

Flushing patriarchy and GBV down the drain

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By Hosia Sithole

The discovery of the bodies of five women in Mthwalume on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast, two of them during Women's Month, is a microcosm of a disquieting picture of moral degeneration. It also highlights a persistence in the blood curdling acts of violence directed towards women.

Daily we hear stories of women subjected to the most atrocious experiences at the hands of their partners. This has especially been the case during the Covid-19 lockdown period in which women have been vulnerable to domestic violence perpetrated by their partners.

While there are many celebrations to honour women this month, the vast majority of women are hardly convinced that these will bring about any material change in their lives. The structure of patriarchy remains alive and intact.

Rape and acts of violence against women are weaponised by men to demonstrate the extent to which women are weak.

Through these acts, women are made to toe the line and to behave as docile victims that should accept their lot in society and even help put a lid on the expression of their aspirations.

This creates a sense of hopelessness that there is not much that is being done towards building a caring and nurturing society. It reinforces the idea that contrary to stemming the tide of women abuse, efforts are rather made to further exclude women from participating in any significant roles in society. So entrenched and normal is patriarchy that women have in the main resigned themselves to the belief that they cannot amount to anything.

Patriarchy regards men as not only superior and in charge but demands of the oppressed women to help uphold and perpetuate their assigned subservience.

For obvious reasons, this has been so damaging to the self-worth of women that their roles, which should form a basis on which they claim their place in society, have been rendered positively harmful.

Although women have taken it upon themselves to change this state of affairs, the pervasive issue of poverty that continues to assail them makes it extremely difficult to radically raise their voices.

This is because they have historically been excluded from economic activities and made to depend on their abusers for their livelihoods. Accordingly, economic exclusion today plays a central part towards entrenching the violation of women's rights.

Unless and until we concede that it is not only men who possess the intelligence and necessary skills required to participate in economic enterprises, the women of our country will forever be regarded as not equal or capable of taking charge of their own lives.

In line with this year's theme for the celebration of Women's Month: Generation Equality: "Realising Women's Rights for an Equal Future", the Department of Water and Sanitation is working to debunk the notion of men being superior to women. In this regard, the department is advancing the role of women and placing them at the forefront.

Meaningful strides have been made towards creating an enabling environment for women empowerment and gender equality. A number of programmes and workshops have been carried out to address gender disparities in the workplace within the department.

The Accelerated Development Programme has been initiated for middle managers with the intention of growing and nurturing a pool of potential managers from within the department. It has ensured that women managers are work-ready to be appointed to senior positions.

The Women in Water Awards was another vehicle through which the department recognised the good work and the vital role women have played in the water sector. The awards encouraged perseverance for women working in difficult conditions in the water sector, and also encouraged more women to venture into this male-dominated environment.

The DWS strives to further foster a culture of women development across the water and sanitation sector and to rip to pieces any semblance of patriarchy as the principal source of violence against women.

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