelters and hot-line numbers when needed.

(h) EDUCATION

An important tool in the ongoing struggle to eradicate violence in the family is inculcating in both victim and offender mutual respect for each other, self-esteem, gender equality, peaceful conflict resolution and tolerance. These values should be incorporated in the educational curricula at all levels in the formal school system as well as in informal educational programmes. In this regard the media can be of immense assistance in emphasising the criminality of family violence and its long-term effects on the victim and minimising its triviality and privateness. Victims should be encouraged to speak openly about traumatic experiences and report any incident of violence which may occur.

(i) RESEARCH

If efforts undertaken to eradicate domestic violence at national and international levels are to succeed there is urgent need for research to be undertaken into the incidence and pattern of such violent behaviour in all countries and more particularly in those where such violence goes undetected and unobserved.

Comparative studies of domestic violence in developed and developing countries should be undertaken, and Commonwealth countries are urged to monitor their legislative and judicial responses to the problem. It is also important that statistical data be kept to ascertain the extent and effect of family violence. Experience has shown that in most countries statistical evidence is either inadequate or non-existent; only when the depth of the problem is known and verified can adequate remedies be taken to exorcise and destroy it.

JUDICIAL ACTIVISM

As stated earlier in the presentation the courts are the final resort which an abused woman has in seeking redress for physical attacks on her. The judiciary and magistracy as part of their inherent function are to administer justice according to

law. However, sometimes strict adherence and rigid application of the law may result in what some may regard as injustice. Theories have been advanced that in instances where the law permits a liberal interpretation as distinct from a rigid one, judges should be bold and strike out in this direction if it will result in fairness and correct an injustice.

I have discovered two cases in the Pacific Islands where judicial activism was at work in applying the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women to rape offences. It may not have had any direct bearing on the result of the cases, but they illustrate the use of this international treaty.

The first case is The State -v- Filipe Bechu (No. 79/94) from Fiji, where a defendant was charged with rape of a young woman, and appeared before a magistrate under the Penal Code of Fiji who found the defendant guilty on the basis that the complainant had not consented to intercourse since under the Penal Code consent forcibly obtained does not constitute consent, and it was not relevant that the complainant was his former girlfriend. The Court stated in support of its finding that women are men's equal and must not be discriminated against on the basis of gender, and it is the State's responsibility to ensure that all forms of discrimination against women are eliminated. Further, the role of the Court is to oversee this obligation in line with the Constitution which states that courts must have regard to the public international law applicable to the protection of the rights as set out in the fundamental rights provisions and made reference to CEDAW.

The other case, The Republic of Kiribati -v- Tieta Timiti & another (No. 43/97), also involved the offence of rape. The prosecution submitted during the hearing that the complainant did not consent to sexual intercourse, and her evidence should be believed as she was a credible witness and was corroborated by three witnesses. It was further submitted that the requirement for corroboration violated the rights of women under the Constitution which guarantees all citizens equal protection of the law and protection from discrimination, and even though it does not explicitly identify sex (meaning gender) as a ground of discrimination, it ought to be read into the legislation; further the Court should follow this interpretation as it is supported by the principles formulated in CEDAW and other international instruments that protect the rights of women. The Court found the defendants guilty.

Although the decision did not change the rule on corroboration, the introduction of CEDAW by the prosecution and the attempt to persuade the Court to apply it illustrates the willingness of lawyers to use international human rights treaties, and perhaps this should be encouraged in our part of the world. Maybe the time has come for recognition to be given in our courts to these international treaties which have been ratified by states. Guyana is the only state in this Region so far which has incorporated international treaties into its domestic law by an amendment to its Constitution in 2003, and which empowers the judiciary to give effect to them.

CONCLUSION

The time has arrived for countries of the world to take action to remove the scourge of violence against women in their communities. Although legislation itself will not solve this multi-faceted problem, it will provide a platform from which women can launch a comprehensive attack on this monster in our midst. Countries should be encouraged to enact legislation protecting all categories of women against all forms of violence outside of the regular laws governing assaults. They should also strive to ensure that the laws are enforced and are effective from investigation to sentence and from initiation of civil suits to compliance with court orders.

However, legal remedies alone are insufficient, and must go hand in hand with a change in attitudes to gender-specific violence. In this regard governments as well as non-governmental organisations must undertake training programmes in the formal and non-formal education system as well as with law-enforcement agencies to sensitise the young and the old, particularly males, that regardless of past attitudes and traditions women are not chattels or property capable of ownership, but human beings with needs and emotions who must be respected and treated as equal partners in this complex world or ours.