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Lets Chat!

The Sixteen Days Cyber Dialogues go global

Sixteen days of peace special edition 2004



Speaking Out ...

and being heard

SADC 2005 deadline looms

amalungelo

A bi-monthly Gender Justice Barometer for Southern Africa • Volume 8

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Editorial

A few days before the start of the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence a cynical friend asked: "What is the point? When it's all over your red and white ribbons will be discarded and everyone will forget … after all old habits die hard." She was right about one thing, old habits do die hard.

But if truth be told, the Sixteen Days Campaign is about much more than "changing habits." The campaign has as its purpose something much more difficult - changing attitudes and mindsets.

It is not after all habit that makes a man douse his female partner in petrol and threaten to set her alight because he feels she does not "respect him". It is not habit that results in the rape of two young girls on their way home from school – who then have to travel kilometers on foot with their parents to report the incident to the police. It is not habit that has resulted in young women between the ages of 15-24 being 3.4 times more likely to be infected with HIV than their male counterparts. And it is certainly not habit that result in statistics like: "one in five women report sexual violence by an intimate partner, and "33 percent of girls report forced sexual initiation."

No. It's not about habit.

Gender violence is about unequal power relations. It is about the belief that women are 'less than' and therefore subordinate to men. It is about statements like "she must know whose master of this house," or "this woman doesn't know her place." It is about men feeling like the only power they have is derived from dominating women. It is about women feeling like they have no choices, deserve the treatment that they receive and internalise the messages they receive that say "you are lesser than."

Changing the attitudes and mindsets of a nation and in fact a world, does not happen overnight – we certainly can not assume that it happens over 16 days. But what does happen over the Sixteen Days is that ordinary men and women – outside of the women and development/ women in development / gender and development circles – are made more aware. They are made more aware of the manifestations of gender violence, its costs – to individuals, communities and nations, its causes, and the actions that can be taken to save lives.

For survivors of violence it reinforces the fact that they are not alone, that there is help and support, that they have voice. For men it offers opportunities and glimpses into alternative ways of being as it reinforces an expression of manhood that is non-violent and caring. For leaders and policy-makers the campaign holds them accountable to the promises they've made. It brings into the public space that which many are afraid or simply unable to name and speak about.

This reclamation of the public space by those affected by gender violence was a key feature of this years' campaign. Across the region, survivors of violence and rehabilitated perpetrators spoke out against gender violence, using public platforms to share their experiences in the hope that others would take courage and do the same. Speaking at the launch of a book produced during the Sixteen Days titled "The 'I' stories: speaking out on gender violence in Southern Africa, to which he contriubuted, rehabilitated perpetrator of violence, Thapelo Rahlongo from Alexandra township in South Africa said: "I am trying to be a man defined by my own standards. Change is always possible."

So how does one measure the impact and effect of the Sixteen Days Campaign? There are some obvious ways the number of



specialised services for survivors of violence; the kinds of laws that are being passed and reformed; the amount of money that governments allocate towards addressing gender violence.

But there are also more subtle, but equally important, measures – ordinary men and women speaking out about their experiences in the hope that others will take courage from them; gentler boy children and more confident girl children; men who deal with conflict non-violently, a society that supports survivors of violence and does not condemn them.

The work involved in creating these changes takes place every day – in families, communities, and nations. This work should be supported and recognised … 365 days a year.

Janine Moolman
Editor

Action alert

Make your voice count at Beijing +10



The cyber dialogues, invented by gender and media activists in Africa, are taking to the global arena with a daily newspaper and online discussions at the Beijing Plus Ten Review in New York from 28 February to 11 March. Brainchild of Gender Links which piloted daily Internet link ups between community groups across South Africa's nine provinces during the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence, the cyber dialogues drew the attention of UNIFEM Executive Director, Noelene Heyzer, during a visit to the country.

Gender Links and its East African partner the African Woman and Child Feature Service have formed a partnership with UNIFEM to run seven dialogues linked to a daily paper, GEM News, during the review. Partners from around the globe are joining the initiative that will have a strong African foundation. Partners on the continent include the Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network and GEMSA country chapters; FEMNET; Wildaf and ISIS. These groups will be facilitating access by women around the continent to the discussion that will take place at 8-10 am New York time on 2-4 March and 7-10 March. As in the case of the Sixteen Days, GEMSA will run a daily e-newsletter with brief highlights each day and information on how to join the chat.

For more information on how to get involved visit www.genderlinks.org.za or contact kubi@mweb.co.za

Add your voice – stop violence against women!

Amnesty International has launched a two-year campaign to Stop Violence Against Women and is seeking support from activists and donors. Financial support is required from individuals and institutions to support the objectives of the campaign. Specific goals include:

- **Protecting women in armed conflict and post-conflict situations:** The campaign will work towards exposing and ensuring punishment for the use of rape as a tool of war and will hold legally mandated peacekeeping missions around the world accountable for accountable for acts of sexual violence committed against civilian populations.
- **Ending discrimination against women:** Amnesty will press countries to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against women, starting with the United States which has yet to ratify the Agreement. Amnesty will identify 20 key US senators to lobby for the ratification of CEDAW.
- **Obtaining asylum for sexual victims of gender based violence:** The campaign will press the US government to provide asylum for women who are fleeing sexual oppression, domestic violence, honour killings, and similar crimes where the refugees' home countries tolerate such behaviour
- **Zero tolerance for domestic violence:** Amnesty will pressure the US and other countries to pass tough laws against domestic violence and to ensure that these laws are enforced.
- **Defending women's human rights defenders:** Amnesty will mobilise its global network to protect women activists and to work with all those who are engaged in the struggle for women's human rights within their borders.

(Find out more about the campaign by logging on to: www.women.amnestyusa.org)

Women's rights in Africa

The campaign petitioning for the ratification of the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa is still underway. To date 10 countries have ratified the Protocol which provides a framework for legislative reform to guarantee the rights of women. These are: Comoros, Djibouti, Lesotho, Libya, Namibia, Nigeria, Mauritius, Rwanda, Senegal, and South Africa. Thirteen countries need to ratifiy the Protocol before it enters into force.

Go to www.pambazuka.org to add your name to the petition. Alternatively, SMS the word 'petition' a space and your name to +27832933934.

Southern Africa media unites to promote diversity



Miriam Zimba from the Times of Zambia presents their newly developed gender and HIV policy

Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

By Colleen Lowe Morna

In an unprecedented show of solidarity, regional media organisations have formed an alliance to promote more balanced reporting on HIV/AIDS and gender as well as fight for press freedom in Southern Africa.

The Media Partners Consultation (MPC) that took place in Johannesburg from 2-3 February adopted a Media Action Plan (MAP) on HIV/AIDS and Gender spearheaded by the Southern African Editor's Forum (SAEF).

The meeting, which brought together over 30 representatives of media organisations and funders from around the region, also backed a proposal to engage with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on civil society participation in key meetings of the regional body, starting with the Heads of State Summit in Gaborone in August 2005.

In addition to SAEF, the steering committee that facilitated the two day consultation, which will now become an annual feature linked to the SAEF AGM, included the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Gender Links (GL) and the Gender and Media Southern African Network (GEMSA). The Netherlands Institute of Southern Africa (NIZA) and the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA) funded the gathering.

After an analysis and general discussion of the action plans of the different media partners, the forum debated a draft plan presented by SAEF on HIV/AIDS, gender and the media. This led to the adoption of a sector plan, with different agencies appointed to lead the five programme areas (policy, training, ethics, research and monitoring as well as resource mobilisation) under the overall coordination of SAEF.

Following a presentation of the Times of Zambia Gender and HIV/AIDS Policy case study, also shared at the Gender and Media Summit in September, the forum appointed GL and GEMSA as lead agencies for the policy programme area. Chair of the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) and SAEF Deputy Chair Joe Thloloe is the SAEF executive committee member responsible for this programme area.

During the two day meeting, GEMSA voiced its strong support for the SADC Civil Society Initiative, spearheaded by MISA, noting that 2005 is the deadline set by the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development for achieving 30 percent women in decision-making. It is also the 10th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. GEMSA plans to work with partners in convening a "gender accountability forum" at the Heads of State Summit in Gaborone.

Mirror on the media reflects improved gender violence coverage

By Susan Tolmay

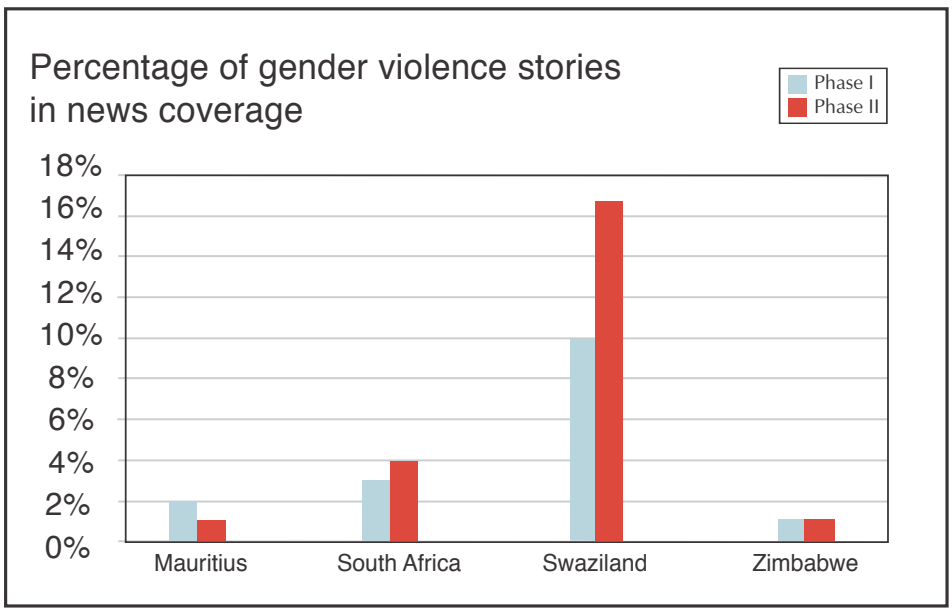
Preliminary findings on media coverage during the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence show an increase in both the quantity and quality of gender violence coverage, with some media houses demonstrating outstanding performance. The monitoring, conducted as part of Gender Links' Mirror on the Media project, took place in four countries in partnership with the Swaziland Media and Gender Watch (SMEGWA) Media Watch Organisation (MWO) in Mauritius, the Gender and Media Zimbabwe Network (GEMZi) and the South African Gender and Media Network (SAGEM).

The networks monitored the media for two weeks before the campaign and again for two weeks during the campaign.

Gender violence stories accounted for one to four percent of news coverage in three of the four countries. Swaziland led the way with 10 and 15 percent in the two phases respectively.

But in Zimbabwe the proportion of women sources increased from 33 to 43 percent during the two monitoring periods, and in Mauritius the Sixteen Day campaign served as a "wake-up call." In Swaziland the Times of Swaziland showed its commitment to creating awareness, educating and sensitising the public by addressing issues of gender violence and giving front and back page coverage to these issues. In South Africa coverage of gender violence constituted about a third of prime time news on SABC 3, with over half of those quoted being women. The full study will shortly be available on the GL website at www.genderlinks.org.za

Susan Tolmay is a programme officer at Gender Links. She can be reached at susan@genderlinks.org.za



G-Day is here!

At a day that must remain a secret in February (lest the media rush out to improve its performance on that day!) members of the Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network will join volunteers around the world in the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). The GMMP, first conducted before the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and again five years later, has become a barometer of how far the media has come in achieving gender balance and sensitivity in its coverage. The GMMP 1995 showed that on average women constitute 17 percent of news sources. This went up by a mere one percent in 2000. The big question is: how will the world's media perform in 2005? For Southern Africa, the GMMP is an opportunity to benchmark the region against the Gender and Media Baseline Study conducted by GL and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) in 2002. Watch this space for more news!

News briefs

Hope that AU meeting recognises HIV/AIDS as a development issue

Activists hope the next African Union summit will get commitments to boost government spending on public health and help curb the spread of AIDS, which killed 2.3 million Africans in 2004. "We are definitely optimistic that this time there will be some movement, that this time there will be not just talk about an HIV strategy for the AU but how to tackle an action-oriented plan," said Shehnilla Mohamed spokesperson for the British aid group Oxfam. "Governments are learning that fighting AIDS is not just a health issue but a development issue," she added. "Now they have to deliver on the existing protocols and develop a serious – and practical – strategy." With the exception of Mozambique, the rest of the 52 countries included in the African Union spend less than 10 percent of their annual revenues on health, anti-AIDS and anti-HIV efforts included.

Source: PlanetWire Media Summary, January 15-31.

Africa's universal primary education goals go back to the blackboard

A new report released by the South African Institute for International Affairs says that it will take Africa more than 100 years to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of Universal Primary Education, due by 2015. The report, titled "Back to the Blackboard" also recommends that attention be paid to improving the secondary education sector as "What will become of the millions of primary school graduates in 2016, or even 2151, if we do not plan for their secondary schooling, and what value will they add to development in their countries?" it asks. In Uganda, despite a seven-year universal primary education programme, less than half the 700,000 children who successfully completed primary school in 2003 were accommodated in secondary school. According to the UN's Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), only 25 million of the 90 million children in the secondary age group in Africa were in school.

Source: IRIN News, February 10, 2005.

Civil society protests against human rights violations in Zimbabwe

Amnesty International led a regional protest against human rights violations in Zimbabwe on International Human Rights Day, 10th December 2004. The demonstrations took place outside Zimbabwean Embassies and High Commissions in the SADC region. In Malawi the major human rights bodies, the Civil Liberties Committee and the Council of NGOs in Malawi sent a delegation to the Zimbabwean High Commission in Lilongwe where the Chair of the Malawi Human Rights Commission presented the open letter of protest to the Zimbabwe state. The largest demonstration took place in South Africa also outside the Zimbabwean High Commission. The event included speeches by Brian Kagoro from CRISIS Zimbabwe and Eleanor Sisulu from CRISIS South Africa and concluded with a candlelight ceremony, a moment of silence and a "prayer for democracy."

Source: CIVICUS E-Newsletter, No 235.

Stay away from locals, peacekeepers told

Responding to claims of widespread sexual abuse of women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has banned peacekeepers from the UN Mission in the DRC from fraternising with locals. A report released in January by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, found that peacekeepers in the DRC mission in the DRC had engaged in sexual exploitation of Congolese women and girls as young as 13. The UN has investigated 150 allegations, including gang rape, made against some 50 soldiers based in DRC's north-eastern town of Bunia. The multidisciplinary team of investigators led by Assistant Secretary-General Angle Kane has tightened a no-fraternisation rule and imposed a curfew for military contingents. Recreation and welfare opportunities are to be developed "to alleviate the concentrated stress present in field missions".

Source: AllAfrica.com, February 10, 2005.

Legislation not enough to curb child trafficking

While Gabon passed a law against trafficking and child exploitation in 2002, the first police roundup of child traffickers and their victims only took place on 24 January 2005 – nearly three years later. The authorities arrested 60 young people from Benin, Togo, Nigeria, Ghana and Niger, along with 20 of their suspected adult employers, who were all immigrants from West Africa themselves. Children's rights activists in Gabon have complained that the police and border officials are only too happy to turn a blind eye to child labourers being brought into the country, whether by canoe along the coast from Equatorial Guinea, or by air into the international airport of the capital Libreville. "As long as the traffickers are not punished, the children who are sent back home will continue to fall back into the trade," said Kristian Laubejerg, the resident representative of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Source: IRIN News, February 4, 2005.

Botswana men in uproar over the Abolition of Marital Power Act

By Kaebonye Ntsabane

Botswana has become the seventh country in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region to grant women equal rights in marriage.

Gaborone: The Abolition of Marital Powers Bill has been passed in Botswana amidst controversy over what many men perceive as a threat to their customs and traditional practices.

Men argued that the Amendment Bill, now an act of Parliament, goes against the Setswana culture as well as Christianity as it reduces the power that they have within their marriages. Since the parliamentary debates on the Bill started, many have misinterpreted it, seeing it as a threat, and arguing that the Bill would allow women to take control and power within their families – something they say is unacceptable in Setswana culture.

