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Adhoc Committee on Covid-19 (WCPP)
WESTERN CAPE PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENT
No 9 Wale Street
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Att: The Adhoc Committee on Covid19

The Covid 19 pandemic has hit South Africa and affected many people in the country, even those who were not susceptible to the outbreak have had to endure with the quarantine measures as placed by government. This has led to a massive increase in violence against women and children, poverty and food insecurity. In regards to food insecurity there have been many organizations and corporate partners which seek to diminish the overall scourge this virus has caused, the need far surpasses the support. But with each milestone we seek to alleviate the social and economic scale by which covid 19 has affected our communities and with the help of private sectors, government and other NPO's who have brought much needed relief to families and homes who have seen the most vulnerable groups negatively affected by this pandemic.

As an organization that strives for the betterment of women and children Ilitha Labantu had tasked itself with ensuring people have access to a daily meal when it became evident to what extent the issue of food security was. The issue of food security affects the most vulnerable and this falls in line with Ilitha labantu core mandate.

In 2006 Ilitha Labantu established its comprehensive food security programme as an expansion of the services already supplied by the organization. Food security as defined by the 1996 World Food Summit is a situation in which all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Ensuring people have access to adequate food is not only an organizational issue but also under Section 27 of the Constitution, asserts food security as a right in South Africa. The Constitution states that every citizen has the right to have access to sufficient food and water, and that “the state must by legislation and other measures, within its available resources, avail to progressive realization of the right to sufficient food”.

Ilitha Laban’s Comprehensive Food Security Programme and Food Distribution models strongly focus on strengthening community organization for social health and local economic development. Ilitha has created and implemented methodologies that promote a holistic community-driven approach to development by capacitating communities to become food secure through job creation initiatives, food support programmes and extended counselling and rehabilitation services for vulnerable women and children affected by domestic violence.

The objectives of Ilitha Labantu’s Comprehensive Food Security Programme include:

- Ensuring access to food for the poor and vulnerable members of our society
- Improve nutrition security of citizens
- Improve food production capacity of households
- Develop market channels for emerging farmers and communal gardens through bulk government procurement programmes of food and private sector markets
- Fostering partnerships with relevant stakeholders within the food supply chain
- Enhance safety nets and food emergency management systems

COVID 19 has swept through many areas and the Western Cape is a known hotspot, in terms of the reach we had hoped to ensure that we went further into the rural areas as we felt that they are in desperate need of assistance.

There were many calls made to the organization by other organizations throughout the province and we had to ensure that we can accommodate all of the people who had enlisted for help, but one has to recognize that assistance can only go so far. In the initial phase we had worked with Solidarity fund and the National Department of Social Development, we were then called upon by the National Department and Old Mutual. But being an internationally recognized UN ECOSOC organization, a call was made by UN Women to help women in the province deal with the effects of Domestic Violence, Femicide and Hunger. This too assisted the needs of many of the beneficiaries we had been able to assist and continue to assist as we have seen that child headed households and women who have escaped from a life of abuse have been at the forefront of this pandemic.

As an organization that has been in existence for more than 30 years I foot print is on the grassroots level where sometimes beneficiaries are overlooked and in most cases cannot receive the necessary assistance due to factors of red tape, buerocracy, ill health and many other factors. We as Ilitha labantu have developed sound working relationships through our networks of organisations, as the pandemic seeks to not only be focused on a issues of hunger but personal well being too. This vast network has allowed us to critically view the needs of the people and disseminate the needs appropriately. We thrive to be an all-inclusive organization but also understanding that each organization has their own expertise including those in the traditional and faith based sectors, which we can call on to ensure that the benefits received by people are used in manner that will ensure a positive growth in the community and address the needs of those most vulnerable. In such circumstances it is the backbone of Ilitha labantu vision and mission and through our slogan that we are people who care about people, regardless of race, religion, sexuality etc.

