



gender links for equality and justice




LEARNING JOURNEY

2014





GL Learning Journey 2014
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2014: Countdown to 2015, the deadline for the 28 targets of the SADC Gender Protocol, and the Millennium Development Goals; an eventful year for Gender Links, referred to by at least two staff as a university like no other. Each year, staff share their learning for the previous year as part of ongoing individual and organisational growth. Change is a strong theme that runs through these pages. We live in a world of breathlessly fast technological innovation that demands we move with it. GL's philosophy is one of *"Making IT work for gender justice."* So in 2014, with the support of the DFID Programme Partnership Arrangement (PPA) grant, GL undertook a range of systems upgrades: Finance, Human Resources, Monitoring and Evaluation and Website. Not all went well, especially on the financial side, where we had to re-implement a set up that did not meet the complex accounting needs of an NGO with 23 donors, about 12 different currencies, and work with over 400 institutions, each undertaking a ten stage process. This tested GL's resilience all the way up to Sage Pastel headquarters where a high level team had to place its case and demand better performance. There is seldom right and wrong in these matters; only better and worse, the ability to change when change is not working, to see the silver lining in the dark cloud, and to do even better the second time around. No pain, no gain, is another theme that runs through these pages, as is learning from mistakes. In November, GL sat on a panel at the annual BOND meeting in the UK to share how successful NGOs learn from mistakes. It was reassuring to note that we certainly are not alone in trying things that have not always worked exactly according to plan. But the margin for error in the non-profit sector is slim. The ability to take corrective action quickly and decisively is key. Problem solving and agency is the other theme that resonates in the Learning Journey. A branch may fall during a storm, but it regenerates soon after. What is important is that the roots and trunk be solid enough to remain standing. We start 2015 confident in the knowledge that the fundamentals of GL – its core values and systems – remain intact and improve all the time. This is a big year programmatically, as we reposition for the post- 2015 agenda, and internally, as GL undergoes its most extensive succession planning yet. We start the year knowing that by passing many challenging micro tests in 2014, we can withstand the even greater macro tests in 2015. ***Yes we must, and yes we can!***

Colleen Lowe Morna, CEO
April, 2015

CEO's Office

Celebrating years of honour

By Colleen Lowe Morna, CEO

> *No looking back as we are carrying on, and shall continue with a sense of pride!* ~ *GL anthem*



George Clooney's 2009 movie, *Up in the Air*, resonated with me more than ever before in 2014. I must have criss-crossed as many miles and clocked up as many days away from home as Ryan Bingham in the movie. I got to know which airports had lounges, the best coffee and showers. I learned to pack my carry-on bag just so, strictly what I would need so that I would never have to check in essentials. Like the love-stricken Bingham, my husband and I struggled to synchronise electronic diaries, forgetting some days who was where, why and for what.

The few days down on the ground should have offered some reprieve. Gender Links (GL) had its largest budget and our largest staff complement ever. We had a deputy CEO and a Director of Operations. We had invested massively in systems. Now, I thought, should be the chance to think and work strategically, as I prepared to hand over, fifteen years after building an organisation from two staff in my back yard to sixty in ten countries. Sadly, 2014, turned out to be my most challenging in this exciting journey. Just as Bingham spent his time on the ground bearing the bad news of retrenchment, my down time got sucked up with frustrating systems and human crises.

Systems failures fan the flames of human drama. "Challenges" quickly become "catastrophes" and "casualties". It's sobering how crises bring out the best and the worst in all of us. We lose our sense of perspective. Blame comes much more easily than taking responsibility. I had to caution staff on the use of words, reminding them that a "catastrophe" is when 298 people disappear in a Malaysian Airline sea crash, without a trace, never to be heard of again. I reminded them that there are diseases of poverty, like malnutrition, and diseases of plenty like obesity. While many NGOs are closing for lack of funds, GL had the luxury of suffering the temporary dislocation of state-of-the-art systems to improve our efficiency and effectiveness. Which disease would we rather have?

I recall in one moment of despair my husband, who has many years management experience in the private sector, sharing this insight: "It is human nature to forget all the good things you may have done," he said, "and fixate on that one thing you failed to do!" I did a little exercise: find all "thank you" in sent E Mail, and find all "thank you" in received E Mail for the same period. Answer: four is to one! I remembered the Biblical saying: "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Still, I could not help thinking how this proved, if ever proof were needed, that general management is a thankless job! Many nights I switched off the lights and wished they would not come on again. But the sun would shine, and my role gave me no choice but to try and shine with it.

In November, the British NGO network BOND asked me to speak on how successful NGOs turn failure into opportunity at a panel that included the new head of DFID civil society. I wondered why they had chosen me for this panel; if our funders had got wind of the challenges we were facing. Putting together this presentation with the management team proved one of the most therapeutic experiences in a traumatic year. I realised GL had been invited because every organisation, somewhere, somehow has stories like this. Borrowing a quote from our Director of Operations Mme Miso, I called our presentation "Turning broken eggs into omelettes: A view from the kitchen." I end the year knowing that despite many hiccups and false starts, we are finally running these systems, rather than the systems running us!

But all this has come at a price. Two years ago, I wrote about discovering that despite my lean diet and vigorous health routines, I suffer from high cholesterol, a slow heart killer that can be hereditary, but is exacerbated by stress. My doctor warned me to

slow down. My plans to decelerate in 2014 failed dismally, as I tried to address one challenge after the next to leave the organisation in the best shape I could. When I went for my annual health checks again in January 2015, the tests told me what I might have guessed: I had done myself no favours. My doctor put it bluntly: "You have given your heart to this job, literally and figuratively. Now you must make a choice."

Make a choice! Make a choice! Make a choice! The words reverberated in my head. My heart pounded louder, literally and figuratively. I had given my notice to the Board in August 2014, signalling a desire for the whole succession process to be over by August 2015, our countdown to the SADC Heads of State (HOS) summit. I had made the choice, now I had to execute it. There could be no more up in the air: it had to happen on the ground! Our Alliance slogan, "yes we must" had become real for me, professionally and personally. I remembered one of my Mum's (several) gems: "do what you can and can what you can't!"

As I write my last learning journey as CEO of GL, I find myself doing something else my late mother would have done: counting my blessings. I count my blessings for the love and support of family and friends; for an organisation that has grown dozens of men and women into foot soldiers of change; for the chance to make mistakes and learn from them; for the amazing chance that I have been given, the chance of a life time, as I put it to the Board, to make a difference.

In February, advisory services took the GL Services team - the manager, Mukayi Makaya, Executive Assistant Shamiso Chigorimbo, and I to East Africa to conduct a gender review of Sense International, an organisation working with the deafblind world-wide. I met, among others, Lois Ouko, a young woman who cannot see, hear or talk, but conveys her love to a visitor she cannot even see through the warmth of a hug. I came back counting my blessings for the gift of the five senses - sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch.



GL CEO Colleen Lowe Morna with Lois Ouko.

Post script to my *Up in the Air* story: A few weeks after returning from Kenya, I got an E Mail from South African Airways saying in 2015 I had been down-graded from gold to silver status. How could that be, I asked, all these miles later? I shared my frustration with Shami. In March, when I printed out my on-line boarding card for the Commission on the Status of Women meeting in New York, it read Platinum! What? I asked! *Wrong metal!* Then I checked with Shami, and found she had launched a complaint with SAA that resulted in me being upgraded to the Lamborghini status, including a business class upgrade on my return from New York. I counted my blessing for the young staff at GL, for their agency, can-do attitude, and promise for the future.

My kids tease me that many dozens of Barometers and publications later I should at least have a PHD by now. I tell them that for me this acronym stands for Permanent Home Dweller, which I hope to become, and that no university could ever confer a degree like the University of Gender Links! I look forward to wearing my graduation gown in August, and to singing the GL anthem with the relay runners who will continue this marathon:

Celebrating years of honour
We celebrate an era of great stride
No looking back as we are carrying on
And shall continue with a sense of pride!



GL Staff Choir singing the anthem! *Photo: Trevor Davies*

There are no shortcuts to success

By Mukayi Makaya, GL Services Manager

> *The difference between who you are and who you want to be is what you do. What you have to do to get to where you want to be, may not be pretty or may not come easy.* ~ *Anonymous*



It is December 2014 already! And I am thinking to myself, "Wow! (Not the GL acronym WOW aka Ways of Working). The year has really flown by." I'm so excited about 2015- as the famous Alliance slogan goes, "2015! Yes We Must! The time is NOW!" But I also need to soberly reflect on the year passed, and so I find myself taking a leisurely walk down 2014's memory lane.

It starts with excitement and high energy levels, I mean hello! I am caught up with "Happy New Year" and "Complements of the new season", and of course the "new year's resolutions" - which generally last until March. I continue to walk. There is joy, anxiety, confusion, hard work, fun, proposals, financial management, team building, deadlines, low points, sore points and high points as I stroll down 'Lane 2014'. What a year it has been!

"There are no secrets to success. It is the best of preparation, hard work and learning from failure." The words of Colin Powell are profound and this realisation was my greatest learning curve in 2014, both personally and professionally. GL Services is one of the profit making or business units of Gender Links. As GL Services Manager I have to be highly assertive and economically ferocious, while remaining diplomatic and professional. Through the GL services Department, income is generated by providing consultancy services in gender mainstreaming training, gender auditing,

policy formulation, and gender related research. The process requires marketing these services to external clients, drawing up proposals that meet clients' needs, and then rolling out the required services.

Every assignment is different, and proposals and budgets are carefully customised and to satisfy the clients' expectations and desires. As any one with marketing and sales experience will know, 'the customer is king/queen.' And, how tough is it to satisfy a king or queen? In 2014, we saw GL Services break new ground by developing sophisticated online tools to advance programme work. The new tools included the popular Organisational Gender Scorecard (OGS) and the revised Gender Progress Score. Both these tools are used to conduct institutional gender audits and assist in gender policy formulation. The data these tools gather inform the specific areas that need attention in gender mainstreaming training assignments. Clients' feedback on these tools has been positive and encouraging. Their feedback also helps us improve the way we work, for instance the Gender Progress Score was revised and updated and now includes questions on gender identities and sexual orientation- an area that is highly contentious and sensitive, and one that Gender Links has previously shied away from.

A comment made by a client, pushed GL to review its Gender Attitudes Quiz tool, to include difficult topics including abortion, women in church leadership structures, same sex unions and adoption rights. Of course there was a backlash from SADC countries in rolling out the updated survey, particularly Zambia and Zimbabwe. These countries hold very strong views on sexual orientation and abortion. This forced GL back to the drawing board and find better ways of asking the same questions. From this experience I learnt to be adaptable and progressive. Organisations are dynamic, and the success of the GL Services Department relies largely on its ability to adapt and remain relevant. We have to be innovative and responsive to whatever is needed by our clients.

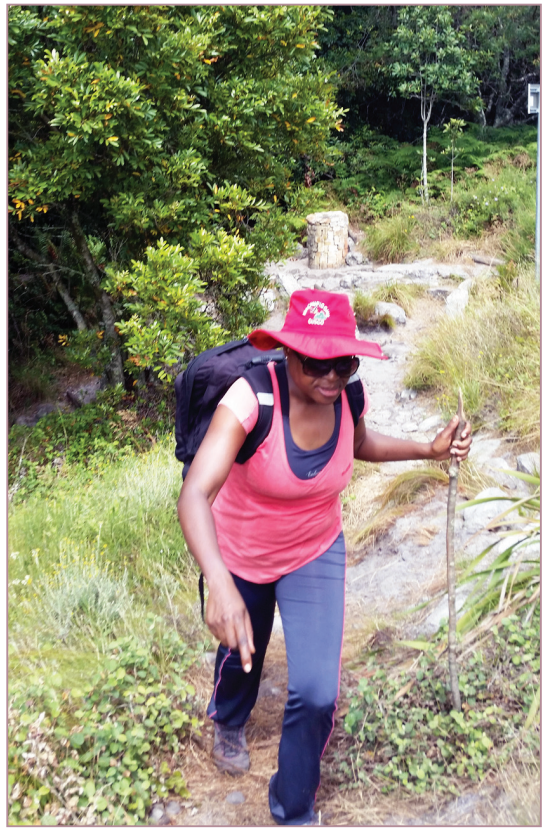
The process of developing the OGS was a challenging one, and required reviewing Gender Links' questionnaires in line with current trends and methods of gender mainstreaming. Only after serious rewriting and numerous drafts did we finalise the OGS. I had the privilege of working with the CEO, Colleen Lowe Morna, my biggest supporter and mentor. Thank you Mme Colleen, you believe in me even when I doubt

myself, you throw me in the deep end but stay right beside me to pick me up. I am forever grateful.

After finalising the OGS, I had to test, test, test, re-test and double-test the tool. I remember tempers flaring between our external consult, Mme Colleen and I. Things sometimes got ugly, but we learnt from our mistakes and all stuck it out. It may have been a long and painful process, but I now enjoy showing off the magnificent product to our clients who are always fascinated and impressed by it. The OGS development and testing process taught me the value of patience and diligence, and not giving up until you get it right. It underscored the importance of preparation- one can never prepare enough.

Of course I made judgement errors along the way. I can recall a time when I forgot to include a whole budget item in a financial proposal to a client, and had to apologise to the client and resubmit a revised budget. That error would have cost us - we would have been basically providing a free service instead of creating income. That experience taught me three key points: to own up to mistakes and take corrective actions; value the time of staff members who support GL Services; and most importantly to pay attention to detail.

As I approach the end of 2014's memory lane, I have in mind the words of the poet Carl Sandburg, "Time is the most valuable coin in your life. You and you alone will determine how that coin will be spent. Be careful that you do not let other people spend it for you." 2015, *the time is NOW! Yes I Must.* Goodbye 2014, hello 2015. Here I come!



Here I come!

Hold on to your dreams

By Shamiso F V Chigorimbo, Executive Assistant and Special Projects Officer

> *A dream does not become reality through magic. It takes sweat, determination and hard work.* ~ *Unknown*



At the end of the year, there was an office clean-up headed by GL CEO Mme Colleen. She had clear instructions on what needed to be done and by whom. As everyone at GL knows, Mme Colleen is extremely detailed and leaves no rock unturned. This is a quality I truly admire and I desire to one day become a multi-tasking person who keeps abreast of everything all at once. Along came GL Driver Clever Zulu to perform his duties in the cleaning process. I emphasised the need to get rid of all the old paper work and clean up the empty plastic container for storage. As always he got on with the programme.

Meanwhile another department, that has never had Mme Colleen involved in their publications management, was dillydallying with the packing and clean-up programme. So to help me drive the clean-up points home, I got some veterans on board and voila! What would have been a long, tiresome process, was completed. At noon, when it was inspection time, all was in place and ready for Mme Colleen's ever scrupulous eye. Gender Links sometimes reminds me of boarding school, considering how much time we spend here and how we often 'camp out' at GL during the busy periods. The yearend annual clean-up also felt a lot like cleaning up the dorm for the next bunch of children to come in the following year.

My work is largely institutional coordination, calendar and weekly planner management, publications oversight, and assisting the CEOs office with donor fundraising and tracking. On occasion, like a special needs officer, I assist with ad hoc projects that come up for the different departments. I have made mistakes, but I learn from them and don't make the same mistakes again. Mistakes have helped me find more efficient and effective ways of doing things. They have taught me the importance of thorough checking and the need for attention to detail in everything I do.

Working with GL has changed my life. It opened up doors for me to study in Ireland on a fully paid scholarship and acquire a Master's Degree. Going back to university for one year contributed immensely to my growth and learning. This enabled me to transition from procurement to GL Services work, and I'm slowly being introduced to GL's programme work. While the environment at GL can be stressful and overwhelming, it is like a 'baptism by fire', from which one learns to sink or swim.

People always say having a good mentor goes a long way, and so I appointed myself a mentor- Mme Colleen. As my mentor and boss, she has played an integral role in my growth. She is a tough professional and intellectual who thinks on her feet. The key is to learn as much as possible from her, and to dust yourself off when things do not go right.

I have learned to multi-task and to think critically. I have also learnt to maintain a positive attitude, to stand up for myself, and to know my values, because they are the core of who I am. I will use all the coordination skills I have gained to plan my lobola and wedding coming up soon- watch this space! My learning and knowledge will one day get me to the United Nations, State House and will help me achieve my goals and dreams.



Riding into the future!

Alliance and Partnerships

Beyond 2015- beyond personalities and inefficiency

By Sifiso Dube, Alliance and Partnerships Manager

> *Fingers of one hand are not of the same length, what is important is that they are rooted in the same hand.*
> *~ my mother, Matilda Dube*



"I hear Alliance is in the dog-box again. I feel for you guys," said a colleague standing in the staff kitchen one spring afternoon. Within a minute, I had subconsciously responded by saying it was due to the usual Barometer challenges. While walking back to my office, I realised that I had accepted what I would not usually accept. Like the way I know my house inside and out, I knew how to respond to every challenge at Gender Links, especially the negative ones. I realised that my mind had become immune to what other people said, and it was being kept sane by the labour of love - fighting for gender equality. It was also then that I realised I needed to plan effectively, execute timeously and delegate responsibly.

The Alliance portfolio has a heavy research and advocacy element to it. 2014 forced me to do things in a business 'unusual' manner. The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development targets come to an end in 2015 giving an opportunity for the Alliance to root its presence beyond 2015. Most donors kept asking us about the sustainability of the Alliance beyond the targets deadline. The firm answer I gave is that the Alliance is not just fighting for a time-bound Protocol, it is fighting for gender equality as a basic human right.

"We need a strategy for the review of the Protocol", Mme Colleen kept saying the last half of 2014. For me, the review of the Protocol needs the different voices of the

women on the ground, right up to the voices at the higher level of policy making. The strategy to collaborate with governments, civil society and the SADC secretariat has been met with hope for the future; a hunger to leave a mark; and the potential to create a SADC example that can be applied to the globe.