The purpose of the Act, however, is to abolish the common law rule in terms of which a man acquires the marital power over the person and the property of the woman he marries. Responding to the confusion and lack of understanding of the Bill, the Women's NGO Coalition organised a briefing for journalists in which panelists from the Attorney General's Chambers and Women's NGO Coalition explained the Bill.

Silibaziso Mtunzi of Emang Basadi, a lawyer by profession told journalists that Section 4 (1) (a) and (b) of the Act abolishes the common law position of husband as head of family or decision-maker in the home. Mtunzi explained that the Act also addresses the issue of domicile so that women, once married, will have say in where they live as opposed to the current situation of married women automatically living at their husband's home upon marriage without choice in the matter.

Prior to the amendments the common law upheld the husband as the head of the household, having final decision-making powers on the family matters. In terms of the common law a married woman had no *locus standi* or capacity to bring or answer legal proceedings without assistance of her husband.

This made it difficult for wives to bring actions against their husbands – for any reason. This power within the marriage had the effect of undermining the legal status of women as it gave the male spouse the unilateral power to take decisions in the home and control the family property. Upon marriage, women would lose their capacity to acquire a home of their own choice. Rather, they would have to live wherever their husbands decided.

Stella Moroka, a lawyer from the Attorney General's Chambers said that the public should embrace the Act rather than oppose it. She said the Act promoted communication within the family and that this would help in addressing issues that were not previously spoken about.

While the Act has caused much debate amongst ordinary Setswana with accusations of gender activists having "betrayed their culture" for promoting the amendments, it is an important step in the legislative reform process in Botswana. Reforming existing laws and passing new laws which prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sex are essential if gender equality is to have meaning for women in Botswana.



No break with tradition, say men in Botswana. Photo: CGIS

The Botswana Women's NGO Coalition has congratulated the Botswana government on passing the amendments and said that it represents a "step forward towards demolishing the discriminatory laws and which cause the suffering of women." Members of Parliament have used the opportunity provided by their Kgotla meetings to raise awareness and clear up misconceptions about the purpose of the Act.

Kaebonye Ntsabane works at the Botswana Women's NGO Coalition. She can be contacted at womens_ngo_coa@info.bw

From drinking in the stream to dining with the academy

By Juliana Omale

Before she became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, Wangari Muta Maathai had long established her own record for arriving first at the finishing line. She was the first woman in East and Central Africa to hold a doctorate and the first woman to head a university department in Kenya.

Nairobi: Kenyan Wangari Muta Maathai's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in November 2004 has thrown into focus the dynamic relationship between women and the environment. It underscores the fact that unless existing environmental resources are managed properly, community development and poverty eradication will remain elusive. Her work through the Green Belt Movement, spanning nearly three decades represents the struggle of rural women, men and children to sustain their livelihoods.

During her Nobel lecture Maathai shared a childhood memory of growing up in rural Kenya where she would visit a stream next to her home to fetch water for her mother:

"I would drink water straight from the stream. Playing among the arrowroot leaves I tried in vain to pick up the strands of frogs' eggs, believing they were beads. But every time I put my little fingers under them they would break. Later, I saw thousands of tadpoles: black, energetic and wriggling through the clear water against the background of the brown earth. This is the world I inherited from my parents. Today, over 50 years later, the stream has dried up, women walk long distances for water, which is not always clean, and children will never know what they have lost."

This idyllic memory puts into context Maathai's experiences in the last 28 years as the founder of the Green Belt Movement. The movement was inspired by her interactions with rural women through the National Council of Women of Kenya where she worked. It became clear to her that rural women's needs revolved around having firewood for their kitchens, getting clean drinking water and enough food for themselves and their families. From this realisation, it was not difficult to make the link between the deteriorating environment around them and a decline in their living standards. In many ways, the Green Belt Movement was a local response to a global problem.

Over the years Maathai's faith in the rural women of Kenya to promote their own empowerment has remained unshaken. Together, they are credited with planting over 30 million trees and she acknowledges them for being the cornerstone in the success of the Green Belt Movement. The movement is one of the world's most successful programmes combining community development with environmental protection. It has built the self-reliance and self-confidence of tens of thousands living in poverty by showing them that planting trees will make a difference in their struggle to improve their lives and those of future generations.

It is mainly women and young people who plant seedlings and distribute and care for the trees. Because it is inexpensive and replicable, the Green Belt Movement has proven to be an effective method for rural development, and has spread quickly to other countries in Africa. The movement has also attracted the attention and support of people and governments throughout the developed world.

The tree-planting serves as a springboard to address other interrelated issues such as food production, firewood, soil erosion and desertification that affect African rural farmers. Environmental education is also a priority in the Green Belt Movement. More than one million young people have been recruited to plant green belts around their schools and to care for the seedlings until they are self-sufficient.

An education process takes place when people join the Green Belt Movement. They become aware that planting trees or fighting to save forests from being cut down is part of a larger mission to create a society that respects democracy, decency, adherence to the rule of law, human rights, and the rights of women. Women also take on leadership roles, running nurseries, working with foresters, planning and implementing community-based projects for water, harvesting and food security. All of these experiences contribute to building confidence within them which gives them more power over the direction of their lives.

In Kenya, the area of forested land has declined to less than two percent. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) recommends a minimum of 10 percent for people to thrive in an environment that sustains them. Maathai's message to governments is that there must be commitment

to environmental protection backed by specific laws. This she says involves political will and public acceptance of environmental protection around the world as environmental management and protection is a global concern and responsibility.

She has consistently argued that a clean and healthy environment is a basic right and that this right cannot be achieved unless it is acknowledged and respected along with other rights by democratic government. However, this does not absolve citizens from their responsibilities to uphold these rights in order to support their livelihoods rather than competing over resources: "We cannot alleviate poverty unless we find a way to use our natural resources sustainably. When people are poor they will not think about the long-term consequences of their actions on a forest, a stream, a field or a species. Once that resource is degraded or lost, the poor will get that much poorer."

Many conflicts, past and present have been waged over dwindling land resources, forests, minerals, oil, water and seeds as they continue to be depleted through unsustainable use, poor management and exploitation. Maathai believes that her vision for protecting global and local environments is essential for achieving lasting peace: "It is critical that people around the world take action to reverse environmental degradation and its negative impacts on our lives and those of other species."

Maathai says she will continue working hard in the coming years and hopes to inspire others to join her in articulating issues of peace and the environment. She wants to establish the Wangari Maathai Foundation through which she believes she will be able to empower a larger constituency to encourage people to deepen their commitment to democracy and peaceful co-existence. "I am fulfilling the mandate of the Nobel Committee when they recognised that my work was contributing to peace. We still have a lot to do. We know that the little we are doing is making positive change. If we can multiply that several million times, we can change the world – definitely."

Juliana Omale is the Editorial Director at the African Woman and Child Feature Service in Kenya, Nairobi. She can be contacted through jomale@awcfs.org

She has consistently argued that a clean and healthy environment is a basic right

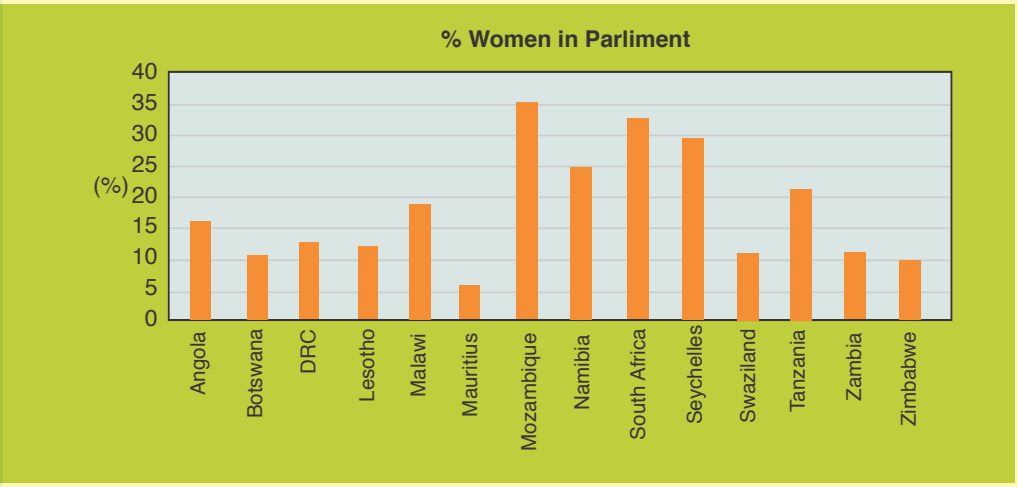


Nobel peace prize winner, Wangari Muta Maathai. *Photo: AWC*

SADC target may be missed

In September 1997 Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) signed a Declaration on Gender and Development that included a commitment to achieving at least thirty percent women in decision-making by 2005. There are ten months left to the end of 2005. The Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network and activists around the region are gearing up to mount an accountability forum at the SADC Heads of State summit in Gaborone in August this year. How are things looking?

Gender and governance barometer



Taking representation of women in parliament as one core indicator, the answer to the question of how governments are faring in delivering on the thirty percent quota is: "not too good." As at February 2005, the average representation of women in parliament stood at 19.2 percent, well short of the thirty percent mark. And, as the graph above shows, the variation between countries is enormous.

Mozambique leads the way, with 34 percent women in parliament following last year's elections. South Africa is close behind, with 32.8 percent women in parliament. Seychelles, no longer a SADC member, is third at 29 percent.

Namibia at 25 percent is fourth and failed to achieve the thirty percent target – which it stood a good chance of doing - in last year's elections.

Others that have missed the mark in recent elections and have no hope of making it since they have no more elections before D-day are Angola, Botswana (which slipped backwards in last year's elections from 18 to 11 percent), the DRC, Lesotho (except for local elections), Malawi and Swaziland (which made good but insufficient gains in recent elections) as well as Zambia.

Tanzania, at 22.7 percent, still has a hope in elections scheduled for later this year and may indeed cut the grade as the Constitution has been amended from a twenty to thirty percent quota for women in parliament. Zimbabwe, which has elections in March, could spring surprises as the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) has adopted a thirty percent quota for women in parliament and the candidate for vice president is a woman.

The other country with elections this year is Mauritius which, with 5.7 percent women in parliament, is SADC's worst performing country on this score even as it leads on most economic indicators. Can SADC's baby tiger pull off another kind of miracle in the October elections? Keep watching this space!

Mauritius: Tiny gains are not enough to tip the scales!

By Loga Virahsawmy

The front page of the 15 December 2004 edition of L'Express depicted an image that Mauritians are not accustomed to – female politicians outnumbering their male counterparts. The four women politicians surrounded by two male politicians gave the impression that woman parliamentarians are a force to contend with in Mauritius.

Before the morning of 15 December, the Mauritian parliament stood out for the fact that it had only one woman minister out of a 25-member cabinet. With the resignation of Sylvio Michel, Minister of Fisheries in November 2004, male politicians jockeyed for the position. But Prime Minister Paul Berenger cut short speculation by reshuffling the cabinet and appointing Lela Devi Dookun to the post of Minister of Arts and Culture, the first woman to hold this post.

Women's representation in cabinet has now increased by a whopping 50 percent from four to eight percent, but this is still far short of the 30 percent mark. In February Media Watch Organisation and Gender Links will run workshops in Mauritius on Gender, Elections and the Media with support from the Netherlands Institute of Southern Africa. The hope is that by raising media awareness, the government and political parties will be forced to take some drastic measures before elections in October 2005.

as 2005 deadline looms

Malawi: Commitment questioned

By Vincent Phiri

Blantyre: The Malawian Parliamentary Committee on Gender and Children's Affairs is planning a meeting to discuss the recent dismissal of three women principal secretaries which has cast doubt on the governments commitment to gender equality.

The three dismissed women are Bessie Kumangirana of the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services, Chrissie Muyeriwa of the Ministry of Statutory Corporation and Hanna Kawalewale of the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture. The Malawi government has alleged that they were dismissed on the grounds of incompetence.

A senior member of the parliamentary committee, also a member of parliament for Zomba Callister Chimombo maintained that there is inconsistency in the President's actions: "As a Committee we feel betrayed by the President (Bingu wa Mutharika) since soon after assuming the top position he assured the nation that his priority is to promote women's empowerment". He said he did not believe the allegations made.

Chairperson of the Non-governmental Organi- sation's Gender Coordinating Network, Emma Kaliya questioned the allegations of incompetence.

Commenting on the African Union target of 50 percent of women's representation in decision-making positions, Kaliya doubted whether Malawi would reach the target. Kaliya argues that even the target of 30 percent of women in decision-making positions as outlined in the SADC Declaration is proving difficult to reach.

She says the government's dismissal of the three women cast doubts on whether it is serious about women's empowerment as expressed by its commitments to various regional and international instruments and to achieving the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs).

However, the Malawian government is optimistic that women's empowerment will be achieved through the Millennium goals. "Through the MDGs our government will realise women's empowerment. Believe it or not, Malawi has already taken positive steps in bridging the gender gap. I have for example appointed Mary Nangwale as the Inspector General of Police – the overall head of the police service in Malawi. [She will be] a shining star to our girl children and a motivator to other women," said President Bingu wa Mutharika at a rally in Thyolo District earlier this year.

The Gender Support Programme is gearing up to support women candidates in local elections scheduled to take place this year.



Polling Station at the Blantyre tax office, 17 May 1994. *Photo: Govati Nyirena*

Lesotho: Local government quota sparks backlash

By Tom Mapesela

With the first ever Lesotho local government elections are just around the corner, some political party leaders have expressed discontent with the reservation of 30 percent of the seats in these elections for women.

This is in line with Section 26 (1) of the Local Government Act which stipulates that every third electoral division of the 1272 seats should be reserved for women candidates.

These will be rotational within the first two terms of the local governance – an attempt to decentralise governance and make it more participatory. All political parties registered with the IEC in Lesotho have been requested to submit the names of their women candidates for the April elections.

The move, according to the IEC, is aimed at empowering Basotho women to occupy decision-making positions in the country.

Gender Director in the Ministry of Gender, Sports and Youth Affairs 'Matau Futho-Letsatsi stresses that equal participation of women and men in local government elections is a commitment made by the government in various forums, including SADC.

But Molapo Qhobela, leader of one of the opposition factions of the Basutoland African Congress declared: "This is equal to sexual apartheid. It is unconstitutional and I am prepared to take the matter to court for a Constitutional decision."

Moholi Mothobi of the opposition Basotho National Party told reporters that the party will "obey the law" but is unhappy. Pashu Mochesane of the opposition Lesotho Peoples' Congress added that "the whole issue is confusing."

However, Lebenya Chakela of the opposition Basutoland Congress Party said his party promoted women's empowerment and had no problem with the new proclamation.

Whether or not political parties support the regulations, Lesotho will hold local government elections before the end of April 2005 at the latest.