The Overberg

The Overberg district remains a place where agriculture; activities are dominant, mostly through the fruit and citrus farming and apples. But as it stands it is also rife with poverty and inequality, where the people have had to make their own means to survive.

The areas are rife with alcohol and drug abuse, and the lack of opportunities has caused an upscale in people turning to violent protests to have their fears alleviated.

Cape Wine lands

The cape wine lands district has extremely been hard hit by the covid 19 epidemic due to the fact that wines and wineries have had to close during this period and even those non seasonal workers have had no gains and permeate workers have had to be retrenched. The wine industry is the backbone of western cape agricultural GDP and without a proper source of income people in the area are doomed to have dismal opportunities.

Cape West Coast

Similar to the cape wine lands but the area also is susceptible to the arid forecast due to the fact that it forms part of the Karoo and thus it is dry arid area, with limited rainfall. The cape west coast also suffers tremendously from the alcohol and drug abuse, with 1 in 3 people addicted to substances and 1 in 2 addicted to alcohol. This is due to the history of the area and payment of labourers in alcohol, aka the dope system.

City of Cape Town

Throughout the years the Cape Town metro has been one of the highest municipalities to experience food insecurity according to the STATSSA general household survey. There is also a plethora of outside factors that contribute to the needs of communities but are barely addressed due to rampant violence, drug related crimes, major influx of the population and a shrinking job network. There is a sense that we have not scratched the surface in regards to alleviating the food crisis in the western cape as there many areas such Delft, Mitchells plain, eMfuleni etc. that have little and or no access to food relief due to the spike of violence aimed at the relievers but also have a majority of its citizens living beneath the poverty line and this needs to results in an expansion to these areas through positive engagement with both national provincial and local government

Covid-19 and Violence Against Women & Children / GBV

The emergence of the corona virus pandemic in South Africa has exacerbated pre-existing social disparities and inequities in South Africa, this meant that those living in poorer communities were more disproportionately affected than those living in affluent communities. Women in the rural areas and township communities were adversely effected as a result of their poor economic status they could not leave their partners and at the same time there was increased difficulty in accessing support services, the courts and even the police, abusers exploited the inability of women to call for help or escape this placed many survivors in a predicament and having to choose between two evils; the Covid-19 pandemic or endure continued abuse and torment at the hands of their oppressor. With this in mind Ilitha Labantu embarked on a public awareness campaign to help raise awareness about the coronavirus and the need for people to adhere to the lockdown regulation imposed by government as well as to practice social distancing and to maintain good health and hygiene during this period. The public awareness campaign which fundamentally focused on raising awareness about the emergence of the pandemic also recognized the need to focus on the issues gender based violence and particularly family violence and violence that is perpetrated against women and children.

In the South African context and especially in disadvantaged and poor communities there are many compounding issues that are further exacerbated by novel coronavirus such as poverty, crime and violence, lack of access to essential resources, joblessness, lack of adequate access to quality healthcare, persons living with chronic illnesses and poor health are pre-existing issues that are further exacerbated by the covid19 pandemic and lends themselves to increased levels of anxiety and stress of being under lockdown.

Ilitha Labantu's public awareness campaign visited various communities in the Cape Flats region namely Philippi, Nyanga, Gugulethu, Langa, Athlone/Bridgetown, Khayelitsha, Elsies River, Delft, Mfulenii and Mitchells Plein. The abovementioned areas of the Cape Flats notorious for having high levels of crime and violence and in conjunction to this are also notorious for having high incident rates of violence that is perpetrated on women and children.

Since the beginning of the lockdown period the organization has received over 30 child abuse related cases from these communities alone further highlighting the effects the lockdown has had on children and call for the need to further prioritize the protection of children during this period and beyond. Furthermore the lockdown has presented many challenges for women and children from disadvantaged communities whom are disempowered by their poor economic status resulting in them enduring abuse at the hands of their intimate partner whom they are dependent on for financial support. These issues highlighted above further legitimizes the organizations need to empower vulnerable members of the community who are at the helm of the destructive forces of violence and abuse.

