



ABORTION & REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION III

08-12 JULY 2018 - RHODES UNIVERSITY / GRAHAMSTOWN / SOUTH AFRICA

ADVOCACY LESSONS FROM ZIMBABWE

By Zama Khwela



Edinah Masiyiwa from the Woman's Action Group (WAG) in Zimbabwe shared WAG's lessons learned in Zimbabwe with delegates at the Abortion & Reproductive Justice 3: The Unfinished Revolution Conference.

Abortion is a taboo subject in Zimbabwe, rife with social stigma and influenced by legal aspects. The WAG began having discussions in 1993, when its advocacy on abortion began. Obtaining a legal abortion in Zimbabwe is possible in certain cases – such as rape, incest, or to preserve the health of the pregnant woman or fetus.

Masiyiwa stated, "When anti-abortionists argue that pregnancy termination is "killing", we remind them that this kind of "killing" is already allowed according to the law in Zimbabwe. In other words, since we do have allowances for legal abortion in certain cases, the anti-abortionists' argument is invalid, since the law okays this kind of "killing". If they want to argue against abortion, then the argument must be held for all circumstances including rape, incest, and the cases where a woman's life is in danger – which in itself is a type of "killing". That is one of the WAG's strongest arguments.

She continued, "The most fundamental anti-abortionists are usually the ones that have the option of pregnancy termination available to them. For instance, a large number of Christian anti-abortionists who believe that abortion is a sin, actually have the resources to travel across the border to access these services where the law allows. As a result of the law and the opposing and often contradictory views that exist, girls and women in less privileged situations have no other option but to have

backstreet abortions because of their lack of resources. This creates a segregation between those who have and those who do not.

Zimbabwe's laws on abortion are not well known by communities. We had a survey that was done by WAG, which showed that 69.9% of respondents thought abortion was illegal, while 22.9% thought it was legal."

Abortion is illegal in Zimbabwe and is only permissible in certain circumstances. Studies show that 20% of maternal deaths are due to abortions and they are mainly happening in young women under the age of 24. In recent years, calls have been made to decriminalise abortion due to its huge contribution to maternal mortality. However, abortion advocacy efforts by activists in Zimbabwe are often thwarted by various factors such as lack of political will by key influencers. Despite the shortcomings, conversations between CSOs and the government are ongoing and they are slowly making inroads. For example, the government was able to put up Post Abortion Care (PAC) services in government hospitals and train health personnel. Recently, government participated in an abortion incidences study by research institutions with a focus on assessing PAC services and severity of abortion-related morbidity and mortality. Findings will help women's rights organisations like WAG hold duty bearers to account and lobby government to increase access to PAC services among marginalised women.

Currently, CSOs are continuing with advocacy efforts through participating in the amendment of the Act to widen permissible circumstances to access legal abortion.

WHO HAS THE RIGHT?

By Shalen Gajadhar



BODY

POLITICS

A PRIMER ON CRIMINALIZATION OF SEXUALITY AND REPRODUCTION

The criminalisation of sexuality and reproductive decisions, for example, criminalisation of abortion, sex work, adolescent sexual activity, HIV and pregnancy, perpetuates power inequalities and gender stereotypes which directly and indirectly lead to thousands of maternal deaths every year. Unsafe abortions is the leading cause of maternal deaths around the world. In an emotional session on body politics run by Amnesty International presenters spoke of the indignity and shame particularly adolescent mothers are put through during the course of their pregnancy in countries where laws on sexuality or relating to sexual practises are restrictive.

The presentation was one of a number of parallel sessions held during a day of workshops at the Abortion and Reproductive Justice Conference being held in Grahamstown from 8-12 July 2018. The Conference is being co-sponsored by The Department of Social Development, Rhodes University, and the Sexual and Reproductive Justice Coalition.

South Africa is the only country in the region where women have the right to request an abortion. Elsewhere abortion is criminalised with narrow exceptions. In Malawi abortion is criminalised unless it is needed to save a woman's life. The reality is that unsafe abortions accounts for 16-20% of maternal deaths in the country. This translates to over 70 000 unsafe abortions being performed every year. 50% of complications due to unsafe abortions occur in women and girls under the age of 25.

"Girls are being forced by to seek abortion services from backdoor operations due to oppressive sexual and reproductive laws that prevent them from accessing healthcare services," said Louise Carmody from Amnesty International South Africa.

In her presentation Carmody stated that Amnesty International defines criminalization of sexuality and reproduction as 'The enforcement of

range of general criminal, civil, or religious laws in a manner that has discriminatory effect on particular sexual and reproductive behaviours, decisions, or gender expression and identities.'

The idea that vague laws are used to control sexual and/or reproductive actions is commonplace in many countries where arguments around morality (often linked to religion) are used to define acceptable parameters for societal behaviour. As an example Malawi's proposed HIV Bill indirectly criminalises HIV as it is considered to be linked to homosexuality in the country.

