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## **Voices of Courage: Reclaiming Civic Space and Combating SGBV for Young Women**

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Gender-based violence was a debilitating challenge globally, with on average one out of three women experiencing some form of violence in her lifetime. Survivors of violence frequently battle not only with feelings of shame and guilt but also with denial. Convincing ourselves that everything is okay is a coping mechanism that helps us move forward, yet it signifies the silent struggle many survivors endure, Alina explained.

Gender-based violence is a pervasive problem throughout Africa. This fundamental violation of women's rights has devastating consequences for women and men, their families and the broader community. GBV increases women's vulnerability to reproductive health problems, negatively affects their general well-being and decreases their ability to freely participate in their families and communities.

GBV also hurts children, men and families by creating a culture of fear and mistrust that leads to a lack of intimacy and safety within familial and intimate relationships. Communities also feel the negative consequences of GBV, which is a drain on the strength and development of micro and macro-economic systems.

[Sextortion](#) is another form of GBV which is common in conflict affected countries, and in countries with high levels of corruption and poverty. In humanitarian contexts, sextortion can occur in relation to for example food distribution or border crossings. In some countries sextortion is also commonplace in the sphere of education, sometimes referred to as 'sex for grades', or in the workplace, where sex is extorted in return for gaining employment, for collecting your salary or for staying in employment. In some contexts where corruption is particularly high, women's rights organizations also report that women are subjected to sextortion when trying to access different types of state services.

Despite these challenges, women are stepping forward with resilience and creativity. Their leadership is evident in several domains:

- Women are organizing at the grassroots level to challenge the status quo. Initiatives like safe spaces, self-defense workshops, and peer support groups provide survivors of SGBV with tools to heal and reclaim their autonomy.
- Social media platforms have become a powerful tool for women to advocate for their rights and mobilize support. Campaigns like #Endgenderbasedviolence, #Sexualgenderbasedviolence, #MybodyMyChoice, and other regional hashtags have empowered survivors to share their stories, demand accountability, and push for systemic change.
- Women are influencing policy by engaging with local governments, lobbying for comprehensive SGBV laws, and demanding the enforcement of existing protections. Their voices are reshaping the narrative around gender equality in public discourse.

Recognizing that identities such as race, ethnicity, disability, and class intersect with gender, women are building inclusive movements that address multiple layers of oppression. Collaboration with allies, including men, civil society organizations, and international bodies, has strengthened the reach and impact of their initiatives. Many women are focusing on educating communities about SGBV and the importance of civic participation.

<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/news/address-gender-based-violence-we-need-creativity-collaboration-and-courage-1947701>

<https://medium.com/usaaid-2030/reclaiming-our-voices-23ecc5c9974d>

<https://africanplanningschools.org.za/images/downloads/handbooks-and-guides/UN-Habitat-Preventing-Gender-Based-Violence-Guide.pdf>