Despite the challenges posed by the covid-19 pandemic the organization made its services readily available on all its online platforms including our website, our social media (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) so that survivors of abuse can access our services without the added risk of spreading Covid-19. The information provided ensured that our clients, survivors and the general public could contact the organization when they needed to access our services through the use of telephonic communication in which two numbers were provided with WhatsApp capabilities and also through our social media interface, these access points are efficient and cost effective for our clients.

Throughout this period Ilitha Labantu has been at the forefront of addressing cases of violence against women and children, most noticeable cases that Ilitha Labantu has been directly involved in were the Amahle Quku and Sibongiseni Gabada. 36 year old Sibongiseni Gabada from Khaylitsha had gone missing for weeks until her decomposing body was discovered stuffed in a bag on the 29th of May 2020. The case against her boyfriend who was in custody for allegedly being linked to her death has been dropped due to inconclusive evidence in spite of the fact that he confessed that he discovered her lifeless body and proceeded to put her body in bag and placed it behind his shack for no one to see until which it was discovered by neighbors 2 weeks later.

Ilitha Labantu took it upon itself to challenge the immoral decision taken by the South African justice system to drop the case in light of the seriousness of the crime that was committed, furthermore what was particularly worrying was the precedent that the actions taken by the justice system would set in the fight against the scourge of violence against women and children, this decision was premature and ill-informed considering that not all legal avenues were considered. Ilitha Labantu used all available platforms to help bring light to the injustice that had taken place, the organization approached media outlets about the incident and circulated a press statement which expresses the shock in the manner in which the case was handled, this press statement was published on major Independent Media newspapers (Cape Times, Cape Argus and local community newspapers Vukani and City Vision).

The organization then wrote a letter to the National Prosecuting Authority urging it to reconsider its decision and to look into the merits of the case into greater detail, this was then followed by an online petition titled **#JusticeForSibongiseni** which was shared on all social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram which helped to direct social media users to the Change.org website provided in the link, to this date the petition has received over 21 762 signatures.

It is important to note that during this particular period there were two other significant incidents that took place in South Africa, one involving the murder of 29-year-old Tshegofatso Pule was eight months pregnant when she was murdered and the other involving 25-year-old Naledi Phangindawo from Mossel Bay in the Western Cape. The three tiers that connects all of these incidents or cases is that they were all young women, they are black and they were murdered by their intimate partners or someone they knew. The Sibongiseni Gabada case brought attention to the manner in which many cases of violence against women and children were treated by the justice system brought about increased pressure to politicians and National Prosecuting Authority, this led to an interview with the Police Minister Bheki Cele on eNCA featuring Ilitha Labantu's Executive Director Mrs Ella Mangisa highlighting the inconsistencies that the organization had encountered in the mistreatment of cases citing the lack of adequate training

by police and investigating officers as a fundamental concern which often results in cases being dropped.

In less than a week after President Ramaphosa made his announcement denouncing the brutal killing of women and children in South Africa the body of 17 year old Amahle Quku was discovered at Siyahlala informal settlement in Browns Farm Philippi. A 25 year old man was arrested in connection with her murder the suspect is also known to the victim, this also correlates with the 3 tiers found in the other cases that the victim is black woman, young and the suspect is known to the victim. Ilitha Labantu also took the lead in this case making number of appearances in court to support the family and friends of the deceased, to help raise awareness about the plight of women and children and to apply the much needed pressure on the justice system so that the case can be properly managed and to ensure that the suspect receives a lengthy sentence for the crime that he has committed.

We do hope that our submission will bring about the required input from a Civil Society organization perspective and hope the that the Adhoc Committee will see how NPO's are critical partners for government as no one can do it alone particularly during a time of such uncertainties.

Sincerely

Ella Mangisa

Director of Ilitha Labantu

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