I have learnt that the success of any strategy is both flexibility to accommodate and drawing lines where necessary. The Alliance strategy to review the Protocol brings together a mixed basket of individuals and institutions who believe in gender equality but who also believe in making things happen with whatever little resources are available. The greatest lesson of all I learnt in crafting a strategy of the Protocol review, is that it is a labour of love. Without this love it is not easy to move forward. It demands commitment, commitment and more commitment!

One has to avert the phases of complacency. You may hit a brick wall on the political or funding front, but the strategy has to be viable despite politics and money. The Alliance networks have encouraged me to be patient and to accommodate diverse voices and opinions.

When some members of the Alliance wrote a letter to the SADC Chair regarding the Protocol review, all I could do was step back. I certainly learnt why the order of signatories and addressees on the letter were so important. These women of status really have several tricks up their sleeves!

On the workstation front, 2014 was a bumpy year, especially when it came to human resources. "Alliance will share a case study on human resources during the January 2015 HR training", instructed Viv with her naughty smile. HR issues will always be there, however they should not be the cause of continuous strain and one needs to draw some boundaries. I have seen my Alliance team grow in writing, programme work and in mutual support. This puts a smile on my face because the right attitude makes all the difference. Many times in 2014, Lucia and Nomthi were my pillar of strength.

The Alliance Unit staff have various strengths just like fingers have various lengths. What I have learnt is that there is a constant need to balance strengths and weaknesses to maintain a successful team. Similarly, there is no need to hide one's weaknesses, but rather one should continue to learn from others.



Sifiso looking at the lighter side of life.

A lack of this balance caused me great angst towards the end of the year, when I was told that Alliance could not go on leave due to the outstanding country Barometers. For the first time in 2014, I cried myself to sleep because of work. I blamed researchers, programme officers and anyone else I could think of. Mostly, I blamed myself for not having the foresight that the researchers may not deliver. It was in the middle of the night that I decided that I wasn't going to take a bullet for anyone else next year in 2015.

I eventually came up with a rescue plan to deliver five Barometers by Christmas 2014. However, I do not want to have a wad of rescue plans in my pocket in 2015, I want a list of proactive plans to ensure that there will be no more tears from the Alliance. Gender Links continues to be a platform for learning for me. I liken it to a processing plant where the end product is more attractive than the raw materials.

I also came to appreciate my family more in 2014. I learnt that I have to cherish every moment and I should focus on the positives and learn from the negatives. I see the value of looking after myself and drawing the line when I need to. I know that I am but one of the fingers on a hand that is directing what GL is carrying forward in a unique way. As I move forward in 2015, I know that my work has to centre around the 'f' words: family, fundraising, fun, frameworks and flexibility. I will try to listen more, and take with me the daily lessons from the GL family, my family and the Alliance family.

No pain, no gain

By Lucia Makamure, Senior Programme Officer

> *I have been bent and broken, but I hope into a better shape.* ~ *Charles Dickens*



There is a popular saying that goes, "There are two types of pain in this world: pain that hurts you and pain that changes you." I only took this saying seriously when I realised that it summed up my past year.

Previous years always started on a high note, usually accompanied by a few resolutions. They seldom make it past June, but that has never stopped me from sitting on my bed each January with my journal, to contemplate ways to make positive changes in my life.

I had big plans to make 2014 a year to remember. I looked forward to many opportunities of growth that lay ahead. Since 2012, the Alliance team has been leading Southern African initiatives for a stronger post-2015 gender equality agenda- a campaign that is very close to my heart. 2014 was our last chance to make a lot of noise to ensure governments put gender at the core of their various developmental agendas beyond the Millennium Development Goals and SADC Gender Protocol.

However, in late February - just a week before the Alliance team was to travel to New York for the annual Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) - I received news that changed my life forever. My sister-in-law was very sick and doctors were very sceptical about a full recovery. My mother and young sister travelled from Zimbabwe to see her. After seeing her, the looks on their faces confirmed all the fears which I had tried very hard to fight.

I decided to keep my sister-in-law's illness to myself, and chose not to share it with my colleagues. During the day at work, I was running around making sure everyone

got their travel tickets, accommodation and allowances. After I knocked off, I would return home to my family and we would comfort each other and pray for a miracle.

The pressure soon caught up with me. I had a workshop pack to prepare and my mind simply shut down. No matter how many times Mme Colleen explained to me what I needed to do, I just couldn't get it. I remember asking Mukayi to help with the assignment. When she came to check up on me in my office, my iron mask melted and I broke down. Nevertheless, I continued with my superwoman charade.

We proceeded to CSW. The Alliance hosted two events and I also wrote articles for the Gender Links newsletter. One of my articles even made it to the top of the shortlist of Women's Rights Caucus Communication during the CSW negotiations.

Three days after returning from New York, I fainted in the middle of a staff meeting and had to be rushed to hospital. Mum Vivien stood there with me while doctors had me plugged in to strange machines and doing various tests to find out what was wrong with me. Having her there holding my hand made a huge difference. The calls from Mme Colleen and my colleagues when I was recovering at home made me feel appreciated and valued by the Gender Links team. That was my first painful lesson: you can cheat people, emotions, even science at times, but you can never cheat your body. Always look after yourself - body, mind and soul.

This lesson carried me through to the afternoon of 5 May, when I received a call informing me that my sister-in-law had died. Life is, fortunately and unfortunately, defined by the unexpected. I gave myself time to grieve and to be there for my nieces who had lost both their mother and friend. Spending more time with them not only helped them cope with their grief, but enriched my life in a way I never would have imagined.

Just a few weeks after her burial, I found myself faced with another challenge. We had to get the 2014 SADC Gender Protocol Barometer finished in time for a 27 July launch in Harare, Zimbabwe. Mme Colleen booked the Alliance team and our honorary team member, Katherine Robinson, in at Whispering Pines for an editing retreat. We were there for ten long days to finalise the Barometer. After arriving in Magaliesburg, Mme Colleen assigned us to different roles, and I remember so well how I felt when she announced that I would be writing the Preface for the 2014 Barometer - also the

SADC Gender Alliance position paper for the post-2015 agenda. At first I was scared and thought the assignment was just above me. However, I realised that she would not have given me the assignment if she didn't believe I could do it. I don't get to say this as often as I should, but I am forever grateful for the way Mme Colleen challenges me. She sees the potential in me, which I often fail to see myself.

Having Sifiso, Nomthi and Kath in the house, sharing thoughts and fears helped me push through and go beyond my boundaries. Despite the long working hours the experience brought us closer together. It also revealed things about myself I had never noticed before. At the end of it we produced our best Barometer in record time, and it is the second Barometer with my name on the cover.

In November, just six months after losing their mother, both my nieces displayed their tenacity by excelling in their studies and receiving top honours at their school's prize giving ceremony. One of them is now head girl at her school. This was lesson number two: sometimes it's necessary to break into a million pieces in order to rebuild yourself into something more beautiful and stronger.

Growing up, we are taught to believe that winning is everything. So after finding out that my laptop got damaged while in the care of the IT officer, I swore that I was going to ensure justice prevailed. According the Gender Links Policies and Regulations, I was not liable for the damage. At some point I had two senior members of staff embroiled in my fight for 'justice'.

In the end I didn't win and that's when I learnt my third lesson: You do not have to win every battle, sometimes the lessons in your loss are the ultimate prize. This also made me think of Maya Angelou's famous words, "When you know better, do better." Moving forward in 2015, I will make sure I am fully informed on everything I sign up for not only at Gender Links but in life in general.



Lucia Makamure at the launch of the 2015 Barometer.

Some battles are worth fighting, others are not yours to fight

By Nomthandazo Mankazana, South Africa Alliance Coordinator

> *You can't start the next chapter of your life if you keep re-reading the last one. Turn the page and start writing on the pages that have been purposely left blank for you to fill.* ~ *Unknown*



Where does one begin to write when so much has happened in just one year? Trying to balance work and personal life can be like the film business - you either produce the movie or you're just a spectator. In 2014 I chose to play an active part in the movie in which I am the star. It has neither been difficult nor easy, but the end of the year has never really bought good fortune my way.

As the South Africa Alliance Coordinator my duties include coordinating the regional Alliance structure to form a country network and strengthening the partnerships that the Secretariat and Gender Links have fostered with institutions such as South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID) - South Africa focal network. They gave me support during the provincial workshops and dialogues. During the past year, I also worked closely with the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE). I was so sad that we couldn't host our very first South Africa SADC Gender Protocol@Work Summit with them, but the show still went on.

My year started off with summit mobilisation meetings in all the nine provinces. Luckily I did not have to travel to all nine provinces because my colleagues Susan and Ntombi helped to cover some of the provinces. We collected case studies in all the provinces and held a very successful SA summit. The South Africa team is indeed a dream team and I know that we will only go from strength to strength, helping to lighten each other's load. I have a sister at Gender Links, and she had a baby this year. Sinaye Mbadlanyana has been a blessing in Ntombi's life and to the GL family at HQ, since baby Ayanda has grown into a young little Miss. I can't wait for the babies to keep coming.

As I grow in the Alliance, I am thankful for the faith and patience that my manager Sifiso constantly shows me, even when I have given up on myself. She has taught me that perseverance pays off. I can attest to that after being on the Barometer team that spent ten full days in Magaliesburg writing, editing, proofreading and walking to get it published in time. I remember like it was just yesterday- we unpacked the groceries, chose our rooms and sat down to work. Seeing other team members push themselves to the limit helped me push myself just as hard.

The first few days we loved it. We woke up in high spirits and got down to business. In the late afternoon we went on walks to revitalise our bodies and minds. But, walking at Katherine and Mme Colleen's pace is just a no-no especially with the long distances they cover. CLM was happy that we were all daytime vegetarians, although at night most of us got our meat fix.

When day seven came all I wanted was to go home. Our leader, Mme Colleen convinced us to stay just a few more days. We moved out of our house on the hill into chalets only to move back into the house again. Who does that? - Only hard working and dedicated staff! We were so tired, after working longs hours every day, but we also managed to have fun and relax with a massage on the last day of Barometer boot camp. That period taught me how to be a part of a cycle that needs to keep moving, because when one link breaks, the whole cycle is broken.



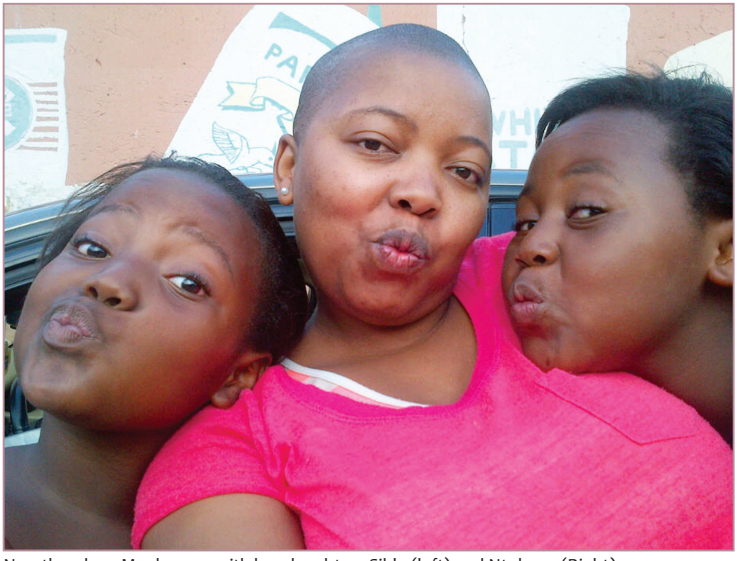
Barometer boot camp.

Sometimes in life in order to measure your worth in a team, you look both at the people you work with and the projects you completed. 2014 was a wonderful year. Mistakes were made and many lessons were. Nothing satisfies me more than having my name on both the 2014 regional and South Africa Barometers- a sweet deal and I am proud of the journey thus far.

The Barometer period was not easy especially because of my family issues I was dealing with at the time. The end of 2014 brought emotional turmoil. For the first time I admitted that I come from an abusive family. I am a survivor of gender violence, and so is my mother. If I don't speak about now then I have no business working for Gender Links where I encourage people on a daily basis to never accept any form of abuse and to speak out. I've actually lost count of the number of court cases I attended and the number of times I had to drive home in the middle of the night because something had happened. I reached breaking point in 2014. I even tendered my resignation and then after some thought, my retraction. We do not always get second chances in life, but sometimes irrational decisions help you learn and actually bring back rationality.

The one thing that I have come to learn is that some battles are worth fighting, others are not yours to fight, sometimes you need to let the giants do the fighting.

I will always be thankful for the lighter moments in my life, many of which I spend with my daughters (my late partner Nomthandazo Mdluli's daughters). Because of them I know what it means to be rock solid, even when throwing in the towel seems like the only option. With them in my life I know God has a bigger purpose for us as a family, and meeting my current partner has done nothing but reaffirm that. As we count down to the 2015 SADC Gender Protocol deadline, I cannot help but count down to my wedding day!



Nomthandazo Mankazana with her daughters Sihle (left) and Ntokozo (Right).

Media and Communications

Someone call 911!

By Sikhonzile Ndlovu-Maphosa, Media and Communications Manager

> *Movement in a new direction helps find new cheese. ~ Spencer Johnson, Who Moved My Cheese?*



This quotation by Spencer Johnson aptly sums up my learning journey in 2014. I have read Johnson's book *'Who moved my cheese?'* several times during the many years I have spent at GL and it still remains relevant. This book has reminded me that a learning individual or organisation never remains in the same spot. There is always movement in a new direction if one wants to find new cheese. This movement is not always smooth, the road is full of speed humps and bumps.

There were many in 2014 that I felt I needed to call 911 - those overwhelming situations when things are not going as planned and you find yourself needing emergency services. Anne Hilton the Entrepreneurship Manager and Katherine Robinson, Communications Manager have mastered the art of calling "911!" I have enjoyed having these two queens of drama and queerness on my journey.

My work at GL involves managing the Media Programme, which seeks to support 100 media houses in the SADC region to mainstream gender in their work. I also take on responsibilities of an institutional nature, by providing support to other teams or country offices. For example, with other GL staff, the media team helps to run Gender Protocol@Work summits in the different SADC countries that GL operates. In 2014, I attended the Swaziland and Tanzania national summits. As the team leader I was responsible for giving overall guidance to the GL team, in-country partners, judges as well as participants.

I cannot even recall how many times I called 911 during the Swaziland summit. Everything that could possibly go wrong, went wrong! We never anticipated the high number of participants who would turn up on the day of the summit claiming that they had submitted their forms online. We realised that we could not turn away the eager participants who came ready to show their work. The fact that we did not entirely trust our online application system placed us in a disadvantage. Some people had copies of their entries, but some had none. As if dealing with participants was not enough, we also had judges waiting for their packs to be finalised. Then the printer cartridge ran out of ink. The Swaziland officer had to rush out and buy another one so we could continue printing. But alas, the cartridge ran out a second time! Of course we then discovered we had no contingency money for printing. The only option we had was to ask one of the local government COEs to print the additional entries for us. Thanks to the Senior Media Programme Officer, Tarisai Nyamweda, damage control was easy and she was able to work with Swaziland interns to compile the additional packs.

Despite the hiccups and drama, we ended up having a beautiful and successful summit. We forged new partnerships and had several local NGOs pledging to provide logistical support for the next summit. The entries were diverse, of high quality and there was evidence of the commitment participants have shown to ensure that gender equality becomes a reality in Swaziland. I know next time around to be better prepared. I learnt many life-long lessons from that summit.

Armed with lessons learnt from Swaziland, I was ready to take on the Tanzania summit, with Mum Vivien a.k.a 'MacGyver' and Lucia Makamure from the Alliance Department. Before we left, we had to pass by the GL offices to collect our materials. The Malawi team was also in the office fetching their summit packs. To get to the airport, we used the GL car and another hired taxi. Since we had an earlier flight, we left the Malawi team in the office and headed for the airport. We joined the long meandering check-in queue, only to discover that we had Malawi materials, and our Tanzania materials were in the hired taxi. The airport personnel called for late passengers to get priority check-in, but we couldn't since we didn't have the correct luggage. When the other car eventually arrived, we were told to pay for excess luggage. At that point we seriously contemplated leaving the box with summit bags right there in the middle of O.R Tambo International Airport. Mum Viv then agreed to sort out the excess cost, whilst we went through immigration.

Lucia and I decided to jump the queue and we gently explained to fellow travellers that our flight was boarding. We phoned Mum Viv and she was still trying to sort out the box with summit t-shirts. At that point we decided that we definitely needed to make it to Tanzania, and agreed that we could leave Mum Viv behind. We got through immigration and ran all the way to the boarding gates. Just before we got to the gates it dawned on us that Mum Viv was carrying all the money for the summit! Damned if we missed our flight, damned if we make it to Tanzania with no money to run the summit!



Sikhonzile and Vivien at the Tanzania summit.

We looked back one last time, and lo and behold - there was Mum Viv right at the end of the queue. What a relief! Trust MacGyver to get airport personnel to take her through underground short cuts to make sure she got on that plane.

The Tanzania summit was flawless thanks to lessons learnt in Swaziland. We printed all the judges' packs and programmes before we left HQ, and made better use of flash drives. As soon as we got to the hotel in Tanzania, we met with the judges, local partners and the rapporteurs to ensure that we were all on the same page. Local partners also verified all entries in advance and checked them against our packs prepared at HQ.

My year has not been all '911'. There have been times of glory and sunshine. Seeing the Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG) take off has been truly rewarding. We have certainly been reminded that our fight for gender equality in the media is not just a regional one, but a world-wide campaign that started off with Section J back in Beijing in 1995. What better way to cap 2014, than to have Gender Links chosen to chair the first ever GAMAG International Steering Committee (ISC). As we prepare for the second meeting of the GAMAG ISC at the 59th Commission on the Status of Women, it is my hope that GL's media team can soar to even greater heights.

