

Has 16 days of activism against GBV lost its lustre?

Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change

South Africans' main concerns were issues of gender norms but violence against women was not the main theme of discussion in the analysis of social media engagements between 1 November to 10 December last year during the campaign, 16 days of activism against gender-based violence.

This is once of the surprising findings in two reports by the Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change (CABC) despite South Africans regarding gender-based violence as the most important women's-rights issue to address according to a 2022 [Afrobarometer](#) study.

Online engagement remained low and disengaged despite government and civil society's efforts during the 16-day campaign.

The online conversation during 25 November and 10 December received more than 270 000 mentions. Only 7 192 of these mentions (about 3.2%) were specifically related to the 16-day campaign. The top posts came from influential accounts who tweeted about topics such as girlfriend allowances, lobola, perspectives on women and abuse. These posts received more than 500 replies.

According to the report, content relating to 16 days of activism "failed to break into the top ten posts with the highest engagement from the dataset, suggesting a lack of significant engagement on Twitter/X".

When the online conversation was isolated, they found that posts receiving significant engagement were from government accounts commemorating the campaign online.

These posts were met with significant criticism accusing government of providing "recycled lip service" and using the campaign as an "annual political stunt" while the lives of women and children remained on the line.

Similar responses were recorded in posts replying to media outlets reporting on the 16 days of activism campaign and related events. These responses ranged from users who argued that the

issue began “at home” while others shared that gender-based violence had become normalised and “harsher punishment” was needed to stop the scourge.

<p>This is such a farce saying the same thing every year but not putting measures in place such as legislation, Specialised courts etc makes it all lip service. Get things done So tired of your talk</p>	<p>Is this a rhetorical Q asked as indirect assertion that GBVF can be deemed as self created problem with no active known, seen shielded and protected role players 🤔 is it a question asked in 2023 when statistics show who victims are and who are perpetrators? What is it exactly?</p>
<p>What have you achieved in the past year?! 😡 All crimes have increased!!! Don't pretend to care, your lack of action speaks for itself! We are all tired of your recycled lip service.. 😡</p>	<p>When asking where does the responsibility to end GBVF lies, why can't we start by asking who are the perpetrators in the event that we either don't know or we have conveniently 'forgotten " if such a Q is asked to kick off a well constructed conversation how is it victim cognizant?</p>
<p>Ah! Time for the annual political stunt!! Showtime folks!!! All totally meaningless while SAPS is defunded, education is fooked, unemployment, poverty, hunger and starvation rocket!!! You Sir, have NO SHAME!!</p>	<p>GVB is normalized in communities, We need schools and parents to educate the youth on GVB. And harsher punishment to stop the scourge. @SAPoliceService is under-resourced and lack ppl management skills.</p>
<p>16 days.. You read that right ladies. Your suffering is limited to 16 days... Not 365 days, just 16... imagine if we had a useful policing system, imagine if criminals were put in jail, then of course most of parliament would also be empty. The ANC cares for 16 days, vote better.</p>	<p>GBV must be addressed by all stakeholders, government, and people at large.</p>
	<p>It's a complex subject. It starts at home. We don't have enough cops trained to deal with gbv, safe houses for victims, therapists available for victims. There are many factors that need to be discussed and looked at. It's not a copy paste subject.</p>

Figure 1: Responses to government and media posts on the 16 days of activism campaign

In addition to critical commentary on government, there were low levels of engagement on campaigns run by organisations working on gender-based violence during the 16 days. Women for Change and Keep the Energy were exceptions, receiving relatively high engagement on their social media posts.

Women for Change ran an emotive campaign, along with the use of #mybiggestfear and #aminext during the period. These hashtags were part of the organisation’s campaign to highlight the daily fears faced by women.

Other online campaigns from organisations such as the Soul City Institute for Social Justice, Father A Nation, Sonke Gender Justice and Justice Deck Africa, for instance, received low levels of engagement online despite making commendable efforts to sustain the campaign.