COVER STORY: SIXTEEN DAYS OF ACTIVISM SPECIAL EDITION

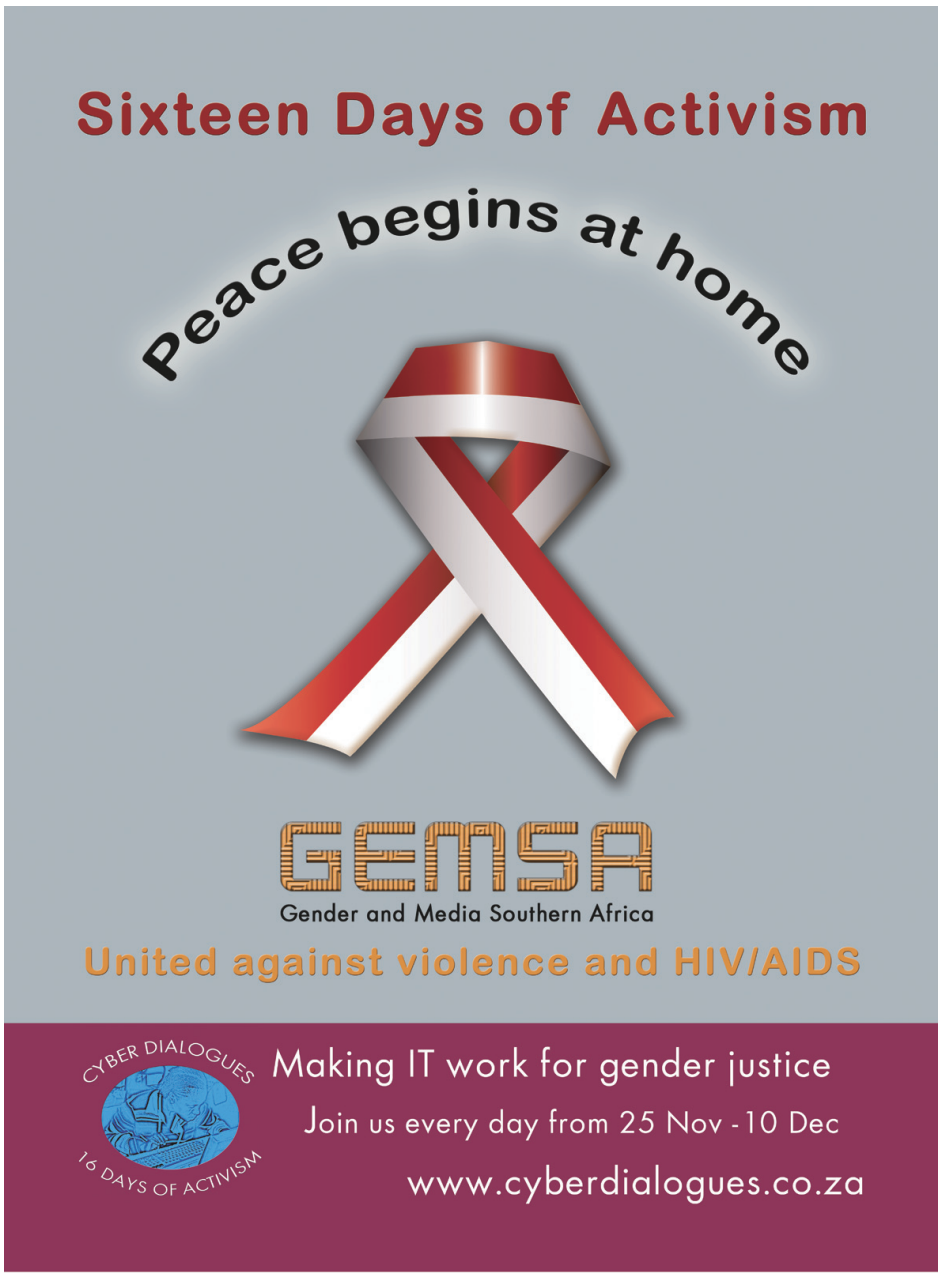
A region united against gender violence and HIV/AIDS

By Janine Moolman

Gender violence and HIV – both are epidemics in sub-Saharan Africa which affect families, communities and nations. Both are high up on the agenda of development agencies and civil society structures, which have recognised that the epidemics cross the divides of race, class, location and culture and need to be addressed simultaneously.

The Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network's programme of action during the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence in 2004 highlighted these linkages. Under the banner: "United against gender violence and HIV" GEMSA took the campaign in their respective countries to the streets.

Whether participating in marches, workshops or other initiatives to raise awareness during the campaign all were united in their commitment



Media at the forefront

Media and communications played a critical role in the 2004 campaign with the launch of the cyber dialogues. This project will be global when the cyber dialogues unite north and south during the Beijing Plus 10 Review meeting in New York.

In Zambia, members of the Zambia Media Watch Association hosted their own cyber dialogues – for four hours at an internet café. While the members of the Zambian government did not participate in the discussions, civil society organisations generated stimulating discussions.

Preliminary results of a media monitoring survey in four countries, before and after the 16 day campaign, show an increase in both the quantity and quality of coverage (see Media Watch).

Speaking out

An important feature of the campaign in 2004 was the claiming of public space by those most directly affected. In South Africa, Mauritius, Zambia and other countries survivors of gender violence spoke out about their experiences. In the final GEMSA electronic newsletter – which was produced daily during the 16 Days of Activism, speaking about the impact of the campaign I wrote:

"It has given voice to many who have been silenced by social and cultural systems which make it taboo to speak about abuse; silenced by media who - despite efforts towards sensitive reporting on gender violence – reinforce the patriarchal myth that 'women are to blame' through biased reporting; silenced by the untruths that many survivors of violence have begun to accept as truth – that their voice is not valid."

In hindsight it is more accurate to say that while the campaign provided the conditions for survivors to speak, credit lies with the brave men and women who rejected the untruths and claimed the space.

The conditions which enabled this need to be sustained throughout the year so that those for whom the silence remains profound, are able to add their voices to the groundswell that has already begun.

A workshop in Botswana with domestic workers brought into focus as did a theme on sexual harassment in South Africa – the fact that gender violence has multiple forms and can happen in myriad spaces. As part of the labour force, domestic workers and other unskilled labourers often lack the protection extended to those in more organised labour sectors. Despite this, they too are at risk of sexual harassment, an issue which received much attention during this years' campaign.

GEMSA

Gender and Media Southern Africa

In the SADC region, where the economy dictates that women are more likely to be found at the lower end of the labour market, often engaging in informal and survivalist activities, this is a critical concern. For example, what protection is afforded to the women traders from Lesotho who cross the border into South Africa to trade at various transport hubs at bus, train and taxi stations where they are prime targets for criminals?

Boys and men make their voices heard

The role of men and boys in ending gender violence has gained currency over the last few years. More and more men have joined the ranks of those working towards and equal and violent free society.

The Sixteen Days Campaign in 2004 continued this trend with special activities taking place throughout the region. Male leaders – including traditional leaders in some countries, came out strongly on the need for men to assume their "rightful" roles as responsible fathers and husbands.

In both Seychelles and Botswana, heads of state played significant roles in the commemoration of World AIDS Day in their countries where they too highlighted the increased vulnerability of women due to gender violence. Another theme was that of the misinterpretation of cultures by men to maintain dominant roles which positioned women as inferior.

Each campaign has generated a series of action points. Now the challenge is to extend the Sixteen Days of Activism to 365.



Photo: Brighton Phiri

New media campaigns

Gender justice barometer shows that Southern Africa has a way to go

By Colleen Lowe Morna and Janine Moolman



GEMSA video confrence on the Gender Justice Barometer at the British Council offices in Johannesburg

Photo: Susan Tolmay

An audit of laws and services for ending gender violence in Southern Africa conducted by GEMSA during the Sixteen Days campaign culminated in a video conference across five countries that has identified action points to be put to the SADC Heads of State summit in August.

While gender violence in now firmly on the political agenda in Southern Africa, laws, services and resources to address this scourge are patchy, and the link between gender violence and HIV/AIDS is not being adequately addressed. Attention to new threats like sex trafficking is growing, but is barely acknowledged in policies and laws.

These are the key findings of a survey of 12 countries conducted by the Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network ahead of Human Rights Day on 10 December 2004 – also the climax of the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence. The findings were debated and refined during a video conference of experts from Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Mauritius chaired by GL Deputy Chair Justice Athalia Molokomme from Botswana, and facilitated by the British Council.

The final report will be launched at the Beijing Plus Ten Review in New York on International Women's Day (8 March). Action points will also be presented to Southern African Development Community (SADC) Heads of State and Government at the "accountability forum" that is being planned by GEMSA and partner organisations at the SADC summit in Gaborone in August.

GEMSA, which includes organisations and individuals committed to promoting gender equality in and through the media, conducted an audit of measures taken by governments in response to the Addendum to the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development on the Eradication of All Forms of Violence Against Women and Children adopted in 1998.

The addendum, which includes a range of measures to be taken including passing laws, providing services for survivors of gender violence and mounting education and awareness campaigns, is supposed to be reviewed by member countries every two years. The last such review took place in Lesotho in November 2000. GEMSA took the view that if governments are not able or willing to review their own performance, civil society will need to take the lead.

Paper rights and real rights

The audit and video conference highlighted the extent to which gender violence is now on the political agenda in the region. But, as the chair of the Mozambican Parliamentary Woman's Caucus Salome Moine acknowledged during the video conference: "The government has political will to address gender violence, but we need the resources to provide the necessary services for women."

The audit found that eight out of the 12 countries surveyed have constitutions that explicitly outlaw discrimination based on sex. But critical issues raised during the video is the dual legal system that exists in most Southern African countries with customary law effectively under cutting constitutional rights, as well as the practical difficulties of accessing such rights.

Not enough specific legislation

Only four out of the 12 countries have passed specific Domestic Violence Acts. These are Mauritius, South Africa, Namibia and Seychelles. Important aspects of domestic violence legislation include: comprehensive and broader definitions of domestic violence to include physical, sexual, economic, emotional, verbal and psychological abuse. The legislation also includes the ability of the complainant to obtain a protection order that resembles an urgent interdict but is less expensive and easier to obtain.

Only four countries - Lesotho, Namibia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe - have passed Sexual Offences Acts. A Sexual Offences Bill is being debated in South Africa.

Explaining why specific laws to address gender violence are important, South African

Constitutional Court Judge Yvonne Mokgoro noted: "These laws create a common understanding of what is required to combat gender violence and how to provide for survivors. Without specific legislation courts also tend to be reluctant to expand the parameters of protection beyond that provided by common law. These laws provide survivors with a strong basis to demand protection from courts of law. Perpetrators also begin to realise the seriousness with which their actions are regarded because they are accompanied by public sanction."

There is a close correlation between countries having sexual offences legislation and explicitly recognising rape is marriage. The five countries that have, or are debating sexual offences legislation, as well as Seychelles, have this statutory provision. With the exception of South Africa, however, there are very few instances in the region in which this provision, where it exists, has been put to the test.

Only four out of the 12 countries in the study - Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia - have policies requiring that health facilities administer Post Exposure Prophylaxsis or PEP, a course of anti-retroviral drugs that can help to reduce the likelihood of HIV infection after a sexual assault. Two countries - Tanzania and Seychelles - said awareness of PEP in their countries only extends to other uses, like for health care workers who might have been exposed to possible infection in their work. In none of the countries is there a legal provision for PEP, although in South Africa this might be provided as part of the treatment clause in the Sexual Offences Bill.

"There has been very limited activism around the provision of PEP. In South Africa for example, there has been much activism around treatment and the provision of mother-to-child prevention programmes, but PEP has lagged behind. I wonder whether this is because it is an issue that largely affects women, " reflected Liesl Gernholtz of the AIDS Law Project South Africa.

Legal provisions for sexual harassment in all countries are weak, with four countries - Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe - reporting that this is covered as part of labour law.

Mauritius' Sex Discrimination Act has the most direct and up-to-date provisions for sexual harassment, referred to as "any unwelcome or unbecoming gesture or act of one sex to the other." However, researchers found that there are very few cases in court, and "victims of sexual harassment in Mauritius find it difficult to get another job" if they report such a case.

Despite this being a growing threat to the region, no country in the region except Tanzania (in its Sexual Offences Bill) has specific provisions for sex trafficking, a phenomenon of globalisation that should be a major concern for vulnerable developing countries that are committed to the rights of girls and women and want to prevent this scourge from taking root.

State support for services is inadequate

While the establishment of specialised services for addressing gender violence is an important step forward, cultural and social factors still work against the effectiveness of these services. For example, attitudes and biases from those charged with delivering the services – who are in many cases men (from the police, judiciary, medial services and criminal justice system in general) remain obstacles to women who use these services.

Only one country, Mauritius, reported having adequate places of safety that are partly funded by government. Three countries, Lesotho, Swaziland and Tanzania said they have no places of safety (other than police stations). All the others indicated that the places of safety that exist are all run by NGOs and these are stretched.

In five of the 12 countries (Botswana, Malawi, Swaziland and Tanzania) there is no government-supported legal aid. In all countries surveyed the bulk of legal aid for women and children is provided by NGOs often relying on foreign donors.

"Civil society needs to advocate for more from governments," noted Elsie Alexander, Chairperson of the Botswana Media Council for Women. "Part of the problem is that gender violence is still associated with the private domain. There is no understanding of gender based violence as a development and this affects the channeling of resources to address this problem. There is a need for governments and decision makers to see gender based violence as a public policy issue."

Call to action

Among action points identified at the video conference included:

- Lobbying governments who have not yet ratified the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa to do so as a matter of urgency.
- Popularising the SADC Addendum in order that civil society organizations can hold governments in the region accountable to their commitments.
- Ensuring that gender violence remains on the agenda for SADC Heads of State meetings.
- Ensuring continuous education and consciousness raising work about gender inequality with people from all walks of life in order to create social conditions in which progressive constitutions and legislation can be implemented. This should include all groups in society charged with implementing policies already in place.
- Networking across the region among organisations working in the gender violence sector to share strategies, challenges and successes and continue pushing for the adoption of specific legislation to deal with gender violence within individual countries.
- Conducting campaigns on PEP amongst women and survivors of violence so that more women demand its administration and have access to the potentially life-saving drugs.

Making IT work for gender justice – the cyber dialogues



Cyber dialogues capture the imagination of children. *Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna*

Chatting up change: how IT can work for gender justice

By Colleen Lowe Morna

In a country of 40 million people across nine diverse provinces, how do you get people talking about gender justice? Through a chat room, of course! The concept is as simple as it is novel. This pilot project coordinated by Gender Links during the Sixteen Days of Activism offers vast possibilities for mobilising communities around common concerns.

Johannesburg: "South African men wake up. The world is watching you!" So warned one of the hundreds of chatters who joined the cyber dialogues during the Sixteen Days of Activism.

An innovative partnership between government, the private sector and NGOs the cyber dialogues provided an unprecedented space for those most directly affected to speak out. This happened both in the face-to-face discussions that took place at 66 centres in all nine provinces as well as in the daily lunch time chats that allowed these groups to pose questions to the 55 experts and decision-makers who took part in the cyber dialogues on different days.

On every day of the dialogues held under the banner of "Making IT work for gender justice" at least one person came online to say that they had been raped. 'Lalu' sent this message on 8 December: "I was brutally raped by my employer… Because I earn R900 I could not afford to get a lawyer. I am now unemployed, where and what help can I get help?" Lalu received several messages back with the contact information for organisations that could help her.

In the live discussion in Alexandra on the same day, Nellie Baloi said that in the 10 years of South Africa's freedom, her testimony before the group had been the first time that she had experienced personal freedom. She recounted how earlier this year her partner sought her out at her mother's house where she had taken refuge; burnt her house and doused her with petrol, ready to burn her alive. He committed suicide after neighbours came to the rescue.

Organisers of the cyber dialogues saluted "the courage of those who have taken the space provided by the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence to speak out. We must not let them down. It is now up to all of us as a nation to secure that space with concrete action."

NGOs expressed concern that despite the government commitment to the campaign, the Sexual Offences Bill that has been on the cards since 1996, has still not been passed. In particular, they urged the government to reinstate the treatment clause that had been removed by the justice portfolio committee on grounds that it had not been sufficiently costed.

They noted that it is inconsistent that this bill should make provisions for the rehabilitation of perpetrators, and then say noting about the treatment and care of those affected. This provision is especially important because of the widespread findings that Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is not available to survivors of sexual assault in many health facilities.

PEP is a course of anti retroviral drugs which, if taken within 72 hours of exposure to the possibility of HIV infection can reduce the chances of transmission. Currently this is provided for in government policy but not in law.

During the cyber dialogues Esther Maluleke of the Ministry of Health said that her ministry will be conducting an audit in 2005 on the availability of PEP to reduce the possibility of HIV infection for the survivors of sexual assault.

Maluleke also announced that in response to research showing that only 16 percent of the few women who have taken the treatment adhere to it, the department is looking at how to integrate this provision into home-based care, including the possibility of "treatment buddies."