A place in the sun

By Katherine V Robinson, Editor and Communications Manager

> *There is hope for everyone. ~ Stevie Wonder*



2014 was a wonderful and memorable year, far less unlucky than the 'thirteeness' of yesteryear. The staff acronyms? - I could wax lyrical! In GL's deep end, I no longer felt as though I was drowning, but instead felt like I was doing streamlined synchronised swimming with my work and colleagues. I knew how much to put in and when I needed to step back. Work and play - a balancing act I had almost perfected.

I mourned in the month of love, and in March, Marie-Annick Savripene and I, got even closer. We had to share a bed in a small hotel room in New York. We spent our days at the UN reporting on the 589th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and our nights drinking super-sized flavoured coffee while editing, writing and uploading content. The GL HQ CSW team-Marie Annick, Lucia Makamure, Sifiso Dube and I - all had a blast in-between the busyness, and basked in the small joys behind the scenes.

It was another cold winter in New York, albeit sans snow, the sun melted its icy edge. I remember staying up until the early hours of the morning finishing the backend website uploads, nearing different cold edge- that of fatigue and frustration, and a tired lament thinking, "Nothing has changed. Oppression of kinds abounds!" At that moment the music in my ears changed, "Like a branch on a tree, I keep moving to be free… there's a place in the sun, where there is hope for everyone."

International Israeli Apartheid week coincided with CSW58. I wore my "Free Palestine" T-shirt and Keffiyeh every day in solidarity, and left countless flyers in UN building bathrooms. I attended a parallel NGO event, where I interviewed a Palestinian representative from the Arab Women's Network. She spoke about how Israeli occupation intensifies and entrenches patriarchy because many women are unable

to access education and healthcare, are more vulnerable to violence and sexual assault and their movement is considerably limited. She also explained that very few Palestinian women are able to attend CSW because it is so difficult to acquire a visa.

Former head of UN Women and now Chilean President, Michelle Bachelet, in her closing statement at CSW57 said, "Delegates adopted resolutions on the future organisation and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women, and on the situation of assistance to Palestinian women". On 26 November 2013, the UN General Assembly voted to proclaim 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Yet in 2014, the international community witnessed one of the worst Israeli onslaughts. We watched a genocide take place, where over 2000 Palestinian people were killed. "A place in the sun? Hope for everyone? It's all rather all dark," I remember thinking.

In April, I went to Botswana for the first time to cover the National Gender Protocol Summit. Shortly after, it was the Regional Summit. I had the pleasure of working with the most incredible team of aspiring journalists from all over SADC. Together we produced fantastic multimedia content and the newsroom was ablaze with fun and fervour. I'll never forget Mike Mwenda, a student journalist from Zambia, who looked at me and cried the day he was due to fly back to Lusaka. He said he did not want to leave his new friends. Mike and the team stayed in touch with one another and still continue to contribute to the Gender Links News Service.

July was Barometer Boot Camp! Colleen booked the editorial team into Whispering Pines lodge in the Magaliesburg for ten days to ensure privacy and productivity for editing. The team and I aptly dubbed our temporary home "Victor Verster". That was the name of the last prison Mandela was held before his release. He was given a large warder's house to live in, with a swimming pool and large garden - still imprisoned but just a little freer. We all worked from the early hours to the late hours, burning all kinds of oil, hiking up the mountain in between, editing by the fire and over-indulging in caffeine and cherries. Sifiso


Barometer boot camp victors.

Dube, Lucia Makamure, Nomthi Mankazana and I grew close, sharing love and laughter during our freer moments.

It was during my incarceration at Victor Verster that I realised cold turkey is not just a nice Boxing Day brunch. Spontaneously and unexpectedly, I quit smoking for those ten days. After twelve years of smoking I decided that chains of smoke and chimneys were better suited. I have not smoked one cigarette since. We printed the Barometer in record time and appropriately launched it on Women's Day in South Africa.

The Civil Society Forum that took place just before the Heads of State Summit was both interesting and frustrating. Soon after Lucia and I arrived at Harare Airport in Zimbabwe, she was approached by a complete stranger who asked her whether she and I were partners, and he made a snide comment about Zimbabwe citizens returning to the country with "funny ideas". This was especially perplexing because not only were we not partners, but we travelled on opposite sides of the plane and hardly made eye contact on arrival at the airport. Lucia then explained that the Zimbabwean Secret Service does background checks on all civil society participants, and probably knew that I had written extensively on queer rights in Southern Africa, with some articles lambasting Mugabe and Zimbabwe for homophobia and prejudice.

Yet again, civil society and NGOs saw LGBTIQ rights being struck off the agenda and excluded from the recommendations going to Heads of State. The conference hall was thick with division, prejudice and hypocrisy. Furious, I stormed out. The student journos picked up on my fury. It was only when I read one of the student's feedback forms that my faith was re-instilled, and I could hear hopeful music in my mind's ear. She explained that she had learnt that as a journalist it is important to serve all citizens, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. Despite resistance, I have continued to push the issue at GL, emphasising the need for a more inclusive definition of gender equality, and GL is giving its all to support LGBTIQ rights.Sixteen Days of Activism was another successful, yet sobering period. For me, the desperate period seemed to extend much longer into December and even into the New Year. It was a troubling start to the year, but it gave me renewed vigour to continue the fight for women's rights, equality and justice for all- and to "always remember there is a place in the sun, where there is hope for everyone… before my life is done, I gotta find me a place in the sun."

Aluta continua!

Learning by doing

By Tarisai Nyamweda, Senior Media Programme Officer

> *Life is like a disco, no matter how the music changes you just keep dancing.* ~ *Mrs Watson, Jumping the Broom*



Another great year has come and gone, and there is more to be thankful for as I continue to ride this learning wave. As I grow older, my knowledge base also grows. I carry with me not only my own experiences, but those of the many people from across the region that have shared their stories with Gender Links (GL).

Sometimes when life feels like a hamster wheel, one thing we might consider is opening the cage door and jumping out. Rather, it is up to us to make those circles and cycles interesting. From the outside, it might seem like we are repeatedly doing the same things. However, I have realised that the more we do things, the better we get at them and we make more progress.

One of my highlights of the year was documenting people's stories when GL hosted the SADC Gender Protocol Summits. Working in the Media Department requires one to have decent writing and interviewing skills. This meant I could easily and effectively handle this qualitative monitoring and evaluation. I attended four summits and interviewed many people from across Southern Africa who had benefitted from GL's work. They are now championing gender in their own institutions and communities- we call them "drivers of change." Sharing lived experiences and powerful testimonies truly connects people, and I have even made good friends with some of the people I met at the summits.

Hearing about their journeys helped me understand the many different roles people play to bring about change in society. Having the opportunity to document their powerful stories meant a lot to me because these stories would not otherwise have been told.

Although this is not my core area of work, I enjoyed writing up the drivers of change. As I continue with my media programme work, I often reflect on the impact that our work has on individuals, families and communities.

Through all this, one thing I know for sure is that passion and extra effort will always yield good results, against all odds. This desire to learn and achieve has kept me grounded in the work that I do. From this learning, I want to inspire others, and continue to grow and build my career.

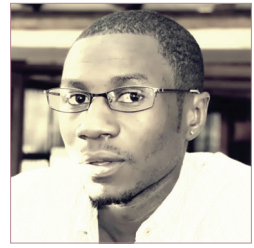


Tarisai Nyamweda interviewing Laura Samoisy, journalist for 5 Plus in Mauritius; Kopanong hotel, Johannesburg.

Attitude is everything

By Albert Ngosa, IT Officer

> *We are what we repeatedly do, excellence then is not an act but a habit.* ~ *Aristotle*



A good friend once said to me, "Albert, your career will be full of unexpected downsides, tough people to work with, and things you can't control. However, what you can control is how you respond. Your attitude is so important and it will be a huge factor in how people remember you."

A positive disposition shapes an individual for the rest of their life. Success and happiness in the workplace largely depends on one's attitude. If you have a winning attitude, you will be a winner. These principles have helped me achieve my goals at Gender Links and helped me manage my work relationships.

I hold the position of IT Officer. I'm responsible for overseeing the IT infrastructure and security, along with day-to-day support of GL's systems. Prior to this position, I was the Audio-Visual Officer, and I also assisted the handling of servers and workstation activities.

I never pictured myself as an IT officer at GL. I was asked to take up the position in the middle of 2014, an especially important time because GL was undergoing a major systems transition. I was very excited when the CEO announced it, but I was also anxious, wondering how I was going to manage the innumerable important tasks and projects I was inheriting from my predecessor.

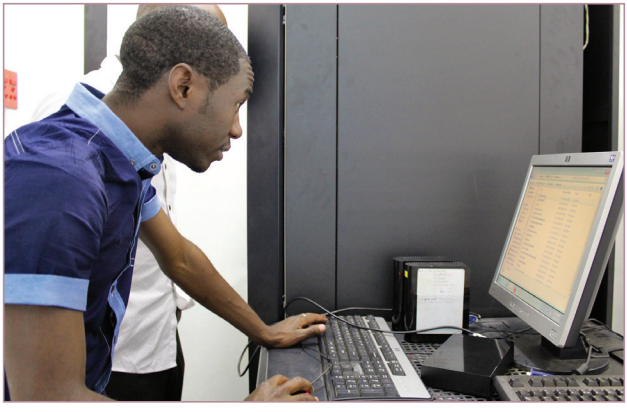
I put my worries aside and took up the challenge because I realised that I was being put in this position for a reason. I have always been extremely passionate about technology and how IT can improve daily tasks and create innovative solutions to problems. I also love to see how an IT solution is implemented, tested and cascaded right down to all the users.

I believe that my willingness to go above and beyond has contributed to numerous organisational and individual successes. However, it has been tough- it's never easy to seamlessly update systems and get all users to implement them. Being an IT officer at GL is far from easy. You need to have a solution to every problem a user has. You have to have a positive answer for them, even when you have no idea what to do. My current position demands that I establish and maintain good working relationships with my colleagues and consultants. As a systems person, one needs to exercise a lot of patience and respect, especially when managing conflicts.

Though work may be challenging at times, I always see it as an opportunity to learn and to make a significant contribution to the organisation. I have also been finding new and more effective ways of doing things. What is even more amazing, is that I'm not bound by a corporate glass ceiling that restricts me from asking questions and learning from my colleagues.

IT, like any other programme at GL, requires strategic planning and management, not only for the department, but for broader goals of the organisation.

I feel blessed for having participated in several policy strategies and planning exercises, The experience I have gained has given me what I like to call "proof of knowledge"- something I can present to future employers which tells them have I been successfully educated in the IT industry and I'm willing to learn and adapt to its rapid changes. I have gained more institutional knowledge by working with all the different departments, and I can confidently walk into a room full of people and share the good work that GL is doing across the SADC region.


Albert Ngosa remembers to be proactive.

When problems arise, I remember to always be proactive, to take initiative, and to find solutions. I always pull through by thinking to myself, "I can, I will, I am able and I am ready!"

The time is now

By Thandokuhle Dlamini, Communications Officer

> *You only get as much energy back as you give out.*



I got a call from our HR Manager, Mum Viv, saying the internet was down. I politely told her that Albert, our IT Officer, was not in. "I know he is not in, you work with him in that office, so you are IT today," she said.

I knew I had a lot to learn from that day. I couldn't be my usual shy and reserved self-I had to take the bull by its horns, be a fast and enthusiastic learner, and step up to the plate, even outside of my job description.

Time flies Gender Links and I can hardly believe this is my fourth year. Starting as an intern in Swaziland, ending up a Communications Officer in Johannesburg, I have had quite a journey with GL. My current work entails mainly monitoring and evaluation for the Communications Department, managing the photo gallery, helping with audio-visual content, assisting with website uploads and dissemination of GL News and initiating payments for the department.

When I first arrived at HQ, I was nervous and really lacked confidence, but the reception I got here was overwhelming. I felt so at home. The care and concern at HQ was so reassuring and as a new team member, I found the atmosphere inviting and productive. I had never before felt so a part of the puzzle. Thanks to my manager Katherine Robinson and everyone at GL, I learned the power and importance of teamwork.

The staff here have contributed greatly to my growth and learning. Everyone was happy to assist me whenever and wherever possible. Nomthi helped me with excel when we were doing the Barometer together. It was only then that I realised how little I knew, when I thought that I knew it all. At the country office, spreadsheets

would arrive complete and I simply had to add information. But now at HQ, I had to prepare them from scratch.

It was during the 2014 Sixteen Days of Activism Campaign that we had to produce newsletters on a daily basis. Although uploading the GLNS articles has rekindled my liking for reading and writing and this part of my job is very interesting, during Sixteen Days it was tiring and at times frustrating and cumbersome. But the Comms Department stuck together as a team through all the ups and downs during this stressful period. I remember how after the last click that sent out our newsletter, my manager Kath and I would high five one another, both knowing the achievement outweighed the frustrations.

I have learned so much about IT, I do not know where to start, in fact my keyboard letters would fade if I were to detail everything I have learnt. Albert, my mentor, colleague, friend and brother says, "The computer does what you want it to do," and I have learnt that it is not the other way around. I am now adept at trouble shooting, fixing internet problems and even setting up new computers with various software programmes. Working on Meltwater News has been such a marvel and it has taught me so much about how technology can be both fun and useful for measuring the organisation's impact.

Learning is a lifelong journey, and all these learning curves add to my own strides and that of GL's giant footprints. We have so much going on both personally and professionally - we simply cannot wait for tomorrow because tomorrow is not guaranteed. The time is now!



Learning by doing. Thandokuhle Dlamini practices his craft.

Gender Justice

Always keep your eyes on the ball

By Linda Musariri, Senior Researcher and Advocacy Officer

> *By persevering the snail reached the ark.*
> *~ Charles Spurgeon*



To summarise the lesson I learnt in the past year, I would say, "Never lose focus and always keep your eyes on the prize." Life's course is always full of hurdles, twists and turns, but one thing I have learnt is to keep moving. As Apostle Paul puts it, "I press on towards the goal to win the prize" (Phil 3:14).

Work, like any other area of life, will always have distractions, disappointments and setbacks. Embracing these experiences and seeing them as opportunities to learn, grow and evolve is the way forward. I have learnt to take responsibility for the things I have done and the things I have not done.

They say that experience is the greatest, but most brutal of teachers. It is also true that what does not kill you, makes you stronger. This past year I came to the fore and assumed more responsibilities in the Justice Programme. Being in charge of this programme is no walk in the park. It needs someone who is forward thinking and solution-oriented. My introduction to the coordinating position was to take over the Zambia Violence Against Women (VAW) study. This was not an easy task, as I had to oversee the whole data collection process, manage finance and work with consultants, partners and donors. One thing about taking over something, is you take over both the good and the bad. This particular project came with lots of politics and issues that need a level headed person to smooth out. I have learnt a lot from this project- the greatest lesson being patience and looking at the big picture.

What I also realised with this difficult project was that I am not the only who feels like throwing in the towel occasionally. I could tell that at times even the CEO herself felt the same way, but she has her eyes on the goal. By being supervised and mentored by our CEO Colleen Lowe Morna, I have come to discover that the difference between those who make it in life and those who do not, is the passion to succeed and never give up.

I have learnt that orientation and proper handover is key if you are to take over a project. Another valuable lesson from this whole process was the realisation that I need others in order to accomplish my goals. I have learnt to value teamwork, be it Fikile's perseverance in assisting with shipments, Mme Miso's assistance with the budgets or the Zambia team running around doing the groundwork. While working with governments has proven to be a challenge, it is still the best way to ensure ownership and long term outcomes for gender equality.

Still caught up in the Zambia saga, along came Lesotho. We discovered that we were missing data from one province thus we could not continue with the data analysis and report writing. This was a test of my integrity and ethics as a researcher. The easy way out was to just keep quiet and probably do what they call "data dredging". After consulting with my manager we decided to take the legitimate route and go back into the field and recollect data for that particular province.

Last year I finally managed to find my feet and place within the organisation. Interacting with colleagues is so valuable, because there is something to learn from each and every individual. I have learnt so much from my colleagues, as well as my supervisor, who has taught me the art of catching one ball at a time. "Do what you can and can what you can't," she always says.

Although at times I felt like I wasn't making progress, I learnt to keep going one step at a time. Like the late Spurgeon says, "The way to do a great deal is to keep on doing a little. The way to do nothing at all is to be continually resolving that you will do everything."



Linda Musariri presents findings of the GBV baseline study.

Gender and Economic Justice

The journey is important, but it is how we treat others along the way that really counts

By Anne Hilton, Entrepreneurship Manager

> *Never hold on to the things that weigh you down.* ~ *Unknown*



The idea of helping women who had experienced GBV to overcome barriers to their own independence and therefore the ability to make choices was very exciting. I had worked in enterprise development for many years with a focus on gender but had never linked this to Gender based Violence (GBV). This was indeed an exciting opportunity. Learning more about GBV and the wonderful work that GL does was amazing.

Getting used to "the GL way" however was sometimes grueling and rocky and many times it seemed that my ability to hyperlink and justify was far more important than my entrepreneurship development experience. Conceptual grief crept in as I made my way through what seemed like endless reports, Share Pointing and looking for information in a range of different documents. A lot of this was new to me.

Getting used to new technologies and new ways of working was often challenging. So mistakes were made; pictures in the wrong place, numbers in numerals instead of letters, and inserting hyperlinks all became a new terrain of engagement for me; but I learnt from all of this and will always have this to enrich my documents. Thank you for that GL.

For me some of the most exciting parts were contributing to the post 2015 agenda and having the chance to raise issues that may contribute to a more enabling

environment for women in business in the region. Access to finance in particular is a terrain of struggle for women; especially the women that participate in the entrepreneurship programme. Policy and strategy changes and the recognition of gender inequalities are far from being resolved.

Another is the actual working on the ground and doing the training myself and meeting the women that had been abused with their heartbreaking stories. I went through one night of severe GBV and cannot imagine what it must be like knowing that that could come through the door at any time.

The thirst for information and knowledge never fails to amaze me when I work with women on the ground. The spirit they bring to the process, despite what they have gone through.

The saddest part of working at GL however was giving up my ballroom dancing because of the long hours which included a long drive home. Just not enough time in a day. Weekends became time to catch up with work I didn't have time to do in the office. Not good wellness.