Understanding the organisations

In the CABC’s author analysis [report](#), researchers unpacked the online engagement of 20 organisations working on issues of gender-based violence and misogyny across multiple platforms including Twitter/X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and LinkedIn.

These organisations, in addition to the aforementioned, include, Shukumisa, POWA (People Opposed to Women Abuse), Rape Crisis, TEARS, End GBVF Collective, Saartjie Baartman Centre, Heartlines, WMACA (Women and Men Against Child Abuse), Manned Up Conversations, Shared Value Africa Initiative, Childline, MenEngageAfrica/Alliance, Gender Links and Kwanele.

Women for Change accounted for 34.7%, Keep The Energy 19.2%, Soul City 8.4% while Sonke Gender Justice accounted for 6.8% of all followers. The remaining organisations held a proportional followership between 0% and 4% individually, representing the remaining 30.9% of followership data.

Women for Change also had the highest engagement percentage at 43.1%, followed by Keep The Energy at 26.3% and Kwanele at 12.8%. The rest of the organisations accounted for between 0% and 5% of the remaining 17.8% of the engagement data.

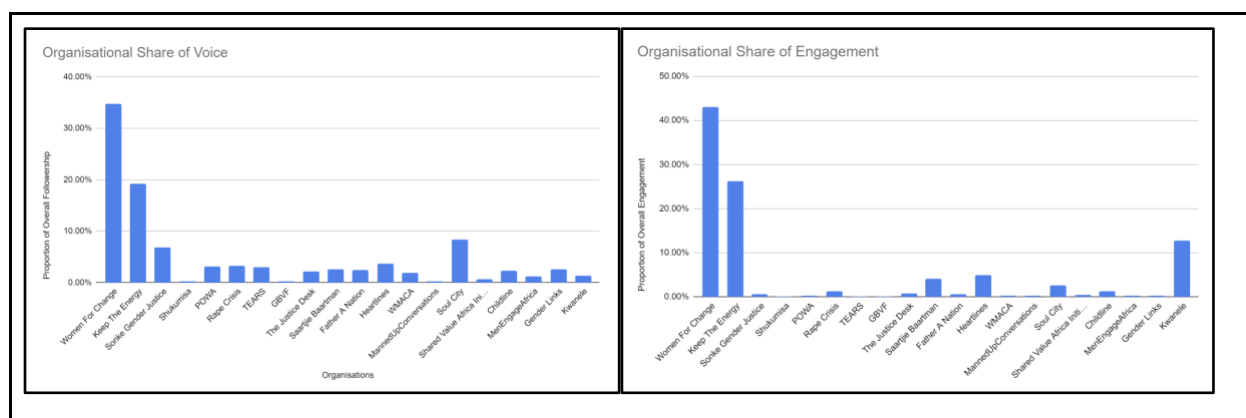


Figure 1: Accounts by followership (left) and share of engagement (right)

It is important to note that these measures are based on reactions to the organisations' online posts and by no means a reflection of each organisation's on-the-ground impact.

A different approach?

It is clear that social media engagement on the topic of gender-based violence plaguing South Africa was not as impactful as it could have been if social media was used more effectively; and if there was a coordinated effort between civil society and government for constructive public and social media discourses on this important issue.

Collaboration between sectors to end gender-based violence is a common theme, having also been highlighted by President Cyril Ramaphosa in the recent State of the Nation Address , when he called on South Africans to “intensify” its “collective efforts to bring gender-based violence and femicide to an end”.

Several reasons could be behind the low levels of online engagement on gender-based violence. These include:

- That GBV and news media fatigue appeared to be creeping in, following the growing trend of news avoidance;
- The 16 days of activism campaign appears to have lost its meaning on social media and no longer resonates with South Africans online; and
- Government and civil society campaigns need to do more to inspire action.

Deep introspection and a renewed energy is required to revive the campaign and inspire public interest in new ways of thinking that captivate the attention of especially young people. We cannot do more of the same and expect change to reverse the deplorable treatment of women in South Africa.

End...