Another case presented by a delegate, illustrating the direct criminalisation of reproductive actions, is where an operation was carried out in Malawi where seventeen schoolgirls were found to be pregnant. The cases were reported to the Child Protection Society, where the learners were removed from school and the parents of the girls were fined.

Another delegate referred to her experience in India where the age of consent for sexual intercourse was increased to 18. "So any sexual encounter under the age of 18 is now considered criminal. If a girl under the age of 18 falls pregnant she cannot access abortion services. The boy would first be put in prison and the girl is put into a juvenile system. Even if this girl had to go to a government doctor this doctor would have to first inform police before they can treat the girl," she said.

The workshop proved to be an enriching discussion with lobbyists from around the world providing case studies with delegates in the room responding with ways in which interventions could be put in place.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN ABORTION ACTIVISM IN BENIN

By Ongeziwe Qinga



Stigma is one of the greatest challenges that prevents women from choosing abortion when they want to, conference delegates heard during the abortion conference currently underway at the Rhodes University, Makhanda.

Elvis Babatunde, a youth activist in Benin laid out what they do in Benin with the abortion stigma, their achievements and the lessons other countries can learn.

Babatunde revealed that in Benin, legal conditions to access comprehensive abortion care remain restrictive. However, abortion is allowed on the basis of protecting the pregnant woman's life and in the case of rape, incest, or in the case of severe foetal malformation. Therefore, in Benin's policy, the grounds on which abortion is permitted is mainly to save the life of the woman. "It is to be noted that this does not expressly allow abortions to be performed to save the life of the woman, but the general principles of the country's policy allow abortions to be performed for this reason on the grounds of necessity," he highlighted.

Babatunde the maternal death rate in Benin is 397 per 100,000 live births, and he said it was saddening to note that 15% of those maternal death rates were attributed to unsafe abortions.

"What then do in Benin is rapid consultation among young people on causes of stigma by having Youth Capacity building on how to talk about abortion in a non-stigmatizing way during communication, there

are awareness-raising campaigns (value clarification) for students and teachers on Abortion stigma, there is advocacy towards school authorities for the non-stigmatization of students who have received abortion services and / or contraception services and they use social media to chat about abortion related topics," he said.

He said in Benin abortion myths and stigma causes are now well known in the communities, the youth groups sensitize their peers on stigma and as such more youth know about abortion stigma.

He also highlighted that schools also played a crucial role by providing moral support to their students and commit not to discriminate girls who have had an abortion. He revealed that currently they were in the phase of the decree signature by the President of the Republic of Benin.

He concluded that young people have an increased need for comprehensive abortion services and that that best results were easily achievable when young volunteers are involved in the implementation of programs that concern them. He revealed that there was a recent case of an attempt to jail a health provider (for abortion), but thanks to public involvement and community activism he got out.

"Young volunteers have the ability to freely refer their peers for proper abortion care and that the stigma related to reproductive health services, abortion to be specific, remains a hot topic that deserves careful debate and that it should be addressed more in the community," he concluded.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN REPRODUCTION

By Ongeziwe Qinga



“The Church and Religion has failed millions of girls ...” This is the view of Hendrika Okunda, a consultant from Nairobi who facilitates dialogues between young women and faith leaders in that country. Brought in a catholic environment, Okunda highlighted the conservative nature of the church in refusing to speak about reproductive issues.

She said that religion has a fear-making dimension whereby the traditional set-up is a man on the pulpit, which is a model that needs to be re-thought. She highlighted that the reproductive justice language aligns with faith landscapes, but for religious leaders, they find it easier to understand the concept of justice only when it suits their religious agendas.

“We need to engage religion because in certain communities, vulnerable and marginalised girls only have access to health services from faith based organisations. Religion is problematic because in most cases, it stigmatises girls whilst in certain countries, it is the church that marries girls at young a age. Religious leaders have misconceptions on abortion and misinterpret bible in their own context,” she said.

The conference also highlighted that religion is shaped by patriarchy, as in so many faith communities, the male leader of the church decides on everything because there is a wide range of roles that faith leaders take which suppress female rights.

Okunde quoted 2 Samuel 13 as the first time sexual violation of women is mentioned, however, the biblical story of King David’s daughter, Tamar who got sexually assaulted by her brother and spoke out is often misinterpreted by religious leaders to suit their agenda. “Even in this day, young people from conservative family backgrounds struggle to talk about reproductive justice issues as it is considered taboo topic in the family,” she said.

It was agreed that sex education and contraceptive knowledge should be widely spread in religious spaces. Contraception is the cornerstone of the fight to reduce abortion. But in order to successfully move from abortion to contraception, people’s attitudes and behaviour must be changed. This requires massive training and education programmes. Therefore, churches must address reproductive justice issues.