Gender Links has so many amazing and positive aspects to its credit. Innovation, good ideas, conceptual capacity and good branding. There are, it seemed, simply not enough hours in a day to do it all. It is not enough to focus on wellness programmes which do not address or recognize the impact of the overtime, stress and the impact on family life. For me this has been overpowering and unsustainable. I need to dance again.



Anne Hilton facilitating a workshop in Emfuleni.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Comfortable with change

By Monica Bandeira, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager

> *Change is the only constant.*



When I reflect on who I am, I am reminded that change is the only constant. I have dealt with a lot of change in my life and in the last few years I have actively sought change and welcomed it into my life. Last year was another year of change: I left a job that I was very comfortable in, to join an organisation I knew little about, but brought the promise of challenge and change. GL certainly delivered on that promise.

When you join GL, you hit the ground running, with many things to learn about the work and the people. It is a fast paced environment demanding the best from you under the pressure of several deadlines. In many ways it was the awakening I was looking for. No longer lulled by the comfort of knowing all the answers and easy delivery. I was jolted into pushing my boundaries and doing it quickly.

It was an exciting and intense time for me, one that required me to find ways to improve the organisation's monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Advanced systems and tools meant that I needed to grapple with what was in place in order to be able to contribute to its improvement. Several audits later, I felt like I was gaining ground and better placed to suggest improvements that could facilitate data collection and analysis across the organisation. The emphasis was also on suggesting changes that were appropriate and cost effective (As GL calls it "Value for Money").

The next step was to be the bearer of change. As anyone who works in this department will tell you, one of the main roles of M&E staff is to bring about change. While I have become comfortable with change, I have also learnt that not everyone is as comfortable with it. Change always brings its own challenges and most people remain sceptical of it until they see its benefits. Learning how to moderate this within a fast-paced organisation, with staff spread across ten countries has been incredibly difficult. I learnt that connecting with the people you are asking to adapt to your changes, goes a long way and helps you understand the resistance as well as their needs.

The planning meeting in January where I finally got to put faces to the numerous names behind emails was invaluable. Having the time to personally connect with all staff and get to know their unique challenges provided great insight. It also laid the groundwork for establishing contact and facilitating conversations thereafter. One thing I can say with certainty, is that GL is filled with resilient, hard-working, open, supportive, and fun-loving people. Every person has graciously accepted my contributions and pushed towards change even if it felt like additional work.

In the short time I've been at GL, I have been able to implement a new system for collecting and analysing data. This has demonstrated how committed the organisation is to innovation. It is not always easy to open your home to someone who is going to be looking at it with an eye towards improvement. This requires an openness that few people have. Again, I learnt that getting buy-in from leadership is key to M&E processes and advancing change.

The new year also brought with it new winds of change. As a single mother to a young child, I came to the realisation that the drive to be a successful mother was in direct conflict with the drive to be a successful professional. Something had to give, and so I began a conversation with GL regarding ways to ensure that the changes I have implemented are sustainable, while allowing me the time and flexibility needed to raise a young child. This was not an easy decision for me and I am grateful for the openness and graceful reaction of CEO. I am happy that I will continue to be linked to an organisation filled with passionate, driven and committed people.

We are all responsible for our own happiness

By Fanuel Hadzizi, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer

> *Do not be afraid of making mistakes, they teach us great lessons.*



My year was a winding journey of difficult moments, new experiences, opportunities, frustrations, fears and great lessons. Gender Links continues to be a fast growing organisation that offers unique challenges to junior professionals and I have been very fortunate to be a part of it. More than any other year, 2014 tested my resolve and pushed my performance to the limits. I made mistakes but now I understand that you might not get things right the first time around. You need to learn from your mistakes, and emerge a better professional.

My temporary move to the Namibia Office exposed me to new challenges in my personal and professional life. As a young father I had to deal with leaving my family, and quickly learn so many new responsibilities. The Namibia Finance Officer had resigned at short notice and the Programme Officer had also left abruptly. The CEO instructed me to go there and hold the fort. She said, "Let's salvage the situation and get the work done." This challenge scared me because the NEPAD donor deadlines were fast approaching and there was no room for mistakes.

In a short period of time I had immersed and made the most out of it. I am proud to say the deadlines were met since we completed the COE process in record time. I learnt that how you react in these situations says a lot about the person you are. If you take challenges as learning opportunities and as a way to better yourself, you will benefit and grow immensely.

In Namibia I had to juggle finance and programme duties. This is easier said than done, but it did not discourage me. I accepted the role graciously and appreciated that my superiors believed I could handle these two positions. If you aren't willing

to wear different and embrace the role that each requires, you will miss the opportunities to progress professionally and personally. Being one dimensional is limiting.

Once my duties in Namibia were complete, I was recalled to HQ to assist in the Governance Department. Although it is always a challenge to bond with a new manager, Mariatu Fonnah made it easy for me. After meeting her for the first time in Windhoek, I had no doubt we would have a great working relationship going forward.

Mariatu and I worked many long days together, made possible by large doses of caffeine. Sometimes we worked during weekends especially towards the Donor Strategy Meeting that was the first of its own kind to be held by a Gender Links country office. To her credit, Sarry has been a beacon of hope. One thing I have learnt from that foot soldier is the importance of putting your heart to your work, and making the most out of your resources.

At Gender Links, it is easy to get caught up in the daily routines and forget about the bigger picture. To put things into perspective, I always remind myself of those big goals. We are all responsible for our happiness and should not blame others for our own shortcomings. I look for-ward to learning new things in 2015. I have already started learning many amazing things from Monica Bandeira and I am looking forward to a fulfilling year and many more lessons.



Fanuel Hadzizi participates in a communications and advocacy workshop in Namibia.

Governance and Country Offices

Learning never ends

By Mariatu Fonnah, Gender and Governance Manager

> *The only source of knowledge is experience.* ~ *Albert Einstein*



"Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character," is another wonderful quote by Albert Einstein. To live one day to the next demands willpower, a pleasant character and living a purposeful life. This quote guides me every day, encouraging me to learn from mistakes and grow through what I embark on.

The long-awaited opportunity to work for Gender Links arose in August 2014. I have now settled into the 'winds of change' to promote human rights, justice and dignity for all. Gender Links centralises the plight of women and girls by promoting gender equality in public and private life across the SADC region. As a human rights, gender activist and researcher at heart, I feel at home with like-minded people who seek to ensure justice for all. I am grateful to have the opportunity to influence change at national policy-making levels, but more importantly, to promote women's rights and enhance their leadership opportunities at the local and community level. I can directly influence the change I want to see.

As the Governance Manager, I coordinate and manage one of GL's flagship programmes across ten countries - Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The assistance

of the Deputy Governance Manager - Ntombi Mbadhlanyana who has taken on direct oversight of four of these countries has shown me the value of team work.

Driving the programme with foresight and hindsight to ensure the work is done according to GL's standards and procedures, while sitting in Johannesburg has not been smooth sailing. The work is taxing and involves coaching, mentoring, leading, directing, innovation and strategic leadership. It also requires that I travel to countries for direct monitoring and evaluation and to ensure effectiveness on the ground. I also liaise with other GL programmes - Alliance, Media and Justice, for a holistic approach to advancing gender equality.

Whilst every decision I make involves thought and consultation, I have learnt a lot from GL CEO, Colleen Lowe Morna, who has trusted and supported me. She has given me excellent direction in strategic thinking, and provided me with effective implementation models that are goal oriented. However, seven months have not gone by without mistakes. I have sometimes faltered and my action has been delayed. At first, balancing needs and expectations of ten countries posed challenges, and having to juggle several tasks at the same time was not easy especially when I was still trying to understand the organisation and how it works.



Mariatu Fonnah at the Namibia Forward Looking Strategies workshop.

However, having supportive colleagues, the right attitude and my personal vision to improve going forward was very helpful. Good leadership, guidance and support from our CEO has assisted me to bridge the gap between uncertainty and understanding. Other colleagues have been at hand to provide further explanations, share needed information and assist in improving my technology and systems skills. My knowledge and experience in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has greatly improved. In my quest to be an achiever in all I do, emotional intelligence has been key for personal and professional relationship building, needed to succeed in anything I set my mind to.

New chapter, new journey, new beginnings

By Ntombi Mbadlanyana, Deputy Governance Manager

> *We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.* ~ *Maya Angelou*



Time to write another learning journey and to reflect on the year gone. As I am writing this I am actually struggling to calm myself and collect my thoughts. 2014 was by far the most eventful year in my life, both professionally and personally. I feel as though 2014 was really the year that made me live. The year started off on a very high note, with the planning at the GL Cottages. I recall the enthusiasm and optimism I had looking ahead at 2014.

I met someone, our love and romance grew quickly. A month later I fell pregnant. I was not sure whether to laugh or cry. I recall breaking the news to my family, and to my colleagues. Sis Kubi was the first person I told at GL, then I broke the news to Mme Colleen on our way to look for new bicycles. It just came out and she calmly told me, "Don't worry. It will work out. Learn to trust your gut and take it easy." The nine months that followed felt like a high-speed roller-coaster.

The Governance Programme in South Africa had gained momentum in 2013, and I was determined to maintain the pace and better the standard in 2014. Judith Maneli joined me as the Programme Officer for South Africa. Working with her in the beginning was a bit of a challenge as she had no knowledge of the work, but she learned the ropes and we soon started working very well together. I came to rely on her a lot in the latter part of my pregnancy. We hosted the first South Africa National Summit in May 2014. It was one of my most proud moments. There were a few glitches, but everything came together, and it was a rewarding experience.

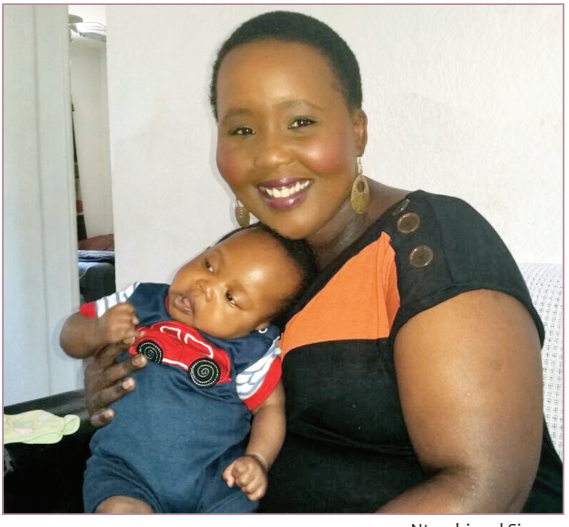
Four months into my pregnancy I developed complications: I had fibroids, and so I

had to limit my travelling. This was very difficult for me since I enjoy being in the field. However, I soon realised that there were others in my team that were fully capable of facilitating the workshops. I learned to let go, trust others and to delegate tasks to my colleagues. It was a great relief and also helped me see my colleagues' capabilities and expertise. A key role as a manager is to delegate effectively and allow room to grow.

2014 was a year of intensive implementation of the COE work. I also needed to ensure that a lot of ground work was completed before the end of my donor grants FOKUS and FGE in 2015. I had to be on top of donor relations and ensure that work would be implemented while I was on maternity leave.

I had such amazing support during my pregnancy. I even had an awesome baby shower that was hosted by Mme Colleen and attended by my colleagues. It was a blessed day and I felt so loved.

On 1 October, I gave birth to a healthy baby boy - Sinaye Kwame. Being a mother has changed me on so many levels. I have learned to be more patient, loving and kind. My son is my pride and joy, and I look forward to raising him to become a strong black man. When I returned work after my maternity leave, I received a promotion and became the Deputy Governance Manager. I am looking forward to the new chapter, and all the growth and challenges that lie ahead.



Ntombi and Sinaye.

There is light at the end of the tunnel

By Susan Mogari, Programme Officer

> *In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.* ~ *Albert Schweitzer*



A journey is not only about where you come from or where you are going, it is also about the path ahead of you. We often think we created the path, but if you look closely, you will see other people have been where you are and are ahead of you.

At Gender Links, the giant footprint was created by people who have walked the path before you.

2014 has gone and 2015 is ahead. I am sure in 2008, when the SADC Heads of State signed the Protocol on Gender and Development, they thought they had loads of time to address gender inequality. Last year was one of anxiety and excitement. Gender Links has definitely prepared well for 2015 and even post-2015.

With Sis Kubi Rama leaving, we were all anxious, but the good planning around her impending absence was a great relief.

South Africa hosted its first GL country Summit and I remember after all the hard work, the team said, "We made it!" When a winning team survives through tough times, your inner being lights up. Sis Kubi kept the team going, while Ntombi Mbadhlanyana was at the forefront inspiring us. We persevered through to the Regional Summit and I gave it my all. Mme Colleen always says hard work pays off, and "when the going gets tough, the tough get going." I lit up once again when she presented me an award, at the staff awards ceremony. It is a spark that ignites a flame, and that award ignited a flame in me.

Between the hard working periods, there were times when we played hard too. I went out for my birthday with Mme Colleen and few friends. We went out to see a play produced by the famous actor John Kani. The lesson was: things are not always what they seem and it is important to plan ahead so as not to have to deal with big problems. We must deal with issues while they are still small.

During Limpopo workshops I had to work even harder. I was away from home but rewards came when I most needed them. The wellness and medical aid plan for employees was one of the best decisions Gender Links has made, and I benefited a great deal from it. I did two workshops in Limpopo and then fell very sick. I was admitted to hospital, but I quickly recovered, climbed back on the horse and continued to ride.

Monitoring and evaluation is a very important part of our work. We need to prove that we are doing the work effectively. I have no doubt that Gender Links will look back in ten years and thank the people that introduced new and efficient ways of capturing and analysing data. The introduction of EPI made my life easier. The tracking sheet means COE workshops will be tracked more efficiently, though learning how to use it was a different story.

System and technology changes are difficult to get used to and I am one of the people who really struggle with it. With assistance from GL, I bought a new laptop which is making my job and travels a lot easier.

Gender Links is facing hard times, but I am sure a few years back it wasn't any easier. Somebody looked ahead and planned. I get to walk down this relatively smooth path and I know somebody walked it before me. New systems and changes help smooth out the path. 2014 has been a big bag of mixed feelings and learning was a big part of it. The past year certainly prepared me for 2015.



Susan Mogari with colleagues at GL - prepared for 2015!

Work hard in silence and let success make the noise

By Judith Maneli, SA Governance Programme Officer

> *"You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have. ~ Bob Marley*



Prior to the Regional Summit, a meeting is held at the MMCR and the announcement is made that I am going to be one of the Gender Links staff members who will be staying and working at the Kopanong Hotel with the delegates. I thought to myself, "Leaving my kids? Staying with delegates? GL management trusts me more than I trust myself!"

I remember having to leave home on a Saturday to prepare for the judging. I cried that night because it was my first time being away from my kids, but Susan Mogari and Kubi Rama made me realise that being there meant I was growing professionally. During the summit awards I had to assist in presenting prizes to the winners. As a shy person, standing in front of so many people, was scary, but overcoming that was priceless. This shows how much I have grown as a young professional woman.

Sixteen Days of Activism planning started and it dawned on me that I would be coordinating and organising it since the SA Programme Manager, Ntombi was on maternity leave. With the help of Mariatu, I had to make sure that the programme and the plans were carried out accordingly. I was asked to identify the councils that we could do Sixteen Days activities, to do a budget for all activities and organise the logistics. At times I felt it was too much for me, but with help from colleagues I did it.

I had to facilitate one of the councils and I remember standing in front of the delegates explaining GL's Sixteen Days concept - *"End violence, empower women."* I used my personal experiences in life since I believe as women we are all victims of gender-

based violence. I got the women and men talking about GBV and gender equality. I felt so empowered by that process and that was the proudest day of my life. It gave me the courage to share and talk about my own issues as a woman. It was my first time facilitating and I did a great job. My communication skills and understanding of GL's vision and mission has vastly improved.

I am responsible for updating MS Project and the SA COE website; arranging all the logistics for the COE and entrepreneurship workshops and budgets; doing payment reconciliations; uploading all the M&E; and typing and storing the "I" Stories.

When you are learning you are bound to make mistakes. I made mistakes but in the process I have grown and I can confidently say that I have become a better person, professionally and personally.

What has contributed to my learning is having a manager like Ntombi who does not spoon feed you. She lets you do the work on your own and when you have a problem she is always there to help. Through her teaching I have learnt how things are done at GL. Susan Mogari has also been a pillar of strength. Whenever I feel like I can't do something she is the one I turn to because she has a positive attitude towards everything.

The skills I have acquired through GL have not only made my job easy, but my personal life too. I apply the principle of 'value for money' to my own shopping. If it is not on sale I don't buy it and save money for my children's education.



Walking the talk - GL staff during the Sixteen Days of Activism.

2014 was the year I realised that with hard work and a good attitude towards learning, anything and everything is possible. Working at GL has changed my life in a big way- I am gaining confidence in myself and I believe the sky is the limit.

Country Offices

Botswana

Never underestimate the power you possess

By Gomolemo Rasesigo, Country Manager

> *Believe in yourself, and the rest will fall into place. Have faith in your own abilities, work hard. There is nothing you cannot accomplish.* ~ *Brad Henry*



We had just completed our first ever district summit in Ghanzi, and decided that we would leave for Gaborone at 6am the following morning. I wasn't particularly thrilled at the idea of driving for eight hours across the desert in the March heat. Hardly 100km out of Ghanzi, in the middle of nowhere, my car overheated and we had to stop. A man with a horse and cart stopped to give us five litres of water. The next person to stop was a truck driver. The man tried to help us but the battery was flat and the car would not start. He came back later and with cables and helped us jump-start the car. He was Godsend. We managed to reach the next village and got the car checked by a mechanic. We arrived in Gaborone and the next day we made our way to the next district summit in Francistown. This taught me that no matter how tough the situation, giving up is not the answer.

