

Special Feature: 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children

*My friend trafficked me so that she can pay her
university fees*

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The publication of this featured story on Dialogue Online is inspired by the Campaign 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children commencing the 25th of November 2015. It falls under SALO's Agenda 2030 Development Dialogue Series on Goal 16: Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies and access to justice for sustainable development and our work on gender and migration between and within countries. SALO promotes the voices of women, youth, people with disabilities and migrants to engage with policy making at national and global level. The intersectionality of issues within marginalized groupings that lead to acute vulnerabilities are often overlooked in the mainstream developmental discourses. In 2015 Syria's crisis forced global onlookers to relook at migration in the world and forge a conversation on the nexus between migration, peace and development. On the African continent, it highlighted the much ignored aspect of intra-African migration, in addition to the phenomenon of internal migration. Stories on the forms of intra-African migration like those of Grizelda Grootboom¹ need to be shared to form a basis to address the plight of women and children on the African continent. Grizelda's story first made it into popular media in 2014.²

¹ Photographs were provided by Grizelda Grootboom

² See Grizelda Grootboom's interview on News 24: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkgAJh1zNP8>

She laid there naked against her will. Her hands and feet were tied. Her eyes were taped shut so that she could not see who would enter the dark room she was in.

For two weeks this was how Grizelda Grootboom lived. Men would come in and out to rape her.

To make sure she didn't fight back, Grootboom was starved and drugged the entire time.

At 18, her dream of leaving Cape Town to make a new start in Johannesburg was shattered when she became a victim of human trafficking.

From a tough childhood to being molested

Grootboom describes her upbringing as happy.

But by the age of nine, her mother had abandoned her, forcing her to live with her extended family in Woodstock, Cape Town.

Wanting to be with her mother, the young Grootboom went looking for her in Khayalitsha, but when she found her, she was turned away.

“She was upset that I had come to ruin the new white-picket-fence family she had made.”

Thrown out onto the streets, a gang of boys found her and molested her. They also raped her. With nowhere to go, she ended up at an orphanage. But at 18, she was kicked out for being too old.



A friend who promised her a new life in Joburg sells her into sex slavery

One of her close friends at the time, who she would not name, had recently moved to Yeoville, Johannesburg, and agreed to offer her a place to stay.

With the little money that she made from begging, she bought a train ticket to Johannesburg with high hopes of starting a new life.

Or so she thought.

She arrived at her friend's apartment, whose home was empty and dark.

"Where is everything?" she asked. Her friend reassured her that it would look better once it was filled and decorated.

Shortly after, three men came in, ripped her clothes off and taped her hands and feet together. Confused and derailed, she looked at them wondering what was happening.

"Didn't your friend tell you what was going to happen?" they asked.

When they began raping her, her friend had already left the apartment, with the cash she had made by trading Grootboom to pay for her university fees.

For two weeks she was drugged up and raped

Grootboom was constantly injected with crystal meth and other drugs. But even that could not take her mind off of what was being done to her.

She soon adapted a method of holding her breathe to the point where she would faint.

For those weeks, all she smelt was the semen that covered her body.

But once her handlers found a new, younger girl, she was kicked out.

"I had nowhere to go, I could not go to the police because they would think I was just another druggie on the street," she said.

She became an addict. And soon her body needed her next fix.

Her life got embroiled into prostitution, with a truck driver at park station being her first customer.

In order to make more money and have a bed to sleep in, she began working for pimps.

Her turning point

She was in her late 20s when she fell pregnant.

"No babies," said her last pimp and it was then she was forced to abort the foetus growing in her.

The following week she became so sick that she could not work that night.

"They beat me up and threw me outside of a tavern when I was unconscious," she said.



After a month, she woke up in a hospital in Johannesburg. This is when she decided she needed to change.

It was a tough but she says she did it one step at a time.

Her transformation started when she began attending church and started speaking out about her experience.

“What keeps me going now is my seven-year-old son and just being in the presence of God,” she said.

Grootboom now works for a non-profit organization called [Embrace Dignity](#), which helps victims of human trafficking.

Human trafficking statistics in SA

Human trafficking in South Africa is often regarded as a transnational crime.

“Children don’t know what it is and adults think it is something that just happens in the movies,” says Grootboom. “But it can happen in your very own neighbourhood.”

Diane Wilkinson, a coordinator at National Freedom Network, which is an organisation that addresses human trafficking says that anyone is vulnerable to trafficking.

Anti-trafficking campaigners and NGOs have claimed that 30 000 victims have been trafficked in South Africa.

But according to [Africa Check](#), a NPO that looks into the accuracy of information across Africa, the statistics are elusive as the methodologies used have been widely criticised as flawed.

Progress in the fight against human trafficking

In August 2015, the Human Trafficking Act had finally been implemented since its first draft in 2013.

The enactment entails that offenders can carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment, a R100 million fine or both in the case of the conviction. Victims can also now claim compensation.

Also, debt bondage, possessing, tampering with travel documents and using the services of victims of trafficking are seen as offences under the new act.

Wilkinson hopes that with the act in place, statistics can be more precise.

Both Grootboom and Wilkinson say that awareness is the key to eliminate human trafficking.

“The more people who know about it, the more matters can be correctly identified, reported and investigated, the more victims rescued etc,” says Wilkinson.



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