Charlene Van de Walt, an old testament PhD Scholar, ordained and a pastor for five years in Makhanda, reiterated the importance of talking about reproduction in religion spaces, and said the church’s interpretation of the bible is one-dimensional. Van de Walt is now based in University of KwaZulu-Natal under religious studies of gender, health and theology. “The methodology of the bible interpretation is problematic on itself, and faith leaders fail to inform young people about their bodies,” she said.

SOUTH AFRICAN MEN SAY WOMEN HAVE NO RIGHT TO ABORT: STUDY

By Ongeziwe Qinga



Young men in South Africa believe that terminating a pregnancy is “cruel and murder that is punishable by God” even though they shift the responsibility of using contraceptives to the woman. This was revealed by Tshego Bessenaar from Mmoho, a campaign that advocates for comprehensive and accessible sexual and reproductive health services for young women and men.

Bessenaar presented the study conducted in three Provinces namely Limpopo, Gauteng and the Eastern Cape, on young men’s attitudes toward abortion.

Her presentation explored young men’s perceptions of their role in preventing teenage pregnancies, and taking responsibility for their and sexual partner’s sexual and reproductive health. It also explored the attitudes of young men between the ages of 18 and 20 years towards contraceptive use and to get a sense of how they view abortion.

It was shocking to hear their views that young men’s use of barrier methods prioritised prevention of HIV over the prevention of pregnancy.

In the survey conducted, the majority of the young men believe that

abortion is cruel and murder that is punishable by God, yet they say that it is the women’s responsibility to prevent unwanted pregnancy, but in the same stance, believe that women do not have the right to decide on having an abortion.

According to Bessenaar, there should not be an assumption that young people do not know that abortion is legal in South Africa. They know. “But their take on the issue has to do with the influence from what is happening in their own communities” she said.

“Hence the young men believe that it’s the responsibility of the young women to prevent pregnancy, and under that same breathe that it is up to them or their family to decide on whether she has an abortion or not, and this is a reflection on how society has constructed gender roles and who makes the decisions and who does not whilst there is very limited decision-making afforded to women within society,” she added.

In conclusion, Tshego said that in order to change young men’s thinking, there needs to be a continuation of engagement with young men to address gender roles, decision-making, and issues of autonomy up until it is normalized in society that women too have a voice.



abortion revolution

ABORTION & REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION III

08-12 JULY 2018 - RHODES UNIVERSITY/GRAHAMSTOWN/SOUTH AFRICA

Building a Caring Society. Together.

www.dsd.gov.za



social development

Department:
Social Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



ARJC in Pictures

The Department of Social Development in partnership with the Critical Studies in Sexualities and Reproduction Research Programme, Rhodes University, the Sexual and Reproductive Justice Coalition and the International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion are currently co-hosting an international conference titled: Abortion and Reproductive Justice: The Unfinished Revolution III from 8 – 12 July 2018 in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape.



ARJC in Pictures



ARJC in Pictures



ARJC in Pictures



ARJC in Pictures



ARJC in Pictures



ARJC in Pictures



ALBERTINA SISULU *Centenary* 2018



In 2018 South Africa will mark the centenary of the life of Albertina Sisulu, a fearless champion of democracy and human rights. The centenary celebrations will run for the entire year and will be marked by a series of commemorative events.

A Woman of Fortitude



#MaSisulu100



<https://www.gov.za/masisulu100>



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



THE YEAR OF NELSON MANDELA CENTENARY

B E T H E L E G A C Y



This year, South Africa will mark the centenary of the life of our nation's founding father Nelson Mandela under the theme: "Be the legacy". The celebration is a major milestone in the incredible story of Nelson Mandela and our nation's journey.

The centenary celebration will extend across the continent and the globe as the former President was one of the world's most revered statesmen. He was a central figure in the struggle for liberation from the unjust apartheid system to an inclusive democracy.

Nelson Mandela left an indelible mark on our society having laid the foundation for a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous society. His legacy lives on in our commitment to ensure a just and fair society for all, including the rights to dignity and freedom of expression.

To celebrate Madiba's life, we need to stay true to his ideals, including his unwavering commitment to justice, equality and a non-racial South Africa. All South Africans have a responsibility to promote freedom and defend our democracy in honour of Madiba's life-long commitment to these ideals.

During his inauguration on 10 May 1994, Madiba outlined his vision for South Africa. He said: "We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity — a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world."

The 100 year anniversary of his birth is an opportunity to recommit ourselves to his principles and building the nation we envisioned at the start of our democracy. The centenary will be marked with a year-long series of awareness, educational, celebratory and legacy commemoration events. It will build up to main centenary celebration on the 18 July 2018 which is former President Nelson Mandela's birthday.

Be the Legacy



#Mandela100

#BeTheLegacy



<https://www.gov.za/mandela100>