2014 began on a high note. I had only been with GL for two months. As soon as we reported for duty in January, we had go to Johannesburg for our planning meeting. I learnt a lot about Gender Links, and I meeting staff from different countries was such an eye opener because they had lots to share and we had lots in common-

particularly Lesotho, as our cultures are very similar. Like a sponge, I absorbed as much information as possible. By the end of it, I had information overload and felt as though my brain was close to exploding.

Because gender work was new to me, everything sounded like a foreign language. I put up on a stern face and pretended to understand it all. I would stay up for hours browsing the GL website and read up on what was discussed. I saw myself grow during 2014, and I began to rely less on the former manager Keabonye Ntsabane (KB), and started making decisions on my own. I had to ensure that all the programmes, including Governance, Media, Entrepreneurship, Alliance and Justice were all functional. I also had to supervise colleagues and maintain good working relations with local stakeholders. Fund raising for the office was no easy task.

The months leading up to the retirement of KB was emotionally draining. When I was first told that I was being considered as the next manager, I was very nervous. A lot was on my mind. I wondered how I was going to cope, and what the gender fraternity in Botswana was going to think of me- the new kid on the block. My success in running the first ever district summits and the national summit, helped ease my nerves.

Reading anything I could get my hands on about gender became my favourite hobby, and using every opportunity to present on gender boosted my confidence. The radio and TV interviews earned me recognition in the shortest possible time and it was amazing how the Alliance members- BALA, UNFPA, BOCONGO, Gender Affairs Department and the SADC Gender Unit- were all so supportive. Other NGOs such as Men and Boys and Kagisano Women's Shelter helped see me through this journey and showed me the ropes. Fellow country managers also gave a great deal of support and didn't hesitate to contact them when I needed help.

One realisation was that you need to be out there representing and selling your organisation, and presenting well researched work. I applied this to internal staff meetings and encouraged everyone to be well prepared. A 2014 highlight was pulling off four women in politics training sessions just over one month prior to the elections. The women were grateful for our efforts, though some felt we could have started earlier and done more training.

One thing I enjoy about Gender Links is that it has taught me to be a quick thinker. Preparing for the Sixteen Days of Activism tested my strength. I was dealing with the Alliance and village level meetings in four areas; gender focal persons who had to update gender-based violence action plans; and emerging entrepreneur business plans in five councils. Keletso rose to the challenge to become both a programme officer and a finance officer. As a leader you appreciate a team that makes an effort to ensure all work is done.

The visit by the DIFID evaluators gave us the opportunity to further cement our relations with donors and important stakeholders. The visit to Lobatse stood out for me because the gender committee was well prepared and the media was also present. The evaluator was impressed by the way the council cascaded gender work down to the community.

I spent so much time away from home while I was running workshops around the country. It was taking a toll on me because I felt like I was not being a good parent. My husband had to take over and raise the kids on his own while I was away, but he felt that I needed to grow in my career. I am blessed to have such an understanding and supportive family. The uncertainties I had and the mistakes I made helped me learn and grow as country manager. Being a leader has taught me to be more humble and to treat each person with the respect, because everyone has something to teach you. I believe that 2015 holds great opportunities for the Botswana office and if we plan well and strategically position ourselves we will remain relevant and important to our people.



Gomolemo Rasesigo addressing the Lobatse Gender Committee during the DFID evaluation.

Either you run the day or the day runs you

By Keletso Metsing, Finance and Admin Officer

> *If you don't like the road you're walking on, start paving a new one.*



The media training was the first workshop I ever had to plan. I had to look for three quotations and then confirm the cheapest venue. The venue stated that payment should be made in order to secure the booking. I only confirmed by calling and forgot to make the payment. On the day of the workshop when my supervisor, Gomolemo Rasesigo, arrived to get the conference room ready in advance, she was told that the venue was not booked. I was so scared that I took a taxi to the venue to plead with the hotel supervisor. He listened to my story, accepted the late payment and told me that there was always a spare room ready for emergency workshops. I was so relieved.

My first year working for GL was all about learning and experimenting. Everything I did was a first time experience. I was very nervous about taking over finances at the office, since I had never worked alone in a department. My work at GL entails finance and administrative work, but I also take pictures during workshops and gather data for monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

It was very difficult to adjust to pressure, especially during the summit season. I was expected to plan the events, make sure that venues, catering, accommodation and travel was booked, as well as coordinate and help participants. It was very inspiring to see the commitment shown by participants who had sleepless nights work on their projects. The Regional Summit was a very interesting experience, and I was surprised to see how different countries could be so connected. My highlight was the cultural evening and drum night. People from all over SADC were wearing their cultural attire and dancing to their traditional music on stage. It was fun and interesting to meet so many people from different countries.

The women in politics workshops were fascinating, and I learnt a lot from the women and all the challenges they face in politics, especially when standing for elections, because it is such a male dominated arena. I was so nervous when I was told that I had to facilitate two workshops in Mochudi and Ghanzi during the Sixteen Days of Activism campaign. I managed to pull them off and ensure the councils updated their gender based violence (GBV) action plans. I loved working with GBV survivors to improve their business plans. The women may not know how to do business plans, but they are very talented. Some women had challenges because they had been told that they could not do anything without the assistance of men.

All my work experiences have made me more confident and I know that planning for upcoming events will be easier going forward. With the support from Gomolemo, working for GL Botswana has given me valuable experience. I have been inspired to work hard and achieve the best results. I am also grateful to the HQ finance team, country finance officers for their support. I also give my special thanks to Mme Kubi, Mpumelelo Mlilo, Emmanuel Kelias and Mme Miso especially during the National and the Regional summit.

Finally, if it weren't for Mme Colleen's passion for writing, I don't think I could have been inspired to complete this learning journey. Being a finance person, writing does not come easy, but when you put your mind to it, anything is possible!



Ntolo Lekau and Keletso Metsing at M&E Training. *Photo: Thando Dlamini*

Lesotho

Taking over the Lesotho office

By Manteboheleng Mabetha, Lesotho Country Manager

> *Life is a series of experiences, each one of which makes us bigger, even though sometimes it is hard to realise this.* ~ Henry Ford



I got excited when I landed the job as the Lesotho Country Manager, but I still sit and reflect on all the work that I had to do during 2014. During the planning meeting in January, I started to panic and thought I had made the wrong decision. When everybody was talking about how great the former manager was, I thought that I wasn't able to fill those shoes.

In all my working life I never had to make big decisions because I had always held junior positions. I was so insecure and desperately trying to perfect everything because I felt like I was being compared with my predecessor. I felt as though I was carrying the weight of the whole world on my shoulders. There was lots of work to be done. I had to finish many of the stages that were not completed in the previous year, and had to prepare for both the district and the national summits.

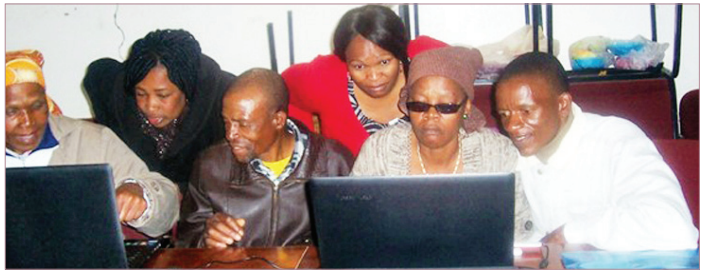
The district summits were my first test. There were 28 councils that had completed stages one to five of the COE process. It had been decided during planning that all the councils that come to the district summit would have to complete stages seven, eight and nine at the summit. I had to travel all over the country delivering the councils' institutional profiles. I had never travelled the whole country, let alone in a car. I was not confident about driving in mountainous areas as the roads are very steep and rough. Even though I had been working for the Gender Ministry, I still believed that only men could drive to those places. Working with Gender Links, I learned that I should practise what I preach. Finally, we held two successful district summits attended by all the 28 councils that had completed stages one to five.

Then came the National Summit. I was panicking and was wondering whether I would pull it off. Thanks to the support from the GL staff, the summit was such a success. There were 102 people who attended the summit with 53 entries in all categories. I remember talking to the former Principal Secretary of Gender, Makalo Theko on the night of the awards and he said to me, "I think you made a good decision by leaving the government service because you would never be able to show what you are capable of if you remained in the government service as a junior officer." That made me realise that despite my lacking confidence, I was doing a good job.

During my first year at Gender Links I came to understand that this is an organisation that brings out the best in you through on-the-job learning. You make mistakes, but you learn from them to become a better person. The one mistake I will never forget is trying to find a bigger office space for GL. I thought to myself, "This is one challenge that I have to overcome." I then began searching all over Maseru.

As the new manager, I thought there were some decisions that were up to me to make. I decided that GL Lesotho should move into new offices. However, I failed to realise was that we had to pay three months' rent in the final year of the lease. It was only then that I realised I should have communicated with my supervisors throughout the entire process. I learned that in everything I do, no matter how small I think the issue, communication is key.

Taking over the Lesotho office has taught me so much. I have grown both personally and professionally. I have learned to use the setbacks to move forward, and I intend to use what I have learned in 2015. I want to keep learning, when I leave this organisation, I will be the best graduate.



Mme Mabetha training councillors in use of IT.

Time heals and tomorrow is a better day

By Ntolo Lekau, Programme officer, Lesotho

> *It always seems impossible until it's done.* ~ *Nelson Mandela*



It was around early October when my manager, Mme Manteboheleng and I went to Menoaneng Council to do COE stages three, four and five. The council is in the district of Mokhotlong. It is rural, mountainous area. It is one of the more complicated and difficult COE councils, although it has very flexible and active councillors. When I was arranging our accommodation, the person I was communicating with told me that we cannot stay at the hotel in town because it is very far from the council and therefore we would have to stay at a very small guest house within the council area. When we got to Mokhotlong after an eight hour drive we went straight to the guest house. The place was very dark and there was no electricity, which was not an issue because we had seen worse. Nevertheless it was very scary and we wondered where the other guests were. When we got inside we were told that we should decide whether we wanted to bath in the morning or at night. I could not believe it, and I looked at Mme Mantebo who could not stop laughing. We got used to it in the end, and enjoyed our five day stay.

As Lesotho Programme Officer at Gender Links I am responsible for monitoring and evaluation; keeping track of GL's work in COE councils; partners and stakeholder liaisons; and facilitating some of the COE stages. We work very closely with community councils in the ten districts of Lesotho. Since last year, we have been working with 40 councils, which we visited and completed all the COE stages. My work is quite interesting because most of the time I am in the field, meeting and working with many different people. This has taught me so much, especially tolerance and patience.

Last year was a very hectic learning curve for me, but through it I realised my own strength and the many capabilities I possess. In 2013 I lost a mother, friend and

manager, but I was able to adapt very quickly and there was a very smooth transition with the new manager and finance officer. We got along very well and that helped us work as a team. We held two district summits for the very first time, and we brought all thirty COE councils down to two regions of Lesotho. It was such an amazing experience, especially because I was in charge of certain things and that gave me a sense of ownership. Both our summits went very well and winners proceeded to the National Summit in Maseru. There was so much interaction at the summit and I realised how GL has grown and the impact it has on many different people. I was moved by the way people were talking about Gender Links and how it has helped them realise their various goals.

I got very emotional when councillors presented their good work. I realised the impact our programme has on the councils. They were so bold and proud. It made me appreciate the work I do at GL and I do not regret waking up every day to go to work or spend weeks travelling in the mountains of Lesotho - it is all worth it.



Ntolo Lekau writing Lebalang Lipholo's "I" Story.

I believe challenges are what make us strong and we learn from them. I had been struggling with the issue of missing reports. There had always been a good and clear structure of reporting, and a place where all the reports were filed and readily accessible. As a Programme Officer my role was to upload them on the councils' website pages. I am very excited about all the improved reporting and filing systems Gender Links has implemented, like share point and the exciting new Epi Info where all the information is kept and everybody is able to access it at any time. I really thank Monica Bandeira for that because I can see that our lives are going to change and things are going to be easier. I hope I can wave goodbye to all the stress of missing information.

Apart from all the ups and downs in 2014, it was a year to remember and a very important one because I won the Country Staff Team Player award. I could not believe it because it had been a very hectic year for me - trying meet all the deadlines making sure I did my school work. It was not easy, but I managed to achieve it all. It would not have been possible if it was not for my manager Mme Mantebo who is always by my side and making sure that I do my work properly. She guided and supported me and we had so many chats when travelling around Lesotho. I could not ask for more support and motivation.



Mme Mabetha collects Ntolo Lekau's staff team award.

In May she had to go to Joburg for the Regional Summit, but I could not go because I was writing my examinations and so I could not attend the staff awards. Mme Mantebo kept calling me and saying "Stolosa please send me your speech for your awards." I would just laugh, wondering why she was so convinced I would win.

I guess it is because we work very well together and she knows me so well. When she came back with this big award I could not believe it. I realised how much my colleagues appreciate the work I do. It was the same happiness I felt when I read the remarks on my 360 evaluation report. Tears rolled down my face, because I was so moved by the love and confidence my colleagues have for me.

Although sometimes my work can be very frustrating, it has taught me to be patient and I realise how much people appreciate our work. Many people do not know how to read and write, and they get so excited when I help them. This has helped me remember that people are different and God has given us different opportunities. My primary goal for 2015 is to make sure that people who do not know how to read and write will leave our workshops at least knowing how to write their name. I believe nothing is impossible!

From the known to the unknown

By Fuzakazi Mqungwana, Lesotho Finance and Admin Officer

Don't watch the clock, do what it does. Keep going. ~ Sam Levenson



When I think about my learning journey in 2014, all that goes through my mind is Lesotho. Moving to a different country made me appreciate life and the people around me even more. I have never been so far out of my comfort zone - it was not as easy. I would get so emotional at times because I missed speaking my language and I miss my family and friends. Everything was different, from the culture, to the weather. However, I have never come across such humble and accommodating people. Basotho people are warm, kind and caring.

At Gender Links Lesotho I worked as a Finance and Administration Officer. My work went beyond doing Finance dealing with the country procurement. I made sure that every month I processed cashbooks and payments for the office; reconciled accounts; processed salaries; recorded staff loans; and completed all office administration. Mistakes are a part of life- sometimes they can be avoided and other times we can learn from them. I have made many mistakes, but I believe that in the New Year they will not be repeated.

Being out of my comfort zone made me focus more on my growth as an individual. I became more independent, organized and conscious of time. Ntolo has contributed so much to my personal and professional life in Lesotho. She has been very supportive and jumps in anytime when I need her, especially where there is a language barrier. My manager has been more than just a manager- this lady believes in me more than I believe in myself. She takes the time to listen to me, especially where finances are concerned. Mr Kelias has offered support to our office in every possible way. He does not make you feel like there are other countries, and gives you his undivided attention.

GL keeps trying to find new ways to assist our work load. HR matters are taken seriously and I am grateful for that. Implementing Pastel Evolution will ensure we work smarter and toward the world of international financial systems.

The respect that colleagues have for each other is also something that I value at GL. We might be in a workplace but we treat each other well. I have made friends, family and mentors at GL, and sadly one of them will be leaving us soon. She has been such a great inspiration and I will always love and appreciate her.

Working at GL has taught me that everyone deserves a chance, and everyone deserves a better life. I now understand my work better as well as the work GL does. I am learning how to be patient, how to manage pressure and how to communicate without stepping on anyone's toes. The skills and knowledge I have received from GL will go with me everywhere I go. GL has become my school.



Fuzakazi (right) at work with the GL team in Lesotho.

Madagascar

Better to give than to receive

By Ialfine Papisy, Country Manager, Madagascar

> *Do your little bit of good where you can. It's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.* ~ *Desmond Tutu*



I started working for Gender Links five years ago. Facilitating workshops has become a routine for me. The only thing I need to do is get a good grasp of the training content do a thorough logistics arrangement and confirm that all the participants are coming.

As the GL country manager in Madagascar, I run many programmes, namely Governance, Media and Alliance, as well as advancing the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

In 2013, GL developed a new programme on entrepreneurship. This project undertakes to train women survivors of gender based violence to ensure that they gain financial autonomy. As a training manager with some experience in the private sector, I had to run this project for Madagascar, which unlike the other countries, has not had the assistance of a consultant for implementation. In the beginning, I was quite confident and I told myself it would be straightforward- simply training women in business! Before starting the first stage of the project, the survivors' I Stories needed to be written. This task was carried out by my colleague. Once these stories were collected and edited, I read them with much emotion in order to put myself in these women's shoes.

The first stage of the project took place in the city of Majunga. We worked with Majunga Counselling center in order to identify the women. When I reached the site,

all the women were looking at me as if they did not trust me at all. I tried to ease the situation during the opening session of the workshop, trying to help them understand that we were there to help them. The first module was a course on self-confidence. During that session, I realised that these women had completely lost hope and that those courses would not be enough for them to regain their self-confidence. One of the women actually cried while talking about what happened to her. I realised that I had to do my best to convince them that they could succeed, and that they would see the light at the end of the tunnel after completing the training.

As the training progressed, I could see that the women were gaining confidence. They started to speak up, and believed that they could improve their financial situation. The main problem they brought up was about how they would find money to implement their projects. I then explained to them that we were going to organise a meeting with the micro-credit institution in order to solve the problem. However, they were convinced that they would not be given loans as they had no bank guarantor. Indeed, that was the problem because, as a general rule, micro-credit institutions require some form of guarantee.

The same happened in the commune of Bongatsara, but this time, their projects did not require a large amount of financial resources as some wanted to plant soya and others wanted to keep chickens for laying eggs. This time around I was more aware of their challenges. As a gender activist, I wanted to walk the talk, leave these women with something, tangible. I decided to give them money from my own resources. That little bit of money could change their lives, so why not? Giving is better than receiving!



Ialfine at a Sixteen Days workshop and Phase III, Bongatsara.

Every problem is an opportunity

By Claudia Rakotonirina, Madagascar Programme Officer

Success is the child of audacity. ~ Benjamin Disraeli



It has been four years since I joined the GL team. I began as an intern in 2011, and now I am a programme officer. I assist the country manager in running different GL programmes and ensure data for monitoring and evaluation is collected.