Other important commitments made by the government during the cyber dialogues that will now be closely monitored by civil society partners include:

- Peter Durandt of the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development said that the department would be launching a hotline to receive complaints or hear about difficulties that survivors of sexual assault are experiencing with the courts.
- Susan Pienaar of the South African Police Service (SAPS) said that the police will be launching an integrated inter-sectoral training programme on domestic violence in 2005.
- Robbie Raburabu of the Independent Complaints Directorate (ICD) outlined the role of the ICD in receiving complaints about the police and their handling of domestic violence matters. He urged the public to make greater use of this facility.
- Following criticism that the government is doing little to support places of safety and care for survivors of sexual assault, Deputy Minister of Social Development Jean Benjamin announced that her department will be building nine new shelters per province each year over the next three years as well as 29 one stop centres for survivors of sexual assault.

Participants in the daily discussions stressed that at the root of gender violence is the inequality between women and men reflected in every sphere of life, and reinforced by custom, culture, tradition, the media and religion. The many long term solutions proposed centre on empowering women as well as changing the attitudes of men. As one "chatter" put it, what is needed is to "bring back ubuntu!"

Survivors of gender violence said that services offered to them should include vocational training and finding employment. Several recommendations related to making information technology more accessible to rural areas as part of a broader campaign to empower women. As one woman put it: "This chat is such a wonderful medium – let us use it constructively to seriously better life in our communities."

Colleen Lowe Morna is the Executive Director of Gender Links.

Reflecting on the cyber dialogues

By Kimendhri Pillay

What did it mean to be at the coal face of the cyber dialogues? One chatter looks back on the experience.



Pillay at the cyber dialogues training. *Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna*

Durban: The cyber dialogues and the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence campaign proved to be an overall success. It made me revisit some of my own gender issues and childhood experiences and was a powerful educational medium that all people should experience.

Even though the online discussion was scheduled to take place for only an hour, the chat room was a hub of activity for the entire 16 days. The issues discussed were so diverse – ranging from sugar daddies to the roles of traditional leaders. It was a space in which many ideas, suggestions and traumas were shared. Unlike other forms of media that are one-way, the great advantage of the Internet chat room was that it is interactive.

The disability discussion proved especially informative for me. On this day many practical issues were raised including the participation of people who have disabilities in projects such as the cyber dialogues e.g. the need for equipment which would allow this, transportation problems experienced by many disabled people, and many other issues. I reflected on something I had learnt at university and asked myself: If women of colour suffer double oppression due to their race, does it mean that a disabled woman of colour suffers triple oppression?

On the day young women, violence and HIV/AIDS was discussed, I attended a discussion at the Gender AIDS Forum in Durban which specifically looked at the "sugar daddies" phenomenon. This was also an interesting discussion which made me more aware of my own reality.

Participants emphasised the link between patriarchy and exploitative relationship between older men and young women. Prior to my participation in the discussion, I had assumed that it was only about young women being spoilt with fancy clothes and jewellery at the expense of their sugar daddies in return for sexual favours. I was troubled when someone mentioned that many of these relationships are condoned by the young women's parents as their own poverty may be lessened from their daughter's association with a man who supports her financially. An important suggestion that came out of this session was the "naming and shaming" of sugar daddies as well as to provide workshops to both young people and their parents.

The bulletin board gave people the space in which to share their stories and also their pain. I won't ever forget the candid heart wrenching story of Sindi Mbandlwa, an independent writer and AIDS activist from KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. It was impossible to read some of those painful stories and remain unaffected. Both the bulletin board and cyber dialogues provided the safety of anonymity – for some their identities had to remain secret.

Many of those chatting posed enlightening questions and comments. Unfortunately, there were also others who abused the chat room by not sticking to the topic under discussion and in many instances using it as a dating site! This limited the amount of time to pose questions. Ways need to be found around this in future.

I didn't think that the actual website needed much improvement – it was user-friendly and accessible. What is needed for future cyber dialogues though, is to reach more participants. Tertiary institutions could play an important role in making their resources available so that more people could have access to the computer facilities provided at most institutions.

Taking the highway to cyberspace

By Raashied Galant

One good idea leads to another. During the Sixteen Days campaign the Gender Advocacy Programme (GAP), a cyber dialogue partner took the cyber dialogues on a road show to broaden access and participation.

In the middle of it all, I hit the road heading north on the N2 armed only with fact sheets and posters with my colleagues Erica Buchianeri from the GAP, volunteer worker Andre Mackay from Leeu Gamka and Sonja van der Sarj, a journalist from community broadcaster Bush Radio.

The unique initiative by GAP aimed at ensuring greater participation by rural communities in the cyber dialogues, as well as to demonstrate the use of ICTs for change. With no bells or whistles, stage props or live gigs, the road show went from town to town in the Western Cape to help communities access the daily discussions.

Heading north towards George, the open road held much promise despite initial disappointment at our first stop, Swellendam. The one public internet café in the town is closed on weekends, so unless you have your own computer and connection, don't plan to go online in Swellendam on a weekend.

In all, three programmes were held in George, Oudtshoorn and Beaufort West, with at most five community workers in each town participating, depending on the size of the Internet Café. The GAP-Cyber Dialogues Road Show was made possible through funding from the Development Bank of Southern Africa.

Clearly more cyber activism needs to be undertaken in the smaller towns in the country. Each programme was greeted with apprehension at first, since the concept of being able to "talk" directly with decision-makers sitting in Johannesburg was hard to fathom. However, by the end of the programme a general complaint was that it was too short.

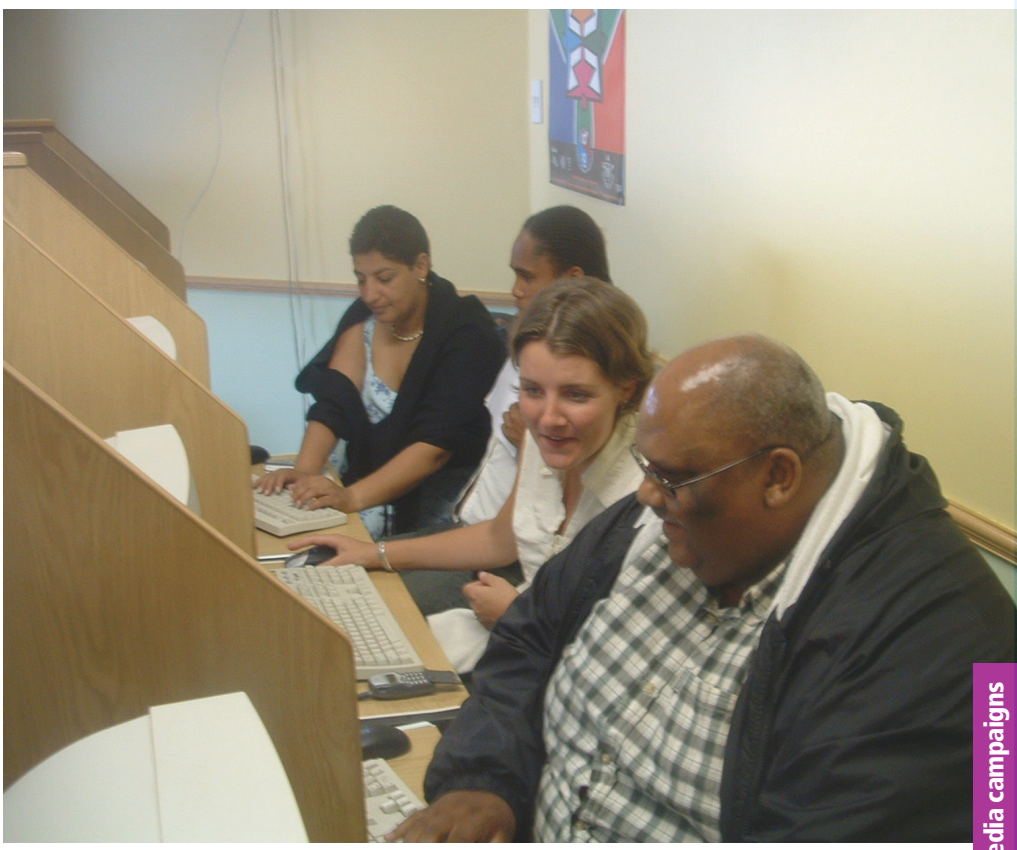
Participants in Oudtshoorn on Day 13 of the cyber dialogues could hardly contain their excitement because of the presence of Jean September, Deputy Minister of Social Development, at the hub in Johannesburg. The three community workers from FAMSA Karoo and the Network on Violence Against Women used the opportunity to point out the unique experiences and challenges they were facing in the Klein Karoo on issues of treatment and care.

Language proved no obstacle, as the Deputy Minister chatted back in Afrikaans. Here was ICT in action for social justice!

In Beaufort West, a local high school hosted the show due to the absence of an Internet Café in the town. But the connection proved so slow that it took several minutes to upload each line of chat. Lesson learned: slow connections are a reality of cyber activity which must be factored into programmes such as these.

Another thought for the future: Given that there's no Internet Café in the huge stretch from Beaufort West to Worcester, perhaps we will consider rigging out a touring van with computers for a travelling cyber café. Let the show go on!

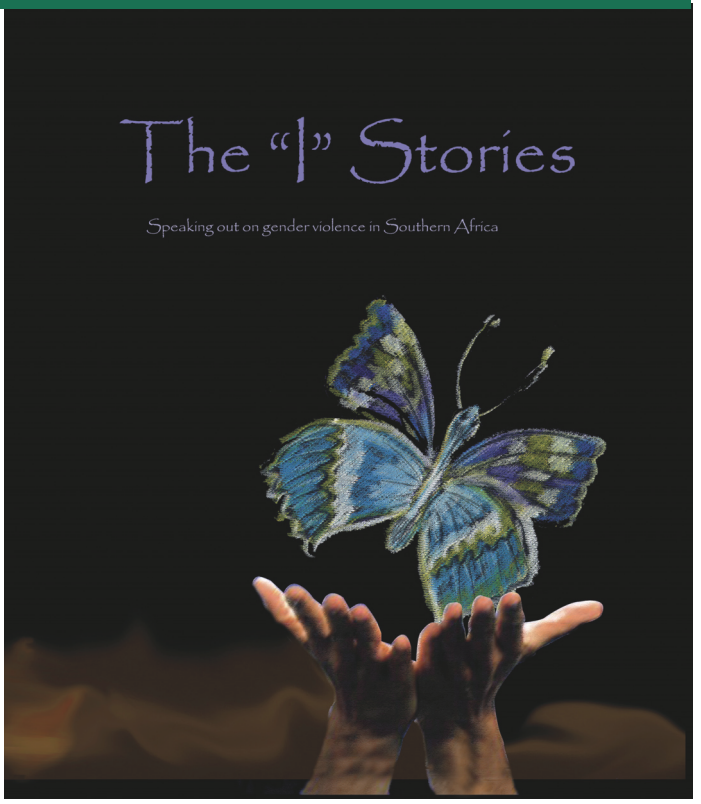
Raashied Galant is the Women and Media Project Coordinator at the Gender Advocacy Programme in the Western Cape, South Africa. He can be contacted at media@gender.org.za



On the road ... cyber activism in George. *Photo: Raashied Galant*

Bua, Khuluma, Speak Out!

By Janine Moolman



"Bua, Khuluma, Speak Out" states the back cover of "The 'I' Stories: Speaking out on gender violence in Southern Africa," a publication produced by Gender Links during the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence. And that is exactly what the writers who contributed to the publication did.

Johannesburg: "If so much is being done, why are we still afraid to speak out?" asked Jacobeth Vena in response to watching a video on the activities that took place during the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence Campaign in 2003.

Vena was part of a workshop held with a group of survivors of violence who embarked on a writing project leading to the publication of the booklet. The I stories also formed part of a special bulletin of the Gender and Media Opinion and Commentary Service run by Gender Links during the Sixteen Days campaign.

Recognising that the authentic voices of those directly affected by gender violence are a powerful tool in efforts toward ending gender violence, the publication features the writing of survivors of violence and rehabilitated perpetrators.

"I want men to know that we can change, and that there are many ways of being a man. I am a living example of this," said Sibongiseni Mngomezulu, whose article "Real men don't do violence" talks about the cultural and social factors which contributed toward his violent behaviour.

Mngomezulu and the six other men whose stories are featured participated in two workshops through which they were able to write their stories for publication. Separate workshops were held with survivors of violence. The ADAPT Men's Project and NISAA Institute for Women's Development were instrumental in organising and facilitating the workshops.

"I want to tell my story so that other women know that they are not alone. Then maybe they too will be able to speak out," said Vena at the first workshop with survivors of violence. This ripple effect of the "I" stories has been phenomenal. During the Sixteen Days of Activism, writers, including Vena and Mngomozulu were featured on national television news and radio talk shows. Many of the stories were also published in mainstream newspapers in South Africa and across the SADC region as part of the Gender Links GEM Opinion and Commentary Service from which the "I" story project was conceived.

For Riana Jacobs, a young HIV positive Muslim woman who disclosed her status in her story, life will most probably not be the same again. Not only was her story aired on national television during the Sixteen Days, but she continues to receive invitations and requests to share her experiences with others (see adjoining story).

The publication also includes the stories of women outside of South Africa – from Zimbabwe, Zambia and Mauritius – as told to journalists who interviewed them.

The power of the "I" stories is that they are told simply and honestly. They are written with the dignity of those who have been able to rise above the indignity of their abuse – both as survivors and perpetrators. As a strategy to end gender violence, the "I" stories, through speaking out, provided the opportunity for participants to reclaim the space in which to make their voices heard.

Janine Moolman is the editor of Amalungelo. She can be reached at janine@genderlinks.org.za

The "I" stories: Speaking out on gender violence in Southern Africa can be ordered through Gender Links at a cost of R30.00. To order send an email to: susan@genderlinks.org.za or visit the publications section of www.genderlinks.org.za.

Reflecting on the "I" stories

No more secrets, no more lies. Two participants in the "I" Story project reflect on their experience of speaking out, and writing their stories.

The freedom that comes with speaking out

By Riana Jacobs

It has been nearly two months since my big day – the day I revealed to the world my HIV positive status. Not knowing how people would react to me meant that I was taking a big risk. But either way, I knew that I was starting journey. And it all started with writing an article with Gender Links.

Writing the "I" story – "The peace that comes with forgiveness" was spiritually uplifting. Gender Links was part of the journey that started with writing this article. It was a journey to long awaited freedom – free from the guilt and most importantly the secrecy of my HIV status. Putting my emotions on paper was therapeutic in its own way. It highlighted the positive progress I have made. I knew I was ready to help others heal in the way I did, I knew I was ready to find the peace that comes with forgiveness.

Being part of the Sixteen Days of Activism Campaign was a sobering experience. Speaking at the launch of the "I" Stories was exciting but scary. When my speech was done I felt a relief, a feeling of exhilaration. People walked up to me and thanked me for speaking out; for letting the world know that being HIV positive is OK and it is not the end of the world.

SABC approached me to do a segment for the coverage of World AIDS Day. I immediately agreed, but deep down was terrified. Those who did not witness my testimony at the launch of the "I" Stories would surely see me on television, I thought.

The interview was done at work. This was the day I would appear on national television and let everyone know I was an HIV positive Muslim woman. My colleagues were supportive; no one had a bad word to say. Most embraced me and had words of encouragement – a reaction I did not expect, but was most welcome.

The TV segment was aired that night.

Members of my family whom I had not shared my secret with were devastated. I was inundated with calls that evening and the following day – calls of sympathy, support and most of all understanding. Primary school friends contacted me expressing how proud they were of me. Receiving all those calls from friends, colleagues and family was a very motivating. Coming out with my status was worth the risk.



Riana Jacobs at the writing workshop

SABC has since done a follow up interview with me – wanting to know how things have been since I revealed my status. What can I say is that coming out with my status was the best decision I could have made. Since that big day, the day I revealed all to the world, I do not feel HIV positive anymore.

Overcoming the challenge

By Thapelo Rahlongo

It is just over month since the end of the Sixteen Days of Activism. For me, that was an experience of a lifetime. I've learnt many things over a short period of time… about myself, and people around me and how to treat them.

I was lucky enough to meet people from Gender Links and ADAPT who gave me a chance to tell my story through writing. In the beginning, when I first heard about how we would tell our stories I was not sure that that I wanted to tell my story, I didn't know if I could find the words. But after I started writing, I was inspired … and I was proud. Writing my story felt like a burden had lifted off my shoulders and I was free.

But there was another challenge that came after writing my story… speaking out in public. When I was writing I was alone so I didn't feel like I had anything to be afraid of… but this was different.

But I also knew that it was important for me to speak, to tell people what I had done, and why I had behaved in that way.

I asked myself if I had the courage to speak out. And reminded myself that everything has its time and progress happens step by step. When we started the writing programme with Gender Links we each shared our stories in small groups – with men, who like me, were trying to change their lives and become better men. I felt that if I could do it there, then I could do it in other spaces.

The first time I spoke out was during the Sixteen Days of Activism, where I was part of a panel of people who were sharing their experiences of violence during the cyber dialogues. All the panelists had been part of the Gender Links writing project. I told my story alongside women survivors of violence – it was scary but liberating. I felt proud that I could stand up and show that change is possible.

My speaking out and against gender violence will continue… once you start, it's difficult to stop.

Communities take up call to end gender violence

By Janine Moolman

Region 7, ward 76 in the sprawling township of Alexandra just outside of Johannesburg was a hub of activity during the 16 Days of Activism on Gender Violence Campaign thanks to local government councillor Sinah Gwebu.



Sinah Gwebu listening to "Herstory" in Alexandra. *Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna*

"The sphere of local government is closest to ordinary people and able to take up the bread and butter issues of communities. Gender violence is one of these issues. It affects the entire township – men, women and children alike," says Gwebu who was largely responsible for the getting the Sixteen Days Campaign off the ground in her region.

Events ranged from a human chain, a seminar on the role of men in ending gender violence, a demonstration, the launch of posters dealing with sexual harassment at schools, a soccer against HIV/AIDS tournament, and what Gwebu refers to as a day of "herstory" – where survivors of gender violence spoke out.

Activities undertaken by councillors in their wards during the Sixteen Days formed part of a joint programme on Gender, Communications and local government between the City of Johannesburg and Gender Links, with the support of the Mott Foundation.

Poverty and unemployment contribute to high levels of gender violence in Alexandra says Gwebu: "It is made worse because there are so many people who move to Alexandra to look for work, and then when there is none they are frustrated and take it out on those around them. Poverty and unemployment make men feel like they have no power. Using their power over women [by being abusive] makes them feel like they have some power."

"It is all over, everywhere you look. Even in schools, where girls are afraid of teachers and do not feel safe at schools. Sexual harassment and abuse of girls at school is a big problem in our community. Children, already dealing with the trauma of living in an abusive environment at home, are then at further risk of sexual assault and harassment at school. During the sixteen days we, together with the Sexual Harassment Education Project focused strongly on sexual harassment, this was an important area of work. We launched a new poster on sexual harassment in schools. "The day of "herstory" surpassed all expectations. While a scheduled number of women had agreed to share their stories, their courage had a ripple effect and many other women spontaneously stood up and spoke out.

"A mother spoke about the trauma of a child who had been raped; the friend of a victim of femicide stood up and told the story her friend would never tell; yet another woman spoke about how she survived being shot at by her abusive husband. They all appealed to each other and to the community to help women in these situations," Gwebu said.

Speaking out was a challenge for many of the women as it surfaced both past and present traumas. Life Line, an organisaton that specialises in counseling was on hand to assist those who needed help.

Many women in Alexandra know about the

Domestic Violence Act which provides that they can get protection orders against abusive partners or husbands. But this knowledge does not necessarily make them feel safer.

The attitude of the police in Alex – as in many cities throughout the country – makes it difficult for women to access the protection that the Act affords them. Gwebu points out that many women report that the police are not helpful, some of them know the perpetrators, and others still believe that violence is a private affair that should be solved within the home. "There is power in numbers. We need to pool our resources and act together to put pressure on the police to do their work and assist women who need their help."

In fact, Gwebu says that is the pooling of resources, and power of the communities' women that made the establishment of the Victim Empowerment Unit at the Alexandra Police Station possible. Special services are available for survivors who report to the police. "Volunteers are always on hand to provide counseling, advice and other support to the survivor."

Region 7 also participated in the cyber dialogues. "For many it was the first time they had the chance to use a computer… chatting with others, and being able to ask questions directly to those who make the decisions was a good opportunity for us," she says.

The visibility of the Sixteen Days of Activism in Alexandra was important she says. "Women need to know that they are not alone, that there are places that they can get help. We must raise awareness amongst the entire community. We also need to raise awareness amongst male councillors as many of them are unable to empathise with survivors of gender violence."

Gwebu is already thinking about the future. "Next year, we must include more people and more organisations. Everyone needs to know and be involved in finding solutions."

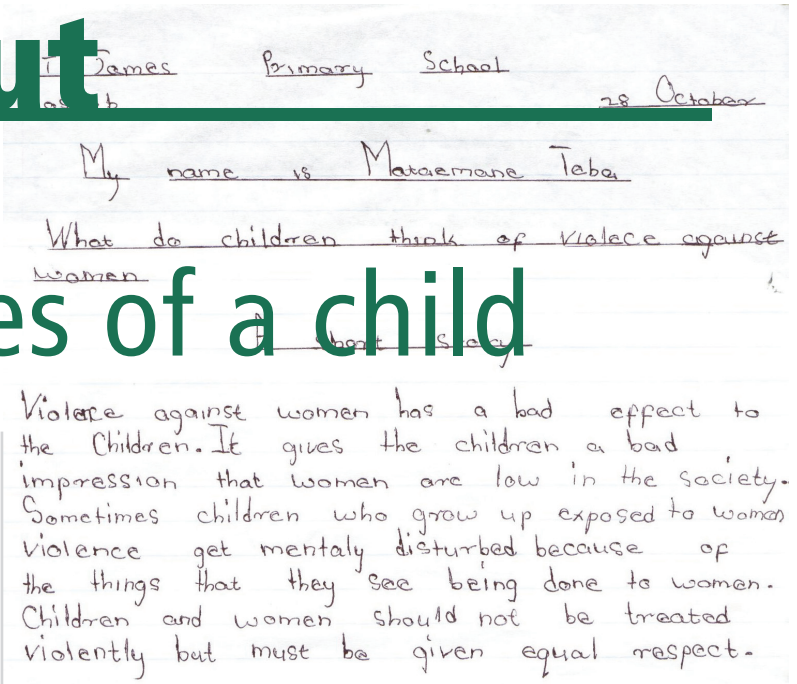
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Mothibi Mohomane (centre) showing the ropes to chatters in region 7

Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Through the eyes of a child


James Primary School
28 October
My name is Matsemane Teba
What do children think of violece against women
Violece against women has a bad effect to the Children. It gives the children a bad impression that women are low in the society. Sometimes children who grow up exposed to woman violence get mentaly disturbed because of the things that they see being done to women. Children and women should not be treated violently but must be given equal respect.

By Mathabang Fanyane

Mathabang Fanyane reports on a competition involving school children in Lesotho who used the arts to share their thoughts and feelings on gender violence.

Maseru: A creative arts competition in Lesotho had school children applying their minds and creativity to raising awareness about HIV/AIDS in their country.

The First Lady of Lesotho, Mathato Mosisili organised the competition as a way of raising awareness amongst children about the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence and getting them to think about how they are affected by gender violence and HIV/AIDS. The theme of the competition was "The girl child and HIV/AIDS."

The competitions rules allowed for children to submit essays, poetry or artwork which expressed their thoughts and feelings on the theme. Media Arts Watch Association (MAWA) was asked to judge the entries. The response to the competition was overwhelming as children from schools across Mohale's Hoek, a southern district in Lesotho sent in creative and innovative entries which grappled with complex issues through reflecting on their own experiences.

One entry stated: "It [violence against women] gives the impression that women are low in society." If children this young – at primary school age – are able to see how violence against women is a reflection of unequal gender relations, there is hope that efforts towards eradicating gender violence are having some impact.

The winning schools and pupils were announced in Mohale's Hoek on World AIDS Day, December 1, 2004. The prizes were awarded by His Majesty King Lestie III who noted that women and girls rights were continuously being violated despite the fact that they were the ones who provided care to communities and who should rightly be protected. The King's participation in the commemoration of World AIDS Day and the fact that he presented the competitions prizes is significant as it reflects the growing concern and commitment to ending gender violence in the Lesotho kingdom.



Winners with their certificates. *Photo: Mathabang Fanyare*

Today, over half of the people in the world who are living HIV are women. The UNAIDS 2004 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic states that in sub-Saharan Africa 57 percent of adults infected with HIV are women. In almost every region of the world, female infection rates are on the rise - Lesotho is no exception. The vast majority of women in Lesotho lack the social and economic power to avoid infection. Large numbers of women are denied the opportunity to go to school, earn a living or own or even to inherit property. Moreover, many women in Lesotho suffer violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination – all factors which increase their risk of infection.

The gender and development policy adopted by Lesotho in November 2004 is aimed at empowering marginalised groups in Lesotho, including women.

Among other things the gender and development policy aims to deal with inequality and discrimination against women in the country by addressing discriminatory laws. It provides guidelines to policy-makers and stakeholders on how to remove gender inequalities and to ensure that gender concerns are taken into account in all national and sectoral development plans and programmes.

It is hoped that it will address the challenges of gender inequality, poverty, unemployment and the spread of HIV/AIDS by adopting a rights-based approach to development. Some of the pressing issues in Lesotho include the fact that the country's cultural and traditional practices give men alone the power to decide on sexual and reproductive health matters. This takes control out of women's hands, deepening gender inequalities, and in turn fueling the HIV pandemic.

Mathabang Fanyane is a member of the Media and Arts Watch Association and also the Gender and Media Country representative in Lesotho. e-mail: mathabangfanyane@yahoo.co.uk

Sex workers break the silence during the Sixteen Days campaign

By Marie Annick Savripene and Loga Virahsawmy

Invisible to a large extent to the rest of the world, there are hundreds of women who live in a violent world where gender violence, drugs and sex work has become a way of life. In nearly all these cases men are at the root of their destitution.

We met 12 such women during the Sixteen Days campaign organised by Media Watch Organisation (MWO, Mauritius). They all wanted to come to terms with reality, look back, start a new way of life and be treated like human beings.

Chrysalide, the first and only residential rehabilitation centre for women survivors of drugs, alcohol, sex work and gender violence opened its door for us well before the official opening.

Although there is still a lot to be done to the building these women have found a place far from all the pimps and clients who they will never forget. Chrysalide is the only haven that they can cling to.

We were struck by the dead look on their faces when we saw them in a big room with hardly any furniture. They are all in their prime of life, young and beautiful. The youngest is 17 and there is only one who is old compared to the others. She is 45 and has been on drugs and sex work for the past 25 years.

But it did not take long for Marie, Belinda and Annick to start talking once they felt they could confide in us. They talked at one stretch as if they were afraid of losing the thread of the conversation and had to say everything at one go. As for the others, their minds were still blurred and their tongues heavy and they found it difficult to express themselves.



Marie: Marie was only twelve when her parents separated. Looking desperately for love and a decent living, she ran away from home and lived with an older man who cared for her. Out of this love a child was born. Her partner was a seafarer, Marie was often left on her own with her child.

She coped with her loneliness until her brother-in-law cajoled her into taking marijuana, soon followed by hard drugs. When all the money was gone she had no choice but to sell her body. She became the 'pariah' of her family, and her child was taken away from her. Before coming to Chrysalide her son who is now ten told her "Although I get everything that I need, nothing can replace maternal love." This one phrase made her take the right decision.

Belinda: Belinda comes from a broken family. Although she lived with her injecting drug user mother, Belinda refused to take drugs. She grew up in an atmosphere of sexual exploitation in her house which was surrounded by brothels. She had her first sexual relationship at the age of 16.

One day while talking to her friends who were sex workers a foreigner asked her for sex. She refused but her mother badly needed drugs and told her that she had nothing to lose since she was no longer a virgin. Her mother forced her to have sex with the man. She gave the Rs.500 to her mother and took to the streets.

Another foreigner whom she met in a night club fell madly in love with her and even promised to marry her. Belinda thought she had nothing to lose as she wanted to stop being a sex worker. But unfortunately the formalities to go to Sweden took so long and meanwhile she fell in love with a Mauritian of her age. She nevertheless left him for greener grass. She was trying to foget her Mauritian lover when she had a telephone call from him to implore her to come back. "I do not know how he got my telephone number. I fell into his trap and returned to Mauritius."

Her life was doomed by just this one telephone call. She returned to Mauritius and soon realised that she was living with a drug dealer. Her partner forced her into drugs until she became dependent on hard drugs. When her partner did not have enough money to buy drugs he forced her to sell her body. "If I did not obey, he would beat me. He even slashed my body once. Once he even put an electric truncheon in my anus. While enjoying himself thrashing me near the church as I could not give him any money, two boys came to my rescue and called the priest who sent me here." Belinda's only fear is facing this man again once she comes out of rehabilitation.

Annick: Annick offered a helping hand to a man who was a drug user. He soon became her partner. She found herself in the sordid world of drug abuse. Abuse became a way of life. "He was slapping me so hard in the face that I got the impression that he wanted to disfigure me. He used to burn me with cigarette butts. He was the master and I was the slave. I had to provide him with his drugs and his cigarettes otherwise he would slash me. My friends were advising me to leave him but how could I ? He said he would kill my family if I left him."

Although Annick became more and more dependent on drugs, she was brave enough to leave this violent man and lived with another with whom she had a child. As she could not stop taking drugs her marriage was in chaos. "I blame myself. I could not stop and because of me my son had to stop school at an early age. I have robbed him of his future."

* not their real names

Women demand peace in their homes

By Marie-Anne Lepathy



Making their voices count, women in Seychelles demand homes and relationships that are violence-free. Photo: Marie-Anne Lepathy

Women in the Seychelles began the Sixteen Days of Activism speaking out against gender violence.

Victoria: Survivors of gender violence joined a march on November 25, International Day of Violence against Women, to condemn the abuse of women in their homes and relationships. The march also marked the beginning of the Sixteen Days of the Activism on Gender Violence campaign in Seychelles and was organised by the Alliance of Solidarity with the Family (ASFF) in collaboration with several other NGOs and government departments.

Several survivors of violence took part in the march and wore t-shirts bearing slogans which called for an end to violence against women. Asked why she had decided to participate in the march, one woman said that it was time for Seychellois women to realise that they should take control of their lives: "Women should take their lives in their own hands and stand on their own two feet," she said.

"Violence against women and children should be denounced and the perpetrators punished." She said she participated in the march to show women who are still in abusive relationships that "they too still have time to rebuild their lives."

Seychelles has made great progress ensuring that women and children are protected against gender violence. A number of laws have been enacted including the Family Violence Act which specifically addresses domestic violence and contains provisions to assist survivors. An important provision is the restraints placed on perpetrators whereby they are not allowed on the premises of the complainant.

In addition several governmental bodies and NGOs have developed programmes to assist survivors of violence rebuild their lives. The National Domestic Violence Committee is a multisectioral committee that addresses the issue of gender violence and works to coordinate the efforts of government and civil society organisations.

However Ms Rose Mary Elizabeth, Executive Director of the ASFF says that it is essential that those affected by violence speak out so that they can be assisted. While the ASFF has assisted many survivors of violence over the years, Elizabeth admits that awareness raising programmes need to be intensified to encourage more women to come out and seek help.

This is particularly important given that gender violence and abuse increase women's vulnerability to contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Speaking out essentially can mean taking action to save one's life.

Elizabeth says that women who are trapped in abusive relationships live in fear and are not able to negotiate safe sex with their husbands and partners for fear of being beaten up. With education and sensitisation campaigns featuring high on the agendas of various family welfare bodies, it is hoped that more women living in violent and abusive relationships will seek help.

In an interview the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Mr Maurice Lousteau-Lalanne said that the sexual behaviour of women in Seychelles is cause for concern. He said Seychellois women should "behave more responsibly" and take "necessary precautions" to protect themselves from infections during sexual encounters. Seychellois President James Michel declared 2004 the "Year of Moral Renaissance"

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Stigma keeps women silent

By Brighton Phiri

Access to post-exposure prophylaxis after sexual assault can save lives. But in Zambia, the stigma that surrounds survivors of violence means that many women do not report incidents of sexual assault.

Lusaka, Zambia: When Grace Zulu's brother in-law raped her, she reported it to the police. But instead of getting the support of her family during this traumatic period, they responded with violence and rejection. "I didn't expect such a thing to happen" said Zulu, speaking during the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence campaign in Zambia.

"My actions attracted harsh reactions from both my late husbands' family and mine. Imagine my own relatives blaming me for going public with [the fact that I had] been raped… they accused me of embarrassing the family." She says even her friends did not want to associate with "someone who had been raped."

After reporting the rape to the police, Zulu was given an HIV test and tested negative. "Thank God the results were negative… I am one of the lucky women to receive PEP. I think there are many women out there who still find it difficult to come out in the open for fear of being stigmatised as rape is associated with evil and promiscuity."

Joyce McMillan, Acting National Coordinator of Women and Law in Southern Africa Trust (WLSA) said that many women do not report sexual assault because of gender insensitive cultures and traditions and inadequate justice delivery systems. According to the findings of a study undertaken by WLSA, published in a report titled "Gender-based violence and how the justice system responds," many women do not speak about their experiences of gender violence. When they do, they often have to deal with not only their abuser, but their families, the justice system, social isolation as well as the loss of personal security.

"Cases of rape and defilement are treated like secret incidents… This makes it difficult to administer post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to survivors as they are reluctant to report the incident within the 72-hour time period that the drugs need to be taken in order to be effective," said McMillan.

Even when women do report sexual assault within the 72-hour period many are hesitant about undergoing the HIV test. "This makes it difficult for medical practitioners to administer the drugs without knowing the survivors' HIV status," McMillan says. PEP can only administered to survivors who have tested HIV negative.

There are also concerns about the availability of PEP in rural areas. Chief Koba of the Bisa people is concerned that the provision of PEP has been restricted to urban areas. However, Health Minister Dr Brian Chituwo has assured the public that the government is taking measures to ensure that PEP is made available to all those who require it. He urged survivors of sexual assault to report the incidents timeously so that PEP can be administered.

Speaking at the launch of the WLSA report, Matrine Chuulu, a lawyer and WLSA National coordinator in Zambia, said: "The justice system … lacks the capacity and sometimes the political will to act decisively and with the required urgency. Where the system takes appropriate action, sometimes the victims are reluctant to exhaust the procedures of the system, which would enable the police to secure a conviction."

The WLSA report highlights the existence of many forms of gender violence in Zambia ranging from physical violence, economic/material deprivation, psychological and emotional trauma. "The fact that came out [strongly] is that marital rape was culturally not recognised in Zambia, making it difficult for survivors of such kind of sexual violence to seek redress," Chuulu said.

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Zambian women march for their health and for the health of women across the world

Photo: Brighton Phiri

Zimbabwe government drags its heels over passing of domestic violence legislation

By Loveness Jambaya

Despite being a signatory to the SADC Addendum on the Eradication of All Forms of Violence against Women and Children, Zimbabwe has yet to enact specific legislation to address domestic violence.

Zimbabwe: On receipt of a petition calling for the Zimbabwe government to enact legislation on domestic violence, Minister of Justice, Patrick Chinamasa was quoted as saying: "I want to emphasise it is the women themselves. Why do I say so? You are the bearers of children; they are your sons… The people you complain against are your children and you have not properly brought them up. That is why they are beating you up." Chinamasa was quoted in a story featured on Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation Television. This statement highlights the uphill battle that gender activists in Zimbabwe are facing.

Gender activists used the Sixteen Days of Activism to petition the Zimbabwean government to enact specific legislation on domestic violence. The Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims Bill was first handed to the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs four years ago and has yet to be passed into law. Currently perpetrators of domestic violence are charged under various aspects of common law.

While there has been some work on updating the draft bill since 2000, there is concern around what appears to be reluctance on the part of government to enact the legislation.

Stakeholders petitioned the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, to ensure that the bill is passed. While the petition had already been in circulation, it was officially launched at the start of the Sixteen Days of Activism Campaign at an event which marked the beginning of the campaign in Zimbabwe. First to sign the petition at the launch was the Minister of Youth Development, Gender and Employment Creation, Ambrose Mutinhiri.



Harare court: where is justice for women. Photo: Trevor Davies

The petition states: "…despite the obvious support and acceptance of the Draft Bill by various women's groups, key stakeholders and communities in general, the Draft Bill has not been tabled before Parliament." It also called on the Zimbabwean Parliament to set up a commission to develop a protocol for the management of domestic violence by public officials including the police, health care professionals, the judiciary, the media and the ministries responsible for the administration of the proposed legislation.

Sheila Mahere, director of the Musasa Project handed over the petition to the Minister of Justice, on December 10, International Human Rights Day, and the last day of the Sixteen Days Campaign. She urged him to ensure parliament speeds up the enactment of the bill.

There appears to be a lack of political will to enact the domestic violence bill in Zimbabwe. Member of Parliament, Evelyn Masaiti, speaking at the launch of the petition said: "The government is the one that comes up with these Bills and has the power to quickly enact them into law because in the past they have fast tracked other bills." The last two years have seen government fast track several bills into law as well as several amendments to existing laws.

The urgency to enact the legislation is obvious as gender violence is on the increase in the country. According to a Central Statistics Office publication, "Women and Men" published in December 2002, one in every 12 women is assaulted with a dangerous object or weapon, one in every five women is threatened with physical violence and one in six women is prevented from going to work, among other issues (based on a survey by the Musasa Project in the Midlands Province). There has also been a steady increase of rape cases since the signing of the Addendum e.g. from 3,651 reported cases in 1997 to about 4,612 cases in the year 2000.

Gender activists say they will continue their efforts to get the bill passed into law.

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Men as partners

With us or against us?
Men in the fight against gender violence

By Nombuso Shabalala

A key question presently confronting South Africa is whether the time has arrived for a more inclusive approach to gender equality through involving men.

Johannesburg: The Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) held a number of provincial Men's Summits in Limpopo, North-West, the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Kwa-Zulu Natal over the course of 2004. These will culminate in a National Men's Summit this year to develop strategies for involving men in gender equality campaigns.

The Summits that took place in partnership with the South African Men's Forum, the Moral Regeneration Movement, and the South African Council of Churches and in some provinces local governments, underscored an increasing recognition of the need to involve men and boys as partners.

At one workshop a man spoke about the continued subordination of women and said that girl children continue to suffer as a result of discrimination. "The abuse of women and children" he said, "will not simply go away because women take to the street and march against this social ill. Gender-based violence will certainly not go away without deliberate, coordinated and coherent actions on the part of men."

CGE Commissioner Bafana Khumalo is adamant that there is a crucial need to clearly define the role that men can and should play in the transformation process in South Africa.

Khumalo however cautions that men's active involvement should not be promoted at the expense of and overshadow the leadership and prominent role that women continue to play in the struggle for gender justice.



Man to man: talking through gender equality at the ADAPT offices. Photo: Adapt

"In most of the work that has been undertaken, the focus was on empowering women to level the playing field. This is proper and appropriate given that it is this sector that has been at the receiving end of gender inequality. It should be noted that much has been achieved in this conjuncture in terms of advancing the agenda of gender transformation," says Khumalo.

Discussions regarding the role that men should play in the gender transformation agenda have gained currency – both within government and civil society. It is essential that this role be defined by the culture that is now firmly established in our constitution – that of gender equality.

This is particularly important given the argument advanced in current public discourse that a number of the social ills that relate to the scourge of gender-based violence can be traced to the negative impact that patriarchy has on South Africa's democratic culture.

In the past decade, there have been several attempts to organise men as a sector to participate in the gender struggle. Unfortunately, many of these attempts have not realised their anticipated outcome and efforts have at best been disjointed and lacked cohesion.

There is also unfortunately a perception that gender is synonymous with "women". Some people make assumptions because of the problem of linguistic definitions. This is despite "gender" being a broad term encapsulating sex, sexuality, masculinity and femininity and possibly more.

The rationale for involving men and boys in the fight against gender based violence and gender equality more broadly, is manifold and will continue to develop and expand as goals are realised and different gender and social arrangements emerge around the world. Men and boys must be bought into the framework of strategy, policy and micro-politics of gender equality programmes.

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What men said at the Summit:

"With regards to men, I do not remember reading anything of authority which dictated that women should be subservient to men. It has been cultural practices which have been unconsciously used repetitively and have been accepted without question. Men who maintain that women cannot be the equivalent of men are backward, uninformed and have not acquainted themselves with the arguments of the equality of the sexes." - Kgosi Mankuroane, Klerksdorp, North West.

"Sometimes men do not see the necessity of becoming involved in issues of gender; hence society tends to leave them out. Gender and power relations in a family set-up influences the behaviour of males which results in abuse."- Thabo Mokoena, Ekurhuleni.

Men as partners

A respect for tradition means respect for women

By Bheki Maseko

The commemoration of World AIDS Day in Swaziland witnessed leaders speaking out against gender violence which they say does not reflect Swazi tradition.

Mbabane: In a speech on World Aids Day, Swaziland Queen Mother Ntombi Tfwala condemned Swazi men who abuse women and children and urged the nation to ensure that women and children are protected.

Acting Prime Minister Reverend Absolom Dlamini spoke on behalf of the Queen Mother's as she was in seclusion preparing for the Incwala ceremony – a cultural tradition which unites the Swazi nation. The Queen Mothers' sentiments were shared by high-level dignitaries who participated in the ceremony which took place in Siteki in the Lubombo region.

"There is no reason for Swazi women to perceive men as lions and jackals who are all out to devour them. We are all human beings. I want to point out that such abuse against women comes at a time when the nation is affected by the national crises of HIV/AIDS where women and children are needed to care for the sick in their different families. This is worrying because most of the time men need women to take care of them when they are sick," she said.

Approximately 400 people attended the ceremony including women's regiments and children from the Lubombo region and surrounding areas. The women regiments, "Lutsango Lwaka Ngwane" performed traditional dances and songs about the difficulties women and children face as a result of the HIV/ AIDS pandemic.

Chief Mdlaka Gamedze who spoke on behalf of the chiefs in the Lubombo region said Swazi chiefs were disturbed by the continued abuse of women and children. "We are also worried about the increasing numbers of orphaned children as a result of the HIV/ AIDS pandemic. These children suffer a double blow, they have lost their parents and they now they are abandoned by their biological relatives to suffer," said the visibly upset chief.

The chief highlighted the increased risk that children orphaned by HIV/AIDS faced as they were also vulnerable to rape and incest. Chief Mdlaka committed Swazi chiefs to the fight against the HIV/ AIDS. Evidence of this commitment he said was the Lubombo chiefs' allocation of land towards the Maize Farming Project.

The project was initiated by the Swazi government through the National Emergency Response Committee on HIV/AIDS and works to provide to children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS with food. There are approximately 70, 000 children in Swaziland who have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS.



Photo: UNDP

The Swazi Minister for Health and Social Welfare Chief Sipho Shongwe, UNDP Resident Representative Chiwe Dike, Chinese Ambasaddor Jin-gou Chang and UNICEF Representative, Alan Brody attended the event.

"Men seek to dominate women and girls for their own pleasures and use customs, law and religion to justify and impose that dominance. They demand rights and privileges, but ignore the responsibilities that go with them," noted Brody. He observed that multiple partners, forced sex, and the failure of men to take responsibility for their behaviours have contributed towards the spread of HIV in Swaziland.

"Men are quick to blame women for promiscuity, but how can this be otherwise when men believe they have right to multiple partners?" he asked. He argued that if large numbers of powerful men were often in pursuit of and obtained sex, then it followed that there were equally large numbers of women who were engaging in sex with them.

Brody said that had HIV been an issue in Swaziland a few hundred years ago, it would not have spread with such rapidity. According to him, before the era of King Mswati II, Swazi's circumcised young boys were taught to respect the virginity of girls and the institution of marriage by adult men.

He said that while the umcwasho tradition that was resuscitated a few years ago was a vestige of these ideas and values, taking on the symbols of tradition mean nothing if men do not respect them.

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My story

The new foot soldiers: men against gender violence

Veli Nsibande writes about his work with rehabilitated perpetrators of violence. He says that it is important for men to know that they can change and that there is support for them to do so.

I sometimes wonder how different my life would have been had I not chosen social work as a career. Would I see the world in the same way that I do today? Would I appreciate the multiplying effect of positive change in men's attitudes? Would I have had the opportunity to work with and meet the many men who have accepted responsibility for their behaviour and are working towards changing their lives and communities? I wonder…

I work as a senior social worker and also coordinator of the Men's Project at Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training – or ADAPT as it's known to many. The ADAPT Men's Project works to end men's violent behaviour towards women, children and other men and encourages them to take responsibility for their violence and develop alternative ways of dealing with conflict.

Part of my work involves working with perpetrators of gender-based violence. I believe that my work with this group of men has provided me with the opportunity to gain insight into the complexity of gender violence in South Africa and made me see the importance of providing support to men who want to change their behaviours.

Many people have asked me: "Why care about the perpetrators of gender violence when they have committed such terrible acts and are the problem?" My response is that we need to involve perpetrators in finding solutions. If these men are part of the problem, why can't they be part of the solution? Changing one's behaviour – for anyone, is a difficult challenge. It is especially difficult when that particular behaviour is all that one knows. Compounding the problem for many men is the belief that it is "manly" to be violent.



Veli Nsibande (centre) *Photo: ADAPT*

ADAPT works with men on a number of different projects including a project around men in prisons, the Men's Forum, and as well as a project that is centred on taverns and shebeens. From my work with the men involved in these projects, I have realised that there are many men who are willing to and in fact have the desire to change their ways of being. In fact, some of the men in the groups with which I work have become foot soldiers – spreading the messages of non-violence within families, homes and communities.

Most of these men have seen first hand how violence destroys lives – and affects both the survivors and perpetrators in damaging ways. They have made the realisation that they do not have to be violent to be considered manly; that 'real men' do not abuse women; that lifting one's fists against those they claim to love is not ok.

It is not an easy path to follow. Many men have spoken about how they are perceived by their friends and community when they try to change. They are called "sissies" and "weak" and told that they are not real men. Their struggle to be better men happens on a daily basis through the choices that they make and the actions they choose not to take.

It is for this reason that projects like the Men's Project are important. They provide the space for men to share their experiences, to get support from each other, and to work together towards making their homes and communities safer spaces.

Veli S Nsibande is a senior social worker and coordinator of the Men's Project at Agisanang Domestic Violence Prevention and Training (ADAPT). He can be reached at adapt@worldonline.co.za

The outsiders within: lesbian women and gender violence

By Ian Swartz

The woman that I see sitting on a trolley in an overcrowded passage of the Central Hospital in Windhoek is not the same youthful and vivacious person I had a conversation with two days ago. This woman is swollen and bruised and covered in blood; she looks much older and defeated by life.

There is no family to support her and in these dimly lit corridors sympathy is scarce. There certainly is not enough of it for her to receive any and even if there was, she does not deserve any compassion. She is after all a lesbian.

What makes the story of Sophie* different from the many that we hear is that her family, the very people she thought would protect her, were responsible for the violence she experienced.

She tells in a soft and broken voice about the name-calling and humiliation, about how she could hear her mother weeping outside the door, about the brutality of the assault and about the fact that the two men who raped her are people she had known all her life. They are the cousins whom she grew up with, the people she thought would shelter her. This was all done to "cure" her, to show her the way and introduce her to the bliss and normality of heterosexuality. And of course, although the family would want those who know to believe that their reasons were entirely unselfish, Sophie being 'healed' would safe them from the extreme embarrassment of having a lesbian daughter.

Despite the viciousness and the unusual circumstances around this assault, Sophie's name will not appear on posters when outraged members of the community march the streets of Windhoek, they will not demand justice on her behalf, and gender activists will not cite her ordeal in their strongly worded statements. If she is lucky a staff member of The Rainbow Project, Namibia's national gay and lesbian organisation, or someone from Sister Namibia, a Namibian feminist organisation, will form part of the programme and consequently the audience will get to know the she too survived violence, and they will learn that she was battered and raped because she is lesbian.

A few questions need to be asked: in a time when we investigate, analyse and hypothesise gender violence, in a time when we can, do and must condemn the actions of those who perpetrate these acts of violence, why are gender activists and feminists so slow in taking up the issue of violence towards lesbian and bisexual women?

Why does this issue not form part of the agendas of the numerous meetings held to discuss violence in Namibia and particularly the violence towards women? Why are lesbians not welcomed into the sisterhood that campaigns and strategies against this vice that has destroyed the lives of so many women?

We also need to ask if we could ever fully understand the crisis of gender violence if we do not keep in mind the particular vulnerabilities lesbian woman have as a social grouping. Do we truly comprehend that pushing them to the fringes of our society increase their chances of becoming victims of violence and thus perpetuates the very problem?

Even amid the outsiders a hierarchy exists and the woman who is attracted to those of the same sex finds herself right at the bottom of this pecking order. With the condemnation from the influential and elected, many of those who maltreat and brutalise women deem their behaviour acceptable and in the case of lesbians, even endorsed and encouraged.

The fact that support structures such as the police and the women and child abuse centres are sluggish and even unwilling to respond, reinforces this perception.

Gender activists and feminists who defend the rights of lesbians are themselves implicated, discredited and silenced. In Namibia that would in all probability mean the end of a livelihood. Rosa Namises, a Member of Parliament representing an opposition party, experienced this firsthand soon after questioning a call from the Minister of Home Affairs on the Namibian police to "eliminate gays and lesbians from the face of Namibia." She was branded a lesbian.



Photo: The Rainbow Project

Lesbians, by their nature, challenge the norm heterosexism imposes on society. Embedded in the heterosexist existence is the institution of marriage. From birth the girl child is guided towards matrimony. Through everyday conditioning it is seen as a desired situation and a purpose. Love, power, convenience, security, morality, procreation and civil rights are all integrated in this authoritative convention.

Marriage delineates the successful woman; it defines what for many becomes the most meaningful part of their lives.

The lesbian who is seen as rejecting this base falls outside our frame of reference and becomes an anomaly.

This perceived abnormality is seen by many as a threat to the quintessence of humankind and therefore not deserving of our tolerance or acceptance. Lesbian women thus do not enjoy the same protection as their heterosexual sisters and the violence directed towards them is often not considered with the same outrage.

Like in many African settings, womanhood in Namibia is also partly defined by the ability to procreate. Becoming a mother is another objective the successful woman should strive towards. Choosing not to have children is seen as adverse behaviour, abnormal.

The misconception exists that lesbians, because they do not desire men in their lives, consequently also do not want children. They are seen as denying that which is and comes naturally and therefore stand accused of not contributing to the all important process of nation building.

Though many lesbians in Namibia experience motherhood, the perception that this is not the case exists – another reason why lesbians are not seen as "real" women and therefore do not have the protection that heterosexual women enjoy.

Like his brothers in many African settings, the modern Namibian male appears to have an identity crisis. With gender roles constantly being challenged and changing, the character of our patriarchal system which for so long governed our society and defined manliness, is questioned. With social challenges such as poverty, unemployment and HIV altering the shape of our worlds, power relations too are transformed. Modern man has to redefine his position as the simplistic role of protector and provider becomes obsolete.



Photo: The Rainbow Project

The blurring of gender roles and absence of guiding principles direct the modern African male to something women are all too familiar with - a sense of disempowerment. To maintain the conventional hegemony men often force the submission of women through violence. The more vulnerable a woman is, the greater her chances of becoming the target of such acts of aggression. Lesbians further challenge masculinity by purging men from what has long been their sacred domain – the bedroom. This perceived act of defiance is often counteracted with violence.

In Namibia the research done on the impact of gender violence on the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities is insufficient.

Lesbian specific study is nonexistent and with the exceedingly limited definition of gender relations by leading institutions such as the Multi-Disciplinary Research Centre at the University of Namibia, is likely to remain so for some time to come.

The Head of Gender Research has publicly described gender relations as that between a man and a woman. Power dynamics between two women or two men fall outside the strictly male-female discourse and therefore cannot be accepted as the focus of an investigation. Though grants are regularly awarded to students doing gender research, the examination of homo-sexuality in Namibian society continues to be an unsupported domain.

As for Sophie, she will probably find the support and acceptance she so desperately needs amongst members of the LGBT communities in Windhoek. In an encouraging environment she will hopefully find her voice and add it to the few courageous lesbian women who exact their human rights. Like most others in her position she chose not to press charges and now has limited contact with her family.

Organisations such as The Rainbow Project and Sister Namibia will continue advocating for change. We remain hopeful that Namibia will one day be a country in which gender violence is not tolerated – against anyone.

*Not her real name

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Sexual violence in schools: does anybody *really* care?

By Relebohile Moletsane

Relebohile Moletsane writes that society's response to high levels of sexual violence against girls in schools has been inadequate as their rights to education, safety and freedom continue to be compromised.

If we accept that the social identities of individuals and groups do not suddenly materialise in adulthood, but are constructed from birth, then we ought to take seriously, the experiences of girls in and around our nation's schools. For example, it is now common knowledge that young children in contemporary South Africa, particularly girls from marginalised communities experience their childhoods and girlhoods amid gender-based sexual violence and other forms of brutality.

While it is true that children are sometimes perpetrators of such violence against their peers and adults, most of them, particularly girls, are victims. More disturbing are research findings which indicate that while schools should be safe havens for all children, many of them, by their silence, or the inadequacy of the actions they take against perpetrators, tend to communicate a high degree of tolerance for these acts of violence. This means that the reality of schooling for many children, particularly girls and other socially marginalised individuals and groups is marked by frequent acts of violence against them, including sexual violence.

Thus far, the ineptitude of our responses as citizens, schools, and other social institutions is not only astounding but also has a devastating effect on our society and its children. Our periodic declarations that "we care" and annual rituals of pledging our undying support for such initiatives as the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence Without significantly changing the lives of women generally, and that of girl children in schools in particular, remain meaningless slogans.

Why, for example, is there no strong and enforceable legislation against teachers and other adults who mete out acts of sexual harassment and violence against girls in and around schools? Why are parents, who because of poverty, are coerced into consenting to their daughters' violation through bribes by perpetrators not provided with alternatives that will benefit their children?

Why are schools allowed to continue to excuse and condone boys' aggression against girls as "boys will be boys"? Where are the vital professional development projects that must educate teachers to equip them with the necessary understanding, values and skills to intervene on behalf of girls who continue to be sexually violated 10 years into our beautiful democracy? Where are the community development projects? The list of questions is endless.

On the one hand, South Africa has enthusiastically ratified the various international human rights conventions, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and adopted a constitution and Bill of Rights that commit the government to protecting children's rights. On the other, the lack of, or ineffectual interventions against sexual violence in schools is not only detrimental to the girls themselves, but it counteracts the very values and principles enshrined in these conventions and our Constitution. In particular, girls' rights to education, safety, freedom, and others are compromised.

Further, it is self evident that any type of violence will result in trauma for the victim. For schoolgirls, such trauma might result in poor engagement in learning activities, and ultimately failure. Sexual violence in particular, has devastating effects on the personal, social and school life of the girl child. These might include unplanned and unwanted pregnancy, which in turn often lead to the punishment of the very victim of the violent act through her exclusion or withdrawal from school. Sexual violence also results in emotional turmoil for the victim and her family, and in further problems for schooling and learning. To illustrate, in a writing project organised under the auspices of then University of Natal's Crime Reduction in Schools Project one of the girls wrote:

"I remember a couple of weeks ago I read about a 14 year old girl who had been raped by several men and I also remember how scared I felt because I am almost the same age as her. What if that had been me? Before I read the story I used to walk to the shop without worry, but now I am terrified to walk alone."



What kind of society do we live in if children are afraid to go to school?

Photo: Trevor Davies

What kind of society are we where little girls are afraid to go about what is supposed to be their daily routine of being children and girls? Why do we continue to support or fail to act against schools that further victimise girls and are silent and/or condone the violent sexual acts perpetrated against girl children? How can girls even be expected to go to school and succeed in such schools and beyond?

Another direct and devastating impact of sexual violence against girls in and around schools are the increasing gendered HIV infection rates among children of school-going age. For example, research findings have concluded that one-third of all HIV infections happen during the school years, while another third occur within two years of leaving school. Many of these have been found to occur among girls from poor and marginalised groups.

Scholars and practitioners in the field of gender equality in education have suggested that one reason for the high infection rates among school children is the unequal gender relations among adolescents, which are often defined by violence, including rape and assaults by classmates. That such violence and infection will lead to poor performance in school and ultimately failure and withdrawal from school must be obvious to many. However, the ways in which the education system and others can intervene on behalf of victims of violence on the one hand, and implement programmes that aim to eliminate the potential for boys and men to become perpetrators of such violence remain elusive.

Unless somebody out there really cares, after this year's Sixteen Days of Activism Campaign, we will again go our separate ways, and once more the sexual violence against women in general, and against girl children in and around our schools in particular, and its destructive impacts will continue unabated.

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The truth 'hangs down like a dirty petticoat'!

By Everjoice J.Win

Everjoice J Win points out the contradictions of the theme for World AIDS Day in 2004, "Did you hear me today?" When, if ever have poor women's voices counted, she asks?

I love international days of this and that. They are such grand occasions for leaders to remember some long forgotten agenda. Take for example World AIDS Day.

The charitable among us hope that occasions such as World AIDS day are a sign of things to come. The cynical like me, gnash our teeth as we see the insincere, the hypocritical and the "couldn't-care-less-on-a-good-day-types" abuse the spaces that are created.

Focusing on women and girls the slogan "Did you hear me today?" (the theme in 2004) was fertile ground for a host of Presidents, Ministers and others with power to pay lip service once again.

The UN Secretary General's envoy, Steven Lewis, God bless his soul, has tried his best to raise awareness of governments about what HIV means to women. From the simple fact that women are more vulnerable to infection, to the reality that we are virtually "conscripted" labour when it comes to home-based care, he has used everything from cajoling language to outrageously sounding right-wing lingo.

My favourite was his assertion at the Bangkok conference in July 2004 that if only African governments knew the kinds of problems women have, they would be "howling from the roof-tops." With all due respect to Mr Lewis, nobody is going to howl from any place. There may have been audible noise on World AIDS Day from many quarters, but beyond this day, if you hear much more than a squeak, we as women will be extremely lucky.

There are many reasons why our heads of state and government are not outraged. Let's start with a basic truth: women are not really autonomous human beings with feelings, rights and therefore entitlements. So when we come up with slogans like "Did you hear me today?" already there is a problem.

Asking "did you hear me today?" assumes the woman has a right to speak to begin with. Can anybody remind me of instances where women's voices have mattered? In the family, so-called "heads of households" views are what matter. Religious leaders remind us about this every time we go to prayers. The media hardly quotes opinions of nobodies – like women and girls, unless they have done something extraordinary. Researchers tell us that our experiences are "anecdotal evidence", meaning they are less valid. Once the question is asked, "but is this scientifically proven?" we are silent and silenced. Not daring to speak up again.

Lofty and passionate speeches came from leaders telling us to change our behaviours and protect ourselves from HIV. Good idea. If only we could be protected from the leaders' behaviour, that would be even better. Young women in Swaziland need to be protected from their monarch who lines them up each year for a free peep show.

If only our leaders would stop testing young women for virginity and exposing them to predators who are looking for virgins to cure their HIV. And oh really, if only all our Presidents and Ministers stuck to their first or only wives – wouldn't that be something to talk about during the 365 days we should be howling to stop the spread of HIV?

Once again, we blindly celebrated women's burdens of home-based care as a reflection of our African resilience and resourcefulness. Poor rural women walk up to five kilometres each day, taking care of sick community members. In some cases they have to give them their own meagre provisions. All of this without much support from anyone. The occasional NGO will train them in home care, dish out more bars of soap, and once in a blue moon give a little financial token of appreciation.

Ask those of us who have never stood at a bus stop for two minutes to do what these women do and see how we wilt in the sun. Ask us to just sit in a doctor's room for 15 minutes and the nurse will not hear the end of it – no way to treat people like us, you think we have time to waste. But village-women, ah, those have a lot of staying power. They persevere against all odds. And when they are done caring for everyone, nobody is there to care for them.

Well, the banners have come down and the media has moved already to the next flavour of the week. And, international donors and governments will still continue with their 1970s gospel in Africa of "less government", and more privatisation. AIDS is not going to change macro economic orthodoxy, simply because some nameless and faceless women are having problems.

All of these issues are not really new, nor is there a dearth of research or women's voices. The problem is the world and its leadership does not want to listen, because it is not convenient to change the "natural" order of things that we have created.

The good thing about HIV/AIDS is that no matter how much one can speak with a forked tongue, the truth is always hanging down like a dirty petticoat. There was probably collective laughter when some well known philanderers stood up to tell us all about safe sex.

Young girls tittered into their bras watching the local sugar-daddies delivering the Secretary General's speech with earnest faces. There was serious ga ga ga, and slapping of each others' palms at the water well when the village women deconstructed those insincere speeches from women in leadership who normally don't believe in this "women's rights business."

But maybe one should not be so cynical. Be grateful for small mercies, my Methodist upbringing reminds me. It is good for women's rights to be finally "discovered". Even if the discovery is a century late, and billions of dollars short.

Everjoice J. Win is the International Women's Rights Coordinator at Action Aid. She writes in her personal capacity. This article is part of the GEM Commentary Service.

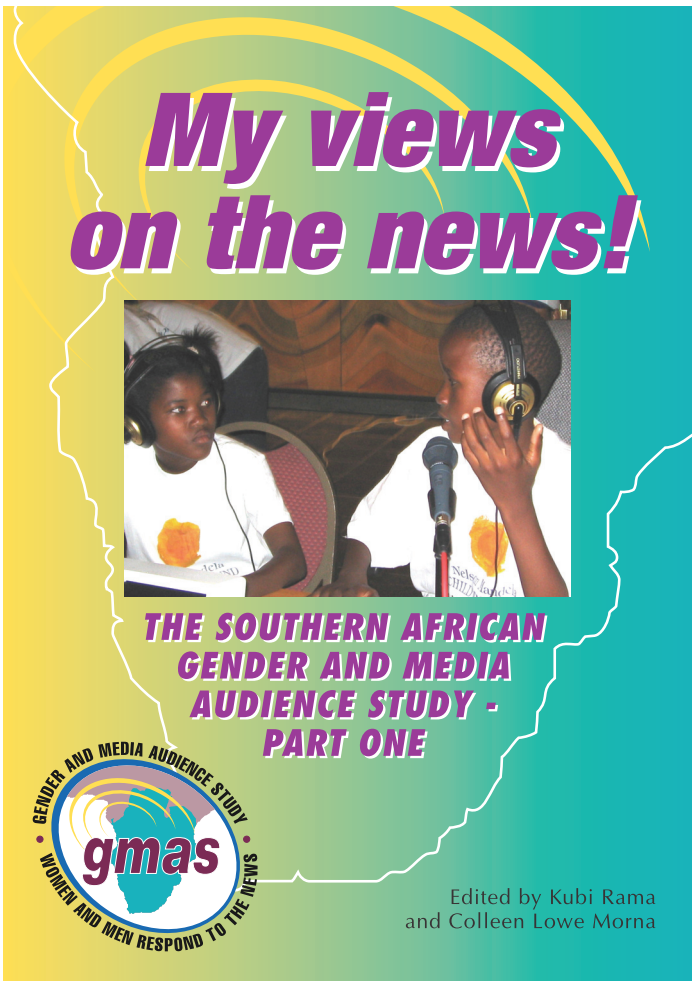
Audiences make their voice count

By Colleen Lowe Morna

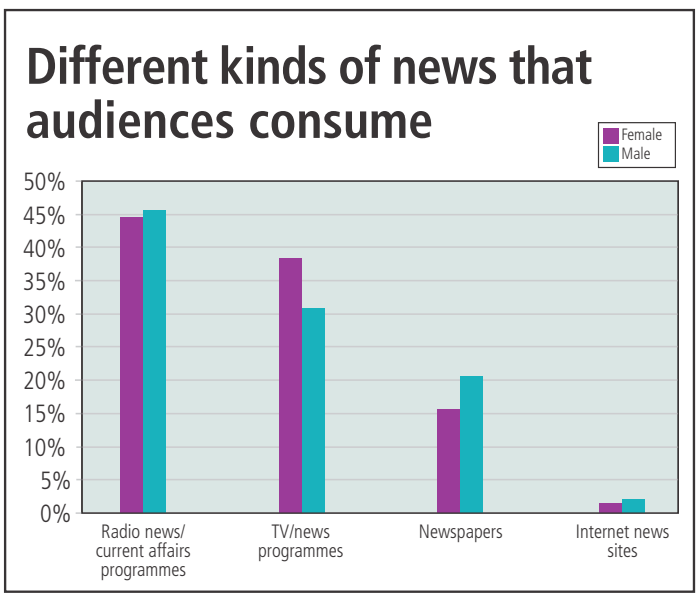
"In most cases, men are the 'highlights' in the news, on almost anything. Men's issues don't go unnoticed, but they would rather talk about women spreading AIDS. Social, economic and political issues in today's world should be in the interest of the world that is seemingly equal."

This insight, from a respondent in the Botswana Gender and Media Audience Study (GMAS) is at the heart of both the reasons for, and the findings of this study. A follow up to the Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS) that found that women in Southern Africa represent a mere 17 percent of news sources and are portrayed in limited roles (most often, either as victims or as sex objects), the GMAS set out to discover how audiences perceive these imbalances and biases - or whether they perceive them at all.

Discovery is the operative term. Although this first phase of the study covered only six countries, the desk top research showed that there is barely any data, let alone qualitative research on news consumers in Southern Africa. The research that exists, primarily in South Africa, is targeted at advertisers, who need to know who is reading, hearing or watching what, and where, so that they can target their wares more appropriately. This has little to do with who is reading, hearing or watching what and why, which would inform both marketing and editorial policies. The central question in this study, of whether there are similarities or differences in the way in which women and men interact with the news, has barely been a consideration.



In this respect, it is fair to claim that the research is ground-breaking, both in so far as it presents the first comprehensive set of data on news consumption patterns and preferences generally, and on the gendered dimensions of these specifically.



But what did the discovery reveal? In a nutshell, it confirmed much of what we may have guessed to be the case about news consumption generally, though it is also a reminder that nothing should ever be taken for granted.

So for example, the study found that in the more affluent countries, television is fast taking over from radio as the main source of news.

Yet Mauritius is the most affluent of the six countries studied, and there radio is still the main source of news.

The study confirms the global finding that more men than women rely on newspapers for the news. Yet in Namibia the opposite is true! It also reflects the digital and gender divide in the finding that only tiny proportions of audiences, and even tinier proportions of women, get their news from the Internet. Yet in Mauritius, one of the most socially conservative countries in the region, more women than men said that they rely on the Internet as their main source of news!

Do audiences perceive the gender gaps and biases that the GMBS, which monitored actual editorial content, unequivocally revealed? Yes and no. When asked if the news reflects the concerns of women and men equally, or whether the views of women are consulted often or seldom, audiences had a mixed set of responses.

These often suggested that most audiences have not consciously thought about what a "source" is or where news comes from. But the comments made in conversation, like the one quoted at the beginning of this article, revealed a fairly high degree of awareness if not on the level of gender imbalance in the news, then on the high degree of gender bias in the news.

Indeed, audience perceptions of the roles in which women and men are most frequently portrayed closely mirrored the findings of the GMBS. And among the most clear cut findings in the study are those that relate to what audiences, especially women, would like to see more of, such as women in more diverse roles, as leaders, experts, in business etc; and men, as parents, care givers and in non-traditional roles.

The other unequivocal finding, across all six countries, is that audiences either feel uncomfortable with, or are insulted by sexual images in the news. Contrary to the line that has perpetually been pushed by the media industry, these images apparently do not prompt audiences to rush out and buy the news.

This is likely to be one of the more contentious findings of the study. As we have experienced whenever commercial interests feel threatened, there are likely to be those who brush the findings aside on the grounds that audiences said what they thought researchers wanted to hear.

Anyone who reads through the methodology and process sections of the full report will realise that such an argument has little merit. The research was undertaken primarily with academic institutions and designed by experts in the field of audience research. Samples included a broad cross section of respondents from different geographical locations most of whom had probably never heard of the GMBS or the gender advocacy that surrounded it. Students, male and female, conducted the research.

More important, the key messages in this research are not about limiting market opportunities, but about expanding them. As the architects of the study explain, the GMAS attempted to combine administrative research, that is concerned with increased audience ratings with critical research (the politics of representation, issues of social power and inequality) to see if in fact there is a coincidence of interests.

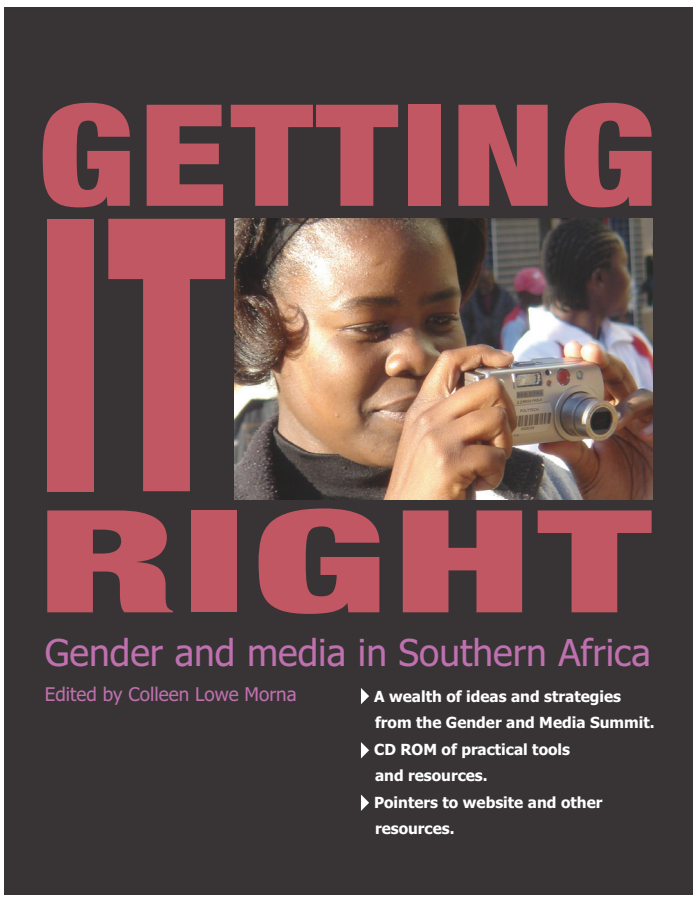
In simple terms: imagine if the media woke up to the fact that 52 percent of all audiences or potential audiences are women. Imagine if the media woke up to the fact that actually the majority of women don't find sexual images of women attractive and feel belittled by being perpetually portrayed, as women, in this way. If the media woke up to the fact that women in our society come in as many glorious shapes and forms and with as many diverse views as men. Imagine if the media woke up to the fact that while men rate sports and politics as the topics of greatest interest to them women rate social issues and HIV/AIDS as the topics of greatest interest to them.

In any truly democratic society, audiences should be the primary shapers of news. What this study tells us is that up to now, few have bothered to listen. Democracy for the people, by the people, demands that news should also be for the people by the people: men and women. May the GMAS be a wake up call, for all of us who work, as the GEMSA slogan puts it, "to make every voice count, and count that it does."

Colleen Lowe Morna is director of Gender Links, Chair of GEMSA and co-editor of the GMAS with GL deputy director Kubi Rama. More information on the report can be obtained from kubi@genderlinks.org.za

New publications

Getting it Right:
Gender and Media in Southern Africa
Edited by Colleen Lowe Morna



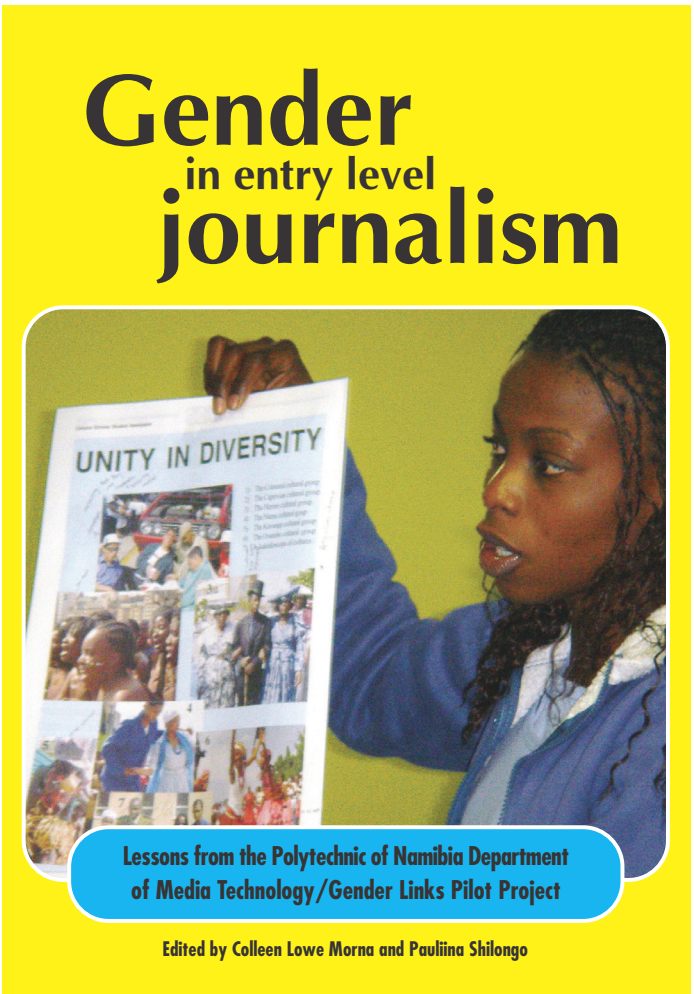
This book is a compilation of the ideas, strategies and tools shared at the historic Southern Africa Gender and Media Summit which brought together 184 gender and media activists from across the region. Over 50 experts and practitioners from across the region have contributed to the rich insights and examples that stand as testimony to the groundswell of support for a media that is more representative of and responsive to the women and men of Southern Africa.

This resource is targeted at all those who have a role to play in promoting gender equality in and through the media including media decision-makers, practitioners, trainers, regulators, collaborators and analysts. It includes a CD-Rom which, in addition to the case studies provided in the book, allows users to access actual artefacts, tools and outputs that are described.

Gender in Entry Level Journalism:
Lessons from the Polytechnic of Namiba Department of Media Technology / Gender Links Pilot Project
Edited by Colleen Lowe Morna and Pauliina Shilongo

This primer documents one of the most far-reaching efforts to mainstream gender in media education in Southern Africa and possibly even further afield. Targeting media training institutions, it describes strategies adopted, steps taken and lessons learned during a pilot project to mainstream gender into entry level journalism education at the Department of Media Technology, Polytechnic of Namibia. Its aim is to inspire other training institutions to adapt and apply similar processes.

It is brought to life by the anecdotes and examples as told by students in their own words and is full of examples of story values, choices and presentation that make for more thought-provoking, balanced and professional journalists. It is intended as a reflection of lessons learned internally and as a practical tool for trainers.



Network News

GEMSA
Gender and Media Southern Africa

Exco and committee meetings

Although the New Year has just started, it feels like the old year already. On 1 February, the GEMSA Executive Committee met ahead of a Media Partners Consultation (see Media Watch) to refine GEMSA's Programme of Action, and then had a teleconference with the steering committee. Many members of this committee also participated in the Media Partners Consultation.

What do networks do well?

In seeking to prioritise activities for 2005, the GEMSA Exco listed the kinds of activities that a Network – as opposed to other kinds of organisational structure – is best placed to conduct. These included:

- Advocacy and campaigns.
- Activist research, such as monitoring.
- Raising alerts and exerting political pressure through the enormous power of the media that GEMSA is closely linked to.
- Conducting audits of performance by national governments in relation to regional and international commitments, such as the audit of the SADC Addendum on the Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children.
- Networking theme groups within the bigger network (e.g. trainers).
- Sharing of information and best practices.

Priorities for 2005

Against this background, Exco prioritised the following activities for 2005:

- Advocacy and campaigns: The Beijing Plus Ten Review from 28 February to 11 March, including International Women's Day; World Press Freedom Day on 3 May (which will be used to launch the Gender and Media Audience Research, where this has taken place); the African Protocol on the Rights of Women (ongoing) and the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence Campaign in 2005. GEMSA has also given its backing to the SADC Civil Society Initiative as a way of calling on leaders to account for progress in achieving the target of 30 percent women in all areas of decision-making by 2005.
- Research and monitoring: The main focus this year will be the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) in February that is being coordinated regionally by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), with technical support globally by the Media Monitoring Project (MMP): both core institutional members of GEMSA.
- Training: GEMSA, in collaboration with the Southern African Media Trainers (SAMTRAN) Network is forming a Gender and Media Trainers Group that will be working together to mainstream gender in media training, drawing on experiences such as the Polytechnic of Namibia gender mainstreaming pilot project. One of the tools that trainers will seek to build on is the Virtual Resource Centre that contains case studies from the GMBS. This in turn will be a centre piece of IT training workshops that GEMSA, in partnership with Gender Links, another core institutional partner, hopes to run in all SADC member countries in 2005. These workshops will target trainers as well as GEMSA members more broadly on the use of ICTs in advocacy, networking and training on gender and the media. They will also be an opportunity to build GEMSA's membership and profile on the ground.
- Policy: In addition to working with the Southern African Editors Forum (SAEF) on HIV/AIDS and gender policies in newsrooms, GEMSA will seek this year to develop tools for analysing media laws from a gender perspective.

Membership and country level activities

At an institutional level, GEMSA hopes to soon have a coordinator in place to ensure regular communication and updating of the membership drive, which continues to gain momentum. But it is important to remember that only so much can happen at regional level. Much of the work of GEMSA Networks takes place at country level. Get in touch with your country representatives to find out how you can be involved!

What is in it for me?

Membership of GEMSA offers:

- Regular news updates on key gender and media developments in the region.
- Access to a substantial and growing database of gender and media activists.
- Information on new publications.
- The possibility of linking local initiatives to regional and international campaigns, garnering support for, and maximizing the impact of your work on the ground.
- The opportunity to participate in the biennial GEMSA general meeting which, in the tradition of the GEM Summit, will be a market place rich in ideas and examples of what works.

What can you contribute?

Your time, ideas, passion and creativity are vital to the success of GEMSA! Let us know what you think about the GEMSA Programme of Action for this year and how you might like to get involved. Make your voice count, and count that it does!

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For more information on GEMSA go to www.genderlinks.co.za.

Vision

Gender Links is committed to a Southern Africa in which women and men are able to realise their full potential and participate equally in all aspects of public and private life.

Mission

Gender Links' primary area of focus is the transformation of gender relations in and through the media by:

- Conducting research on gender disparities in the internal structures and editorial output of the media, as well as working with media institutions to develop corrective policies.
- Developing gender training materials for the media, and assisting media training institutions in applying these.
- Creating and sharing content that demonstrates how a gender perspective can be integrated into media coverage.
- Taking advantage of opportunities presented by information and communication technologies for advancing gender equality.
- Strengthening the media and communication skills of gender activists and women in decision-making.

In all its work, Gender Links strives to build strategic partnerships and networks to serve as a catalyst for gender transformation by working through existing structures.

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