Working at GL is always exciting and 2014 was no exception. It was a year full of surprises, interesting experiences, and great opportunities to grow. I learnt how to prioritise work, since we have several deadlines to meet. At the beginning of the year, the most important events were the district summits and the national summit. Organising these events is not an easy task and time was very tight. Thus, a well-planned strategy is crucial. During the summit period, I learned to take initiative, and organise my tasks according to expected results. To do this I wrote up a list of tasks by priority according to the overall objectives. This planning method helped me avoid stressful situations.

I have learnt a lot about keeping records and how to file both hard copy and electronic documentation. Previously, when I was asked for a document, it took me so long to search for it because my file management was not as good as it is now, and that negatively impacted on my productivity. Since we have many programmes, it is highly important to be well organised.



Claudia promoting GL products at a local fair.

I have also gained a better understanding of GL's work. When my manager went on maternity leave for three months, I represented GL at several meetings. Preparing for and attending these meetings improved my knowledge of GL's partners and the way in which GL operates. I also learnt a lot about civil society in Madagascar.

You cannot get experience by chance

By Zotonantenaina Razanandratefa, Programme Support and Finance Officer

> *I am bigger than anything that can happen to me. All these things- sorrow, misfortune, and suffering, are outside my door. I am in the house, and I have the key.*
>
> *~ Charles Fletcher Lummis*



I have been working for Gender Links for five years now. My work and designation has evolved over the time. In 2010 we worked with ten COE councils, now we have 66 councils. The 16 newest councils are very far from the capital of Madagascar. At GL we run a busy schedule, many things are done all at once, in a short period of time, so I have learnt to multi-task.

During 2014, GL implemented a new accounting system used by big companies: Sage Pastel Evolution. At University we did not have the time to use such programmes, and GL has taught me to use this advanced system. It was difficult in the beginning because testing a system requires time but after a training for two weeks, I understood the system which is implemented in all the SADC countries where GL operates. Although it is a uniform system, it has to be modified for each specific country. For example, in Madagascar we are required to submit financial reports according to the 2005 accounting plan, although the budget codes used by Pastel are quite different.

The national summit is improving every year. We had 175 participants and it was well organised compared to 2012. We have learnt to plan well and I trust the 2015 summit will even be better.

Through the entrepreneurship programme, I learnt that a huge number of Malagasy women are survivors of violence. After talking to them, I noted that the project needed to integrate family planning as part of the training. Although all the modules are very valuable, I believe that these women need more practical and financial support, because it is impossible for them to get micro-financing without a deposit.

Finally, by organising the different workshops, I know the value of a driver for the distribution of invitations. I now know exactly where our partners' offices are, as well as the ministries and the people that we invite to our workshops.



Zoto with his family in Madagascar.

Mauritius

Blessed to be part of the family

By Anushka Virahsawmy, Mauritius Country Manager

> *Success if not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful.* ~ Buddha



One and a half years with Gender Links, and I feel blessed to be part of this big family. It has been a very hectic but fruitful year, filled with tears, laughter, surprises and positivity. The past year has been a time of growth when it came to human issues. I learnt how to deal with different challenges and struggled to keep my head above water.

The many unplanned activities were as important, if not, more important than the planned ones. Tremendous work was achieved with the municipal and district councils after the verification process, and the national summit was a success. 2014 was a year of learning and sharing of good practices between all localities of Mauritius. We completed a pilot project in the Grand Port District Council, which I am hoping will be cascaded in all the other eleven councils in Mauritius. The workshop encouraged collaboration and teamwork among the members of the council, which I was told by the CEO of Grand Port District Council, does not happen often. I was also pleasantly surprised by the respect and commitment shown by the representatives of the councils and I was honoured to be part of that team.

Even though there were a few unfortunate human resource issues in the office, I had the help and support of a very good intern, Sheistah Bundhoo. Together we completed all the planned tasks and got funding for Sixteen Days of Activism campaign. We managed to garner a lot of in-kind support. The GL flag flies high in

the country - there has been a fantastic working relationship with the Australian High Commission, the European Union, the British High Commission, the University of Mauritius and various other government ministries. The Australian and British High Commissions want to continue working with us, and now the Ministry of Education and other NGOs want to collaborate in 2015.

Striving to accomplish work of the highest standard is what Mauritius did and GL innovative by organising a symposium which all the leaders of the four main political parties attended. It inspiring to see how women wanted their voices heard. Regretfully the election results were very disappointing. Out of 15 SADC countries, Mauritius has regressed in its ranking for the percentage of women in parliament. The country was at 10th place with 19% women parliamentarians, but has now dropped to 12th position with a mere 13% women in parliament. A few days after the results were released, we were shocked to hear that the percentage had worsened when the seven best losers were announced. Women now make up only 12% of parliament. Mauritius is now among the five Southern African countries with the lowest percentage of women in parliament.

I would like to eventually see the Mauritian office become an independent entity, but we will have to do things differently when it comes to the entrepreneurship and the COE training. The 2015 planning must be geared toward poverty alleviation through training and support.



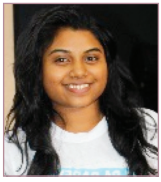
Anushka presenting at a 50/50 workshop.

My 2014 journey has been a very positive one and has helped me develop my networking and negotiation skills with different partners. I feel blessed to have people like Colleen Lowe Morna and Loga Virahsawmy as my mentors. They have contributed a lot to my journey and I am looking forward to a positive and productive 2015.

You cannot get experience by chance

By Sheistah Bundhoo - Intern at Gender Links Mauriitus

> *Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can't help them, at least don't hurt them.* ~ *Dalai Lama*



Enriching, amazing and boosting; this is how I would describe my experience at Gender Links (GL). When I joined in 2014, I met with this wonderful lady, Anushka Virahsawmy who first told me that in your working life 'if you fail to plan, you plan to fail'. Ever since, this has been my motto. Months back I would have never imagined what I have become today. Usually when you come out of university life, the student mindset is still with you; the thoughts, the reactions and the responses would be different. But today I see myself as a more mature person.

From taking personal testimonies of Gender Based Violence survivors to planning the biggest events at GL, the Manager has given me golden opportunities to grow, to network and explore the work. I am amazed by the working strategy of GL where transparency, accountability and peace reigns. In some months now, I will be going for my Masters but I give enormous credit to GL's contribution towards my achievement of this scholarship. I remember the day I went for the interview for this Masters scholarship and the board members told me: 'So you work at an NGO? Gender Links, right? I have seen their advertisements for the 16 Days Campaign. Good job'. I was like, 'wow', this is great!

I feel really blessed to have had undertaken this internship at GL. This is something I will cherish my whole life; the principles and work towards gender equality will always be on my agenda.

Mozambique

The more we are challenged, the more we learn

By Alice Banze, Executive Director of the Lusophone Office

> *Life is made up of successes, failures, challenges and lessons.*



2014 was full of challenges trying to build a Lusophone office that would meet the needs of GL, its partners and the women of Mozambique. In order to meet GL's vision and mission it required me to fundraise in order to sustain the Mozambique office, and to ensure that we are less dependent on GL Headquarters. I am passionate about GL's work and love to be challenged by different situations. Feeling challenged and loving the work you do helps you achieve successful results.

I started the year with funding from DFID through DIALOGO. This funding enabled us to replicate the COE work in other councils. After securing this funding, I was hopeful that more funds would be raised because GL was doing great work, but unfortunately we weren't so lucky. I was so frustrated by the endless messages reading, "We would like to inform you that your proposal was unsuccessful" or "We appreciate the work your organisation is doing to advance gender equality but you are not eligible, because we only fund national organisations."

I had to step back and review the strategies used to approach donors. I came to the conclusion that it was not about the quality of our work, but rather about the complex donor environment. I realised that the best way to move forward was to be more adapt to that environment.

I started researching other organisations and visited consultant companies hoping to get information and advice about surviving in the donor environment. I even did

a half day presentation to showcase all the work GL has been doing in Mozambique, and why this work is so important for the development of the country and the improvement of women's lives. I received many compliments and got really useful advice on how to improve all fundraising strategies. From that moment I knew that the doors were open and the Mozambique office would be in a better position to fly financially.

One of the big lessons I learnt through this process was that true success is not easily achieved. Life is made up of challenging situations that help us learn and grow, and encourage us see things differently. Without growth we cannot achieve our goals.

I'm excited about the opportunities that the New Year will bring. I am also excited to apply my knowledge and implement new fundraising strategies. Giving up is never an option, we should try everything possible to reach our goals. No pain, no gain!



Getting the word out in Mozambique.

Gender inequality is close to home

By Raul Manhisse, Programme Support and Finance and Admin Officer

> *Tomorrow's success, starts today.*
> *~ John Maxwell*



I joined Gender Links five months ago, and it has been a valuable learning experience. On my first day at work I was expecting to receive proper hand-over from outgoing colleagues, but to my surprise no one else was there, so the Lusophone Executive Director, Alice Banze was the one briefing me about my work. I was informed that I would have to multi-task as programme support, finance officer and general administrator.

I had drew on my previous work experience and worked hard to familiarise myself with GL tasks. Of course I made mistakes and needed to adjust to GL policies and procedures. Mr Mlilo from GL Headquarters came to Mozambique to conduct an internal audit and introduce me to the financial system. He made me realise that this was an opportunity to prove to myself that I can work well and help make GL a successful NGO in Mozambique.

My manager and I have been working hard to fundraise in Mozambique, and we have come up with strategies which we hope will be successful. The registration of GL as National branch in Mozambique is going to open doors for us financially. We do not need to panic. We will keep GL Mozambique running!

I am a Christian and working with GL has opened my eyes to the reality that men and women are equal and we were created in God's image. I have learnt a lot about gender equality and I now call myself a gender activist. Gender inequality is an issue close to my heart, because I witnessed gender discrimination and gender violence growing up. When I was just two years old, my father passed away and his relatives

sent my mother away. In the process she lost her house and land, and we were left homeless. She was a single mother, and without any help had to fend for her children.

I pray that I will marry a professional wife who understands the values of equality and who knows her rights so that she does not experience what my mother experienced. Tomorrow's success starts today - by empowering the women of today, we will have a successful tomorrow.



Alice Banze (left) and Raul at work in the Mozambique office.

Namibia

Advancing a post 2015 gender agenda

By Sarry Xoagus-Eises, Outgoing Namibia Country Manager

> *Envisioning women's rights post-2015, will address the status quo and help ensure equality in all spheres.*



Thank goodness for GL's SADC Gender Protocol Barometer, that measures countries' progress in achieving gender equality. Many countries both globally and regionally are preparing themselves for the deadlines on commitments they made to advancing women's Rights. GL has done so much work with many governments and civil society to realise the SADC Gender Protocol goals. Governments alone cannot achieve these goals, and GL has in many ways helped filled the gaps.

Government did a good job of domesticating and popularising SADC Gender Protocol, which expires August 2015. Namibia even embraced a voluntary quota for women to ensure a better representation of women in the National Assembly. We hope the percentage of women may even increase further, after the 2015 Local Authority and Regional Elections. The country won't meet all the targets and needs to do a lot more to address the high levels of gender violence. 2015 is the year of reckoning- Yes We Must! This year we take stock of how far we have come. But we can't stop there, we need to review and set stronger targets for the post-2015 agenda.



Gender Links is the only institution that has developed strategies, policies and programme areas to drive the SADC Gender Protocol before and after 2015. I have helped contribute to the success of these strategies and programmes. In 2014, working with donors was a great experience, and the year reemphasised the importance of prioritising women's empowerment in order to achieve equality.

Swaziland

Every ending brings a new beginning

By Ncane Maziya, Swaziland Outgoing Country Manager

> *It is important to forgive ourselves for making mistakes. We need to learn from our errors and move on.*



There were so many hardships, and ups and downs in the year of 2014. I learnt a lot in different spheres of my life. During the Sixteen Days of Activism campaign I heard very scary stories from survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). While I was going to different councils to review GBV action plans, I heard a story that shocked me to the core and I am still startled why the perpetrator has not been brought to book.

This lady shared her story with tears rolling down her face. She was raped at the age of 13 and then fell pregnant. What is so sad is that she has no love for her child and the child knows it and has threatened suicide.

GL is working with both urban and rural councils to cascade the Centres of Excellence (COEs) programme. GL Swaziland was recognised by one of the Gender Consortium partners - Swaziland Action Against Abuse (SWAAGA) and was requested to train three Shiselweni councils on GBV during the 2014 Sixteen Days campaign. Many men now better understand gender and GBV issues. One of the male participants from Hlatikhulu council also shared his story of abuse, about how the mother of his children abused him, but that he continued taking responsibility for his children.

Last year I learnt that patience and creativity are important. After realising that the DPM's office was taking time to sign a memorandum of understanding, I went to

the Director of Gender, and requested she write a supporting letter to the Tinkhundla Ministry. This allowed GL to continue enrolling new COEs.

I worked a lot with interns in 2014 to ensure that we met our deliverables. I also improved my training and public speaking skills. I am much better at facilitation and have a better understanding of data collection for monitoring and evaluation. I will continue to share my knowledge and support my colleagues, because GL has truly groomed me in good ways of working.

Finally, it is important that we forgive ourselves for making mistakes. We need to learn from our errors and move on. Making mistakes is part of our learning journey because if one never makes mistakes then one would never learn.



Ncane Maziya trains councillors in Swaziland in use of ICT's

Zambia

You can only give what you've got

By Sangulukani Isaac Zulu, Country Manager

> *We'll never make sustainable progress in our world until we all walk the longest journey, the journey within.* ~ *Dag Hammarskjold*



"When did you join Gender Links?" This is the question that I am always being asked wherever I have an opportunity to represent and talk about Gender Links (GL). Most people are surprised at my response. I speak with such zeal and passion that people think I have been working for GL a lot longer than I have.

My journey with GL started in 2009 through the Local Government Centres of Excellence (COE) programme. I was a political councillor in one of the first ten GL COE councils in Zambia. I served as an elected ward councillor in Chongwe District Council from September 2006 to July 2011. It was while I was serving as a councillor that I responded to a call for entries for the 2011 Regional Gender Summit. Fortunately, my entry was successful and I had the privilege of travelling to South Africa for the first time. At the summit I won the runner-up award in the leadership category. The prize meant a lot to me and it gave me impetus to champion the cause for women's empowerment in my council.

After having successfully served my full term in political office, I quit politics and went into private consultancy. In August 2013, while enrolled at a Technical & Vocational Training College (TVTC), I received a phone call from Faides Temba Nsofu, GL's Zambia country manager. She asked me if I would be interested in becoming a GL consultant for local government COEs. I submitted my application and curriculum

vitae, and by October 2013, I was facilitating COE stages four and five with the Chinsali Municipal Council in Muchinga Province.

On 24 April 2014, at Cresta Golfview Hotel in Lusaka, I was introduced as GL Zambia Country Manager by Mme Colleen Lowe Morna, GL's CEO, who had come to Zambia for the 2014 National Summit. I wondered if I was the first ever male country manager, and told myself that I was diversifying in GL! There were over 130 people in the room that evening, and Mme Colleen asked me to stand at the podium and make some remarks before the key note speaker. I confidently stood up and picked up the microphone.

Over the years, I have taught myself to learn from whatever mistakes I make. However, I strongly believe that it is a mistake to repeat a mistake! While mistakes might be unavoidable in our journey of life, some mistakes are too costly and their consequences too ghastly to contemplate. I am a very outspoken person, who believes that one should take full responsibility for their actions. Those that love me have told me that I am sometimes too frank and assertive. This comes from my strong belief that open rebuke is better than hidden love.

Through the feedback I receive, I have learnt to listen, be more empathetic and to embrace diversity. I have come to appreciate that everyone is unique. It is important to respect other people's opinions and only push my way if it is for the common good or in public interest. From my mistakes I have learnt to pay serious attention to detail and invest more time in planning my work.

Being enrolled at 'GL University' full time since March 2014 has taught me too much to mention. The rich content I work with provides a wonderful platform for multi-tasking and exploiting of one's full potential. The availability of modern information technologies; excellent evaluation and monitoring tools; and abundant resource materials have greatly contributed to my learning. I can comfortably say I am now a better writer than I was three years ago. Despite being born before computers (BBC), I am very IT proficient.

Faides Nsofu, the former Country Manager has been a great mentor. For instance, she taught me to respect deadlines, how to network and to ensure value for money

in all GL activities. Despite being a married and busy mother, she invested lots of time ensuring that responsibilities were smoothly handed over to me when she finally stepped down. She made herself available 24/7 so I could ask her help on any matter.

Being a multi-racial and multi-cultural organisation, GL has added a lot of value to my life. It is amazing how a small organisation, can positively affect millions of lives across the globe through well-structured and impactful programmes. GL has taught me to do my job with integrity, accountability, transparency and objectivity. Some challenging situations have enhanced my people skills, and shown me that I am capable of so much. Change is inevitable, but effective and efficient change is both crucial and inescapable. GL should invest in developing better ways of managing change at both strategic and operational level in order to avoid any system break-down.

Through the rich knowledge and experience that I continually gain at GL, I will undoubtedly become a better local government COE facilitator and manager. I personally believe there is plenty room for improvement. I need to up my game in meeting deadlines and enhance the quality of my reports. Going forward, I will undoubtedly continue putting everything I have learnt into practice for the benefit of both GL and my own growth.



Sangulukani Isaac Zulu presenting at a Local Government COE Village Level workshop, in Chipata District, Zambia.

Learning never stops

By Stephen C. Malulu, Programme Officer, Zambia

> *All the world is my school and all humanity is my teacher.* ~ *George Whitman*



2014 was filled with so many priceless moments, one of them being when I facilitated my first high level workshop during the Sixteen days of Activism in Kasama and Livingstone. The high calibre audience made me nervous at the beginning of both events. But the feeling of holding a successful workshop packed with such highly educated participants gave me real joy and satisfaction.

Training GBV survivors in the entrepreneurship training gave me equal exhilaration. During Phase 1 training in Chirundu, a small town at the Zambian border with Zimbabwe, six participants had never seen a computer in their life. They were afraid to touch the computer because they did not want to damage it and were not motivated to try as they did not think they could learn how to use the seemingly sophisticated machine. But after days of practice and coaching especially on how to move the cursor and where to find it on the screen, every participant in that training could do some basic functions with the computer.

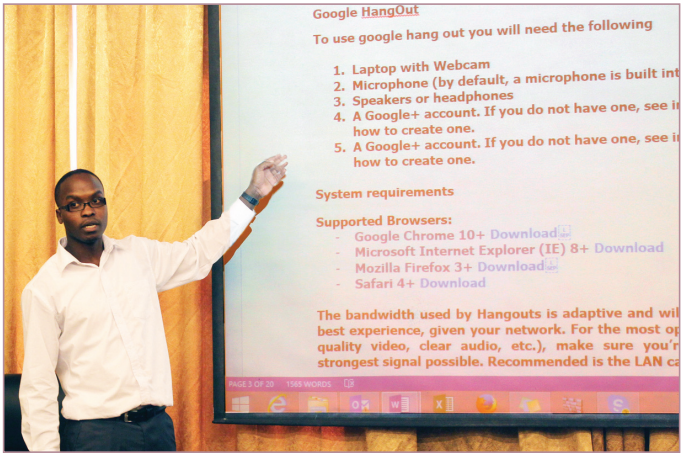
They were all able to use Microsoft word and they each typed a business letter to show their newly acquired skills. The joy on their faces and the happiness in their hearts at the end of the training made me realise that the training was not just about entrepreneurship. It was like a happiness therapy to them and a moment for them to forget about their traumatic experiences and to look at the brighter side of their lives. And to me that redefined my work at GL: it became about changing the lives of people I came into contact with.

My job as a programme officer entails planning and reporting on assigned tasks, ensuring that M&E tools are administered at all workshops conducted, co-facilitating training where necessary and ensuring routine maintenance of finances and resources.

Our relationship with the councils provides a strong link between GL and the communities we work with. Our work in these different communities helps me appreciate the different cultures of people and the ways in which they perceive life. It helps us acknowledge peoples differences in levels of understanding issues of gender equality and gender based violence.

Working at GL has taught me many things. I learnt from my previous Country Manager Faides Nsofu who always emphasised working fast and multi-tasking. She taught me never to procrastinate and to get all work done on time. This helped me a lot during our preparations for the District summits and later on the 2014 National Summit.

My current Country Manager Isaac Zulu has taught me a different, but essential philosophy of work. He believes in staying calm and always prioritizing work whenever multiple tasks arise. This has helped me especially when working with local government officials who always want to set their pace of work when collaborating with partners and stakeholders. Working with GL has transformed me into a hardworking and strategic individual. I am able to apply the knowledge gained at Gender links to help others, to improve my personal life and to attain professional and personal goals. I always apply the value for money principle in my personal life and when advising people around me.



Stephen Malulu during the 2014 16 Days of Activism Training of Trainers at Golden Bridge Hotel, Lusaka.

The year 2014 is gone; I am now looking forward to a wonderful and challenging 2015. I am hoping to facilitate some COE workshops and I am anxious to learn about the prevailing levels of GBV in my Country after the final Zambia GBV Research report is released. I hope to keep learning from my endeavours as GL Zambia programmer officer.

Change is always possible

By Aubrey Sakuwaha, Finance and Administration Intern, Zambia



Two days prior to the GBV Indicators Research our Country Manager, Isaac Zulu, sent me to the Airport to receive Morne du Preez, one of the facilitators coming from South Africa. I stood at the entrance to the terminal building with a poster written 'Morne - Gender Links', as I waited for the plane's arrival. All the passengers on the said flight seemed to have all gone, but I could not locate my visitor. I requested security to check inside the terminal building, to no avail. I developed an odd feeling like I had lost something until, to my relief, Morne emerged from the crowd with a smile. This was my first administrative assignment: going to an Airport I had never been to before and looking for someone I had no idea about.

As Finance and Administration Intern, my major responsibilities are finances. I had to ensure budgets were prepared for Programme work (COEs and Entrepreneurship training), venues organised and payments processed on time. I have to contact participants and inform them about upcoming workshops and at the same time ensure general Office administrative responsibilities were met in relation to everyday operations.

I have learnt multi-tasking, time management, prioritisation of tasks from HQ requiring timely responses. The work environment is dynamic and everything moves at a very fast pace. The organisation is constantly evolving, especially with Systems linked to Information Technology and Communication (ITC). Although we work as a team, individually I had to study more as I was being exposed to new information every day.

Due to ever improving IT systems at GL, I improved my IT skills further. Most of our statutory payments in Zambia such as Pay as you earn tax and Pension contributions for instance, are done online. This is a very good system (and a valuable skill to learn)

as online payment systems are taking over the business world due to their efficiency, effectiveness, risk reduction nature and their capabilities to improve accountability.

In trying to keep up with the dynamic work culture at GL, I saw my personal philosophy about life develop both as an individual and as a professional. Working with GL gave me an opportunity to meet and interact with people from all walks of life and I have learnt never to put myself first before others, to show respect to everyone and to be a better student of my own life.

My biggest inspiration has been my Country Manager, Isaac Zulu a professional Accountant who is both my manager and role model. I have learnt a lot from his vast accounting and personal life experience. He always explained further including underlying principles whenever I sought advice about financial policies I was facing challenges in understanding. He always emphasized on hard work and team spirit if we would go far in achieving the objectives of the organisation.

When I joined GL, it seemed like there was not much to do except for finances. I proved myself wrong in my first week of work when I attended one of the COE trainings in Samfya, Luapula province of Zambia. I came to appreciate what GL is doing to combat GBV and mainstream gender into society for development. Soon after the workshop I reflected on the discussions I had been part of and realised just how much I did not know about gender - So much information was out there but it took a good facilitator or teacher to put it in plain words. This made me love my organization and the work that I was doing a lot more.

Today I share most of the information I have acquired on gender and development with friends and acquaintances because I do not want them to ask themselves the same question I did the first time I attended a GL workshop - how come I never knew all this?

The one thing about Gender Links is that the work scope is so large and you get exposed to your fears, but it leaves you no choice other than to face them, and at the end of it all you become better than you were before because you soar above everything. The year 2014 was an eye opener, I am now looking forward to more challenges in 2015. I am positive all will be well because at GL nothing ever fails.

A new person in me!

By Naomi Kalikeka, Programme Intern, Zambia

> *A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimension.* ~ *Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.*



Having worked for an organisation as an intern for about a year, and my contract almost coming to an end, I decided to cast my net wider in search for another job. One Monday morning with my Certificates and Curriculum vitae in an envelope I decided to visit the Gender Links Office. Walking up the stairs, I wondered what the day had for me. I prayed whilst climbing the stairs for a miracle to come; hoping even for voluntary work as I did not want to spend any more time at home doing nothing. I dropped my application and Certificates at the GL offices and decided to go back to my former work place. An hour later, I received a call from the then Country Manager, Faides Nsofu who asked me to come back to the GL offices. I was so happy to hear that they needed my services though on a voluntary basis, but that did not matter to me as I just wanted to acquire the experience that would help me become a better social scientist in future.

I started work on 18th October, 2013. On my very first day GL Zambia had a workshop to present research findings on a pilot study on GBV in four Districts of Zambia. I had the rare opportunity to meet people from different organisations. It was so exciting to be part of friendly team who gave me a very warm welcome and treated me like I had been part of them for some time. I told myself "I think I am in the right place." What motivated me most was Faides asking me to stand up when the Deputy Chief Executive officer asked GL Zambia staff to stand up and be appreciated for the commendable job they had done during the pilot Study. It made me feel like flying as I did not imagine myself being among a team that would be commended by the Deputy CEO.

Barely a week old at GL, I had to go to a workshop in Kalulushi a town in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia. I had more questions than answers, including: "What am I supposed to do at this workshop; what is the workshop all about?" I then gathered enough courage and asked the facilitator who told me what the workshop was all about and what I was supposed to do. He went on to encourage me and said I could execute my duties excellently. The facilitator went on to tell me that at GL it is about learning by doing. I thank Isaac Zulu for believing in me and for encouraging me to put in the best in all I do.

I still had challenges helping facilitate workshops, it was not easy for me to stand in front of Government workers and local leaders to say even a single word but I had no option but to do it as I was assigned to be making announcements during workshops.Handling a camera and taking photos was something I had never done before yet I was told to take photos during the workshops. To my surprise, the pictures I took were said to be very good ones. This further gave me the confidence. My deliverables at GL include assisting with logical planning and implementation of programme events especially the Local Government COE and Entrepreneurship training; data capturing and management of Monitoring and Evaluation forms;



Naomi Kalikeka at work in the Zambia office.

uploading and captioning photographs. My work also includes compiling monthly systems reports in preparation for monthly management meetings, typing of "I" Stories and ofcourse taking care of GL equipment during and after workshops aswell as doing any assignment assigned to me when need arises.

There have been challenges: I remember one time when I forgot all the workshop materials packed in a bag and I carried the wrong one! I only realised what I had done after Isaac called me notifying me of the mishap. Thanks to good team work, the forgotten luggage arrived before the start of the workshop the following day. There were times when tasks would become too many and I felt like giving up, but the overwhelming support I recieved from my colleagues kept me going.

My stay at GL has brought out what I would call a new person in me. I have learnt a lot and I am now able to do things that I did not know before, my IT skills have greatly improved and all thanks to my GL family who have been there to offer assistance when I needed it.

The Entrepreneurship program is one area that I enjoyed the most because my passion lies in poverty eradication and improving the welfare of women in society. I have always wanted to know and understand why women have been vulnerable and underpriviledged compared to men. It was a priviledge to be assigned to the Entrepreneurship programme where I accompanied the Entrepreneurship facilitator on her workshop trips. This assignment made it possible for me to have direct contact and interaction with the survivors of GBV, thereby broadening my understanding of this issue. Interviewing GBV survivors' about their plight taught me to be self reliant as a woman as I realised that dependency on a another person was the root cause of abuse. I have learnt that GBV can happen to any one regardless of ethnicity and religious background. It is a vice that must be crushed at the very first instance it appears.

My stay at GL has made me realise my full potential and it brought out certain aspects that I did not know about myself. It has changed my perception of life as a woman and has broadened my understanding of gender. It has built up my self confidence: I am now able to relate freely with anyone regardless of sex, status or class in society. My stay at GL taught me to be humble and wise. To sum it all up Gender Links brought out a new person in me!

My talents discovered!

By Tafele Mbewe, Intern, Zambia

> *Your talents and abilities will improve over time, but you have to start from somewhere.* ~ *Martin Luther King Jr*



I stayed home for over a year after college writing job applications. Sadly nothing came out of it. All I got were promises that I would be called back. In April of 2014 I thought I should give myself a last try and just see how it goes. I remember taking my letter to the Gender Links office and telling myself even if I was not called at least I had made an effort. The welcome I got at reception made me start praying that I would be called back: I was so sure GL would be the best place for me to start my working journey!

Two weeks later, I still had not got a call from the Gender Links office. It felt like I had waited forever for the call and when it finally came I was so excited that my letter to work as a volunteer was considered. Since then it has been a learning experience every day. The staff in the GL office have been very helpful and patient with me, they made it so easy for me to feel like I fitted in. I remember one time when I accompanied Isaac Zulu, the Country Manager, for a village level meeting in Mumbwa. Instead of administering the participants list for that occasion, I used the one for Centres of Excellence. He explained to me the difference between the two and where I administer which form.

At one time I was so upset with myself because I felt I was failing miserably and I just wanted to quit. It took Stephen Malulu the programme officer to encourage me and am happy he did and I stayed on. From that I learnt that I cannot just drop everything because something has become tough. At the office we have become more than workmates: we have become a small family. There are times we have had to work late trying to meet a deadline and it was clear to see the team spirit in us as we all showed passionate towards achieving our goal.

I usually work with Naomi Kalikeka, a fellow Intern. She had always been of great help. Every time Isaac would give us tasks, Naomi ensured that we did the task on time and according to the finest detail provided. Every day I went to the office I learned something new and many thanks go to Aubrey the finance Intern who was always nice to me and constantly helped me improve my IT skills.

As this is my first job, there is a lot to learn. Before I came to GL I had no idea about office etiquette, writing minutes for a meeting and how to take good photos. I have developed a love for pictures; how they are taken can really tell a story and that a story without them is dull! The nature of work at GL requires one to have an open mind and to be a very social person. This is because we are always travelling and meeting new people with different personalities, beliefs and backgrounds.

My duties as an Intern were to assist with logistical planning and implementation of programme events especially the Local Government COE and Entrepreneurship trainings. It also entailed data capturing, management of M&E forms and uploading of photos taken at events. Generally I did almost anything that required my help, I feel useful in one way or the other and really appreciate being part of the GL team because it really is and has been a very big stepping stone in my life and I cannot be happier that I started my work experience from here.

Gender Links has helped me become more social. I can easily relate with anyone regardless of class or status. Before, I liked to keep to myself and would always have my head buried in a novel and detached from the world around me. I did not realize I was missing out on all the beautiful things our country had to offer, the people and especially the scenery.

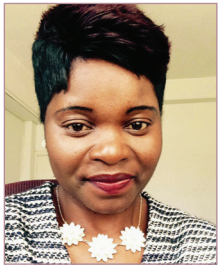
I can honestly say that I am not the same person that I was when I joined GL.I am now more gender aware. I never took much interest in pictures because I thought that is a man's job. I have now come to realise that a woman can take just as good picture as any man can! I had a great 2014 and look forward to an even more exciting and invigorating 2015 at GL if time and circumstances allow.

Zimbabwe

Commitment leads to victory

By Priscilla Maposa Country Manager, Zimbabwe Office

> *Every worthwhile accomplishment has a price tag attached to it. The question is whether you are willing to pay the price to attain it: in hard work, sacrifice, patience, faith and endurance.* ~ *John Maxwell*



As the norm at GL, we commenced the year 2014 at the Head Office for the annual planning meeting and training. As I was working through multiple activities at HQ, my sixth sense kept on nudging me, reminding me that of the three year funding proposal to be put forward to the Swedish Embassy. I really had a tough time and spent sleepless nights. As usual, I was saved by the realisation that I was not alone because the CEO of GL, Colleen Lowe Morna, was always by my side to give me direction. I vividly recall the day we worked until midnight because we had set a target to be met. When I thought I had done everything, I emailed the proposal to the CEO and pronounced a great sigh of relief.

The response later showed in my mail inbox and I froze right there in front of my computer. I had to redo the proposal! I sat still, waiting at the bright screen not knowing what to execute next. I told myself that I must do the job and get down to business. It was a painful exercise, but it brought me to another stage of professional growth. After various encounters with the Swedish Embassy, our proposal was successful and we got the three year financing. At that moment the words of our CEO, "Sango rinopa waneta (the forest rewards the weary)" came flashing into my mind.

It is not over until it is over! The grant agreement included a condition that we had to go through an audit before the funds could be disbursed. That proved to be

another litmus test which I had to pass. Preparations were tough, but I saw myself growing from strength to strength. The Head Office played an oversight role and allowed the Zimbabwe Office to exercise full control and ownership of the process. I witnessed a high level of team spirit between the Head Office (the Finance Department) and the Zimbabwe office team. May I take this opportunity to thank Miso Dhliwayo, Director of Operations at Head Office for the continued support. Team spirit and commitment is vital for the success of any project as shown by the successful audit.

I feel humbled by the confidence conferred in the Zimbabwe office by our Head Office. The CEO authorised me to sign all donor agreements and to respond to queries; a high level of autonomy to the Zimbabwe office. Through this experience, I learnt that there is a need for Head Office to play an oversight role but still allow country offices room to grow. I feel indebted to the CEO for everything because she is a very busy person, but she still had time to groom me and give me guidance. I also in turn allowed my team to grow and manage their portfolios which made us all grow as a team.

As the Zimbabwe Country Manager, my work is largely centred on the Gender and Governance Programme, particularly the Centres of Excellence for Gender mainstreaming in Local Government programmes. Management of staff and consultants also falls under my jurisdiction. The role requires me to mobilise resources, and manage partnerships and finance. Profiling GL at a country level is likewise one of my major duties.



Priscilla Maposa signs the Sida grant agreement with Wonder Jekemu.

All the effort I put into my tasks has produced

positive results. In 2014, 33 councils became COE's. All this took place in the face of harsh economic challenges. Some Council's successfully implemented their action plans with some setting aside budgets for gender activities. Political buy-in is the key for any plan to be successful. The high level political buy-in, involvement of the parent Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development bore fruit. This was commendable considering the evolution of the COE process. As I carried out my duties, I learnt that getting more men involved in programmes still needs more effort, but GL Zimbabwe has made strides in a number of COEs. The Field visit to Makoni RDC by Sida resulted in a new momentum for the COE programme. I was so humbled by the level of commitment displayed by the council. Capacity building of Gender Focal Persons (GFPs) through the COE process also bore fruit: most of them have been elevated.

One of the most important lessons I learnt is that willingness to learn is the key to success. The CEO of GL offered support; I was willing to learn. In the end, I benefited a great deal. I also learned, to quote the Chair of GL, that "hard work will never betray the worker." The work that GL is doing in Zimbabwe made it possible for the Swedish Embassy to extend our grant by three years. But there is no free lunch; the next grant is only as good as performance on the last one!

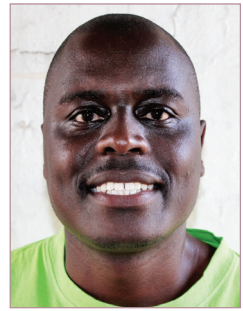
As I continued to manage partnerships, I learnt that the value of nurturing relationships to the survival of any organisation. Partnerships are a foundation of our work. The partnership between Gender Links Zimbabwe, Ministry of Local government and International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) has managed to produce results as it strengthened the COE process.

My learning journey in 2014 was not a stroll in the park. I made my fair share of mistakes, but I learned and grew from them. I would like to thank Pat Made, my Board member, for always being there for me when I need her. Anna Harris, GL's HR consultant, has transformed me into a better manager through her coaching sessions. I have learnt that a happy team is a winning team. It is always refreshing to see your staff members growing from strength to strength through delegation of responsibilities. To my family, the Zimbabwe office team: Tapiwa, Abigail and our interns, friends and colleagues - thank you for the continued support and for believing in me.

Learning and applying

By Kevin Chiramba, Senior Programme officer, Zimbabwe

> *A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.* ~ *Lao Tzu*



Welcome aboard! As you start reading this piece, you are probably wondering why I chose that heading or that quotation by Lao Tzu, but let me tell you something: my learning journey so far, has been that of learning and applying. To me, joining Gender Links was a turning point in my career, and Lao Tzu's words reverberate as I look back at the six months that I spent at GL head office in the Justice department, before moving to the Zimbabwe office as Senior Programme Officer at the end of the year.

My work revolved around planning for surveys, collecting and analysing data, writing and editing research reports, and organising events. When I joined GL, I was still engulfed in academic writing but as each day unfolded, it soon dawned to me that I needed to strike a balance between academic and media writing. This formed part of my first learning drill. To date, I have become accustomed to how educational psychologists define learning. They view learning as a relatively permanent change in behaviour brought about as a result of experience or practice. Sometimes during a learning curve you may stumble over one or two things. I don't know how many times I was sent back and forth by the finance office to make corrections on the finance forms.

Then came the day when I was preparing research instruments for the Lesotho GBV research. I had begun printing the Women's and Men's questionnaires but the heavy duty stapler was giving me difficulties as it could not fasten the thick questionnaires. At the same time, the toner was showing signs of distress. As anxiety crept in, Procurement Officer Fikile Maviya came to my rescue. She advised me to contact PostNet and send everything that I wanted printed. She helped me through the

process and eventually I realised that it was a very cost effective way of doing things which ensured value for money. Had it not been for that timeous intervention, I could have gobbled thousands of pages of bond paper and one or two units of the toner.

As I went through my daily chores, it also dawned on me that I needed discipline to learn as well as take responsibility for my actions. I also learnt new vocabulary that is, P-drive, back end, telecon. Above all I learnt to understand and appreciate some of GL lingo; *'let's touch base', 'by COB today' or better still '… is on my case.'*

Life was a bit hectic in terms of meeting deadlines but I was glad that GL has appropriate tools, templates, and forms to use. It has a great repository of knowledge and resource materials that can quench your thirst for learning at any given time. This helped me so much whenever I wanted to write a report, make a requisition or compile monitoring and evaluation data.

In addition, GL's online resources such as SharePoint, and p-drive are awesome platforms that ignited enthusiasm and motivation to want to discover more and more. Coupled with the high speed Internet, I could do my research and verify facts before putting something in a report.

When I was given the task of editing 'I' stories I was careful to meet the grade that Mme Colleen expects, however, I was a bit slow. Given another chance to do the same, I hope to increase my pace.

When I saw people working quietly in their offices, I thought I was lost. During the first few days I would ask myself whether or not these people talk at all. I then realised that GL's work revolves around meeting strict deadlines and working towards a common purpose, requires a business unusual approach. I felt challenged to work the extra mile because now I had internalised that *if you snooze you lose!* I did not want to be a weak link in the chain!

The great teamwork at GL helped me to quickly grasp the basics and much needed skills to keep afloat. To me everything was just like magic. Whenever I approached anyone in programmes or corporate services to consult, I found people ready to assist. This slowly melted away the apprehension that I felt in the initial months.

During my stay, I helped with the GBV indicators research in Zambia. I crossed the 2.5 kilometre Luapula Bridge on my way to Mansa. This is one of the longest bridges in Africa with an amazing view of the Luapula River.

The opportunity to work and interact with people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds challenged and inspired me. I learnt to accommodate other people's views and feelings as well as embrace new ideas. I even found myself wearing Basotho regalia on South Africa's Heritage day! I now consider being able to work with people from diverse educational backgrounds and nationalities as my greatest achievement. Not only has this enhanced my professional career but also it added value to how I interact with different personalities.

From June to December 2014 I not only worked at GL head office; I also stayed in the GL guest house. This too taught me some of life's important lessons, including being responsible with institutional property. Before going to sleep each day I would make sure that each door is locked and the kitchen is left clean. GL house manager Mum Josey taught me to use a washing machine. Monica Ntebe and Susan Mogari taught me to set up a teleconference. Thank you for this.

My stay at GL completely changed my life in terms of appropriate use of technology to work smart. Now I can use MS Outlook to schedule my tasks, and even set up meetings. I can use Preditor for content management. I also learnt to check my emails the way I check my rear view and side mirrors when driving. This will ensure that I do not miss any communication that demands my action.

They say a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Like the monthly walks I loved participating in for my general well-being, I am still walking; still learning!

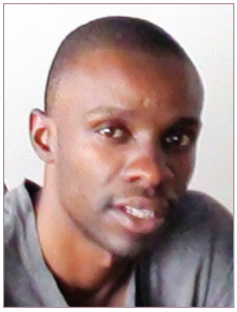


Kevin Chiramba interviewing Senior Chief Chipepo in Central Zambia.
Photo by: Muliyunda Lilembalemba

Excellence is not an act but a habit

By Tapiwa Zvaraya, Country Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Zimbabwe

> *You are always a student, never a master. You have to keep moving forward.* ~ *Conrad Hall*



Looking back over the years, it seems like I have been at Gender Links (GL) forever. Well, I do not mind because this is the only place I have called my home away from home. The late Steve Jobs once said, "you can never connect the dots looking forwards but looking backwards." The last three years at GL have given me a platform on which to reflect and savour the lessons, though they were neither always good nor always bad. In life you can forget everything except the lesson. Here is my expedition through GL over the past couple of months.

As I reflect on my GL expedition, I am seeing the world in a different way and language. Quick to come to my head are the words 'Baseline', 'Indicators', 'Targets', 'Outcomes', 'Outputs' and 'Objectives'. Yes, that is the world I wake up to every single day at GL. Words that have become my persona. I am currently the Zimbabwe Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, a new title which I have just been accorded which also comes with new responsibilities and a lot of excitement and adjustment too. Among my many responsibilities are to collect and analyse all the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) for the country. This includes the use of websites, which is a feature that I'm really excited about as we are transitioning to a new form of website.

The use of M&E tools like Attitudes Survey, Citizen Scorecard, Gender & Media Diversity Centre forms will aid my collection of quantitative data while the use tools like Drivers of Change forms will present the organisation with qualitative data. Furthermore these tools have been absorbed into the organisation's websites which will make the work easier. These tools will help the organisation in its reporting framework to donors and other external partners alike. The transition from Programme Officer to Monitoring and Evaluation Officer is no mean feat but those

are the qualities that have been engrained in me by GL. I would not have achieved this feat without the help of my manager, Priscilla Maposa to whom I owe the utmost gratitude for nurturing me over the last couple of years and still counting.

The past year has seen me learning a great deal of things in the organisation. The biggest lesson is that 'It is not always the team with the most talented individuals that will win the match, but the team that is willing to work together and have the greatest heart will always succeed'. This is how the Zimbabwe office has worked together as a team. That unity of purpose has seen me grow to appreciate my own strengths and shortcomings as an individual. The Embassy of Sweden Grant and the demands of the deliverables also helped me learn that I am not doing this job for my own cause but for the cause of a lot of silent voices out there. Our ability to satisfy the donor requirements showed us the impact that GL has had in the lives of the unheard.

The Audit brought with it tireless nights of preparation, back and forth engagements with the Head Office. This was a pinnacle event in my life and personal growth. I am glad that as a result of the audit, GL has started reviewing some of the policies that were questioned by the audit team especially the Information and Communication Technology Policy, seeing to it that I also handle some of that in my portfolio. Again teamwork shone through: Priscilla, Abigail, myself, management and staff at Head Office did their part to ensure the success of this audit.

2014 showed me that hard work will always be recognised. For the first time I managed to win awards as a GL employee. I look at those accolades and think to myself: "Someone helped me get those. Someone brought the diamond out of me." Thank you Priscilla and Abigail for extracting the diamond; thank you GL for processing the diamond. I want to do it again. All I can do is strive to work harder than I have and be an inspiration, not only to myself but other people within or outside GL.

As 'I keep walking' like Johnnie Walker, I hope the New Year will bring more excitement, thrills and spills. And yes, it has already begun: EPI Info, MS project, Pastel Evolution. I am ready to walk even through the rain and keep learning. Like Mahatma Gandhi said, "Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever."

Like a phoenix… rising from the ashes

By Abigail Karikoga, Finance and Admin Officer, Zimbabwe

> *Don't wait for the perfect moment. Take the moment and make it perfect.* ~ *Anonymous*



2014 came and went and it all felt like a haze. All the days looked like one very long day. Oooh my… 2014 was a year I felt like a phoenix… rising from the ashes. A year of mistakes; success; love and happiness!

For the first time in my life I was in charge of ensuring logistics for a group with over 100 people (my first national summit). All those people needed something every now and then. I saw the look of hope and appreciation from the survivors of gender violence who attended the summit. For the first time I felt that I was part of something big, something that has impact on people's lives. I was in awe of this. This needed to be sorted, that needed to be done but above all that chaos the team came out strong and the summit went well.

Through all of this, I knew that with team work everything works out, lessons that have been taught and learnt. All this is to better yourself and grow. Through all the ups and downs that I experienced during the year the one thing that has been a constant is family, friends and my partner. In 2014 I learnt that in every situation there is a lesson and reason for it. How you handle it will determine whether you sink or swim.

I am Zimbabwe's Country Finance and Administration Officer. Among my duties are to ensure that the office financial systems are running smoothly: daily, weekly and monthly. It is my responsibility to ensure that budgets are adhered to and proper financial systems and documentation are kept well within the confines of the organization. Over the last year I have learnt that Gender Links has an intricate set of financial systems. I arrived at GL at a time when the organisation was rolling out

their latest technological advancement: Pastel Evolution as well as MS Project. These tools have been the backdrop of financial reporting amidst all the other paperwork from cash requisition forms to quote comparisons.

Working with GL Zimbabwe has seen me grow both at a personal and institutional level. I owe much of this growth to my immediate supervisor Priscilla Maposa. She has managed to keep us as a close-knit family while guiding me on GL financial processes, including programming. It is because of her that I now have an understanding of the Centres of Excellence (COE) process. This has enabled me to understand the programming jargon. I have also been able to help with some Monitoring and Evaluation, as I have an appreciation of the online Attitudes forms and Gender Empowerment Index forms. This is a skill I acquired mainly due to the fact that I was responsible for handling the Entrepreneurship programme.

Perhaps the pinnacle of the lessons learned this past year was the Swedish Embassy financial audit. The preparations for this and subsequent undertaking of the audit was a big eye opener as it helped not only myself but the whole organization realise our shortcomings as well as our strengths. It enabled the organization to realise areas where we could improve. As an individual going through this process was a big challenge as the audit came at a time when I was writing my examinations, thus I had to strike a balance between work and school. I am glad I managed to handle the situation to the best of my abilities and all went well.

Reflecting on the journey I cannot forget the period I was asked to go to Head Office and help out the organisation with the finances. I learnt a great deal; thanks in particular to the Director of Operations Miso Dhliwayo, who was always there to help and give guidance. I managed to come and apply some of the skills that I gained. Unexpectedly I also won a prize at the Gender Links annual staff awards.

I often wonder how a new person like me would manage to achieve such a feat. Thanks to all that have been part of this journey. I wish to keep growing and be like the wine that matures with age. I look forward to working with the new Pastel system and seek to make the GL Team look and be good. I am simply a little fish swimming in a pool full of big fish. I will endeavour to swim all the time, even against the tide.

Corporate Services

Rising is the surest way to defy a fall

By Miso Dhilwayo, Director of Operations

> *While we're at it, we might as well …*



In today's world humankind has come to depend infinitely on technology. Technology brought about the global village. Against this backdrop we at Gender Links felt we had to up our technological ante as well. We crafted our Terms of Reference for Pastel Evolution, the new finance software that we all agreed would take us to the next generation of accounting.

We undertook a transparent process of procurement, culminating in the choice of a Gender Links- sensitive service provider, echoing one of our core values. After a convincing presentation by the choice service provider, we drew up a service contract. The launch of Pastel Evolution commenced with much fanfare. Expectations were high. This bouncy baby enjoyed everyone's attention.

In the interim, unknown to the service provider, our expectations grew exponentially. Instead of a donkey's cart, we now needed a horse's carriage! A donkey does not yield to duress, something else ought to give. The first attempt at launching Pastel Evolution suffered a still birth. The ensuing fallout had many victims of culpability. As would be expected nobody wants to own a simmering cauldron with its unpalatable broth. There had been many cooks.

As legend has it, rising is the surest way to defy a fall! Project Pastel Evolution was re-launched under clearer management. With our visions crystallised by our previous experience, we could see more clearly.

I was reminded of the famous Nestle case study of a $200m, ERP June 2000 project that failed after this sizeable investment. I remembered that projects tend to expand once people become excited about them with the underlying thought that "While we're at it, we might as well …" I was also reminded of the fact that projects that keep expanding, with new objectives being added are nearly certain to go off and may at times fail to achieve their original goals. The empowerment and ability of the "project leader" to say "no" is key. One takes cognisance of the fact that the choice of the service provider is extremely critical.

Several dynamics were at play!

The time factor: From hind sight, one wonders what difference, if any, stopping the initial launch brought to bear? One is left with the feeling that that the initial launch was not accorded a fair chance, given the protracted time period the second launch has taken.

Budget overruns: One wonders if the initial supplier had been encouraged to re-quote for extra time in the expanded scope of work, the project would have cost as much as it has with the re-launch.

High stress for the finance team: While we re-implemented finance systems, routine work, donor reports, policies, forms, support etc. demanded attention. The team tried to cope by putting in long hours at the office, literally working every day. We gave our utmost sweat, at times even tears but was it enough? Did we as a team triumph? One may note that we had remarkable deliverables notably donor reports manually generated. We also had undesirable side effects with high staff attrition and a lethargic team, perhaps due to the guilt or failure cards flashing in our minds.

2014 has indeed been a year of events. Generally we came out triumphant. My contribution counts, a way has been made for those following behind; work will be much more pleasant as systems work optimally.

Learning from mistakes

By Vivien Bakainaga, Human Resources and Asset Manager

> *A woman must be big enough to admit her mistakes, smart enough to profit from them and strong enough to correct them.* ~ By John C. Maxwell



In 2014 I completed six years with Gender Links (GL), was among those awarded with a long service award. You would think that with this award tucked away in my collection I have mastered my work: no challenges, boring routines! This would be the biggest misconception at GL. GL a dynamic Southern Africa NGO: dynamic in the true sense of the word, characterised by constant change, activity and progress. Working in this kind of environment, you learn to stay on your toes and keep abreast of the moving times. At GL you never stop learning, by choice or by coincidence. As I write this Learning Journey, it never ceases to amaze me how GL has been a university for many who have had the privilege to learn on- the-job. I have seen young men and women starting work at GL very timid and leave GL confident young professionals ready to take on the challenges of working in a competitive environment.

As the HR and Assets Manager my work involves HR planning, determining staffing requirements for organisational management and programme delivery as well as overseeing the implementation of human resource policies and procedures. In 2014 GL undertook a salary survey of NGOs to benchmark itself as part of a retention strategy to attract the right talent and retain them. This process required me to do a lot of ground work, well researched before its presentation to the GL Board. There was a lot of back and forth after presenting the first cut to the Director of Operations Mme Miso and CEO Mme Colleen. Under the direction of the CEO and DOO we presented the paper to the Board members and it was approved. As Mme Colleen says the devil is in the detail: it was important to be detailed and avoid any lingering

doubts in the minds of the decision-makers. I had to re-do all staff contracts with the new amendments: an intense exercise that I look back on with satisfaction.

GL keeps reinventing itself by looking at new ways of working smart through the use of technology. I will be going for training on SAGE VIP Payroll which is a new package that has been introduced to run payroll. Working with Monica Bandeira, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, who has introduced new ways of measuring our work with innovative tools has been refreshing. Monica analysed the annual 360 degree feedback and presented it in creative way. I am still learning this technique from her.

I travelled with Skhoe Ndlovu to the GL Summit in Tanzania: an opportunity for me to learn more about GL Programmes. I was in charge of administration, interacting with participants. This helped me to appreciate what programme staff do on the ground and the challenges they face as they interact with different people in the field. I was so irritated by the participants for their lack of courtesy and demanding their per diem!

As you try to juggle different things, you catch some balls and drop others. Taking responsibility when things go wrong is part of leadership. GL does a lot of in-house training of staff as part of the Staff development plan. GL pays the Skills Development Levy (SDL) which can be claimed annually. One of the consultant deliverables was to assist GL in claiming back the money paid to SDL. GL missed the deadline for submitting the claim to be reimbursed. These funds would have gone back to promoting staff development. I learnt to be mindful of details of processes and put deadlines of submission of SDL as stones in my HR calendar. Learning from my mistakes is to me the essence of the Learning Journey.



Vivien Bakainanga and Skhoe Ndlovu at the Tanzania Summit.

The long and short of it

By Emmanuel Kelias, Senior Accountant

> *Accounting for the most part, remains a legalistic and traditional practice, almost immune to self-criticism. ~ Kenneth Boulding*



It is true what they say, "life is a journey" and indeed it is. The long and short of it is that I found myself at GL, I think this happened by design because my previous organisation was going through difficult times with funding. I applied for a vacant post with GL and I landed myself the position of a regional accountant.

In every organisation there is a way of doing things - 'modus operandi'. As I made a walk through how GL works as compared to the other previous environments that I have passed through, GL was totally different. In my first few days most of the things did not make sense to me. The first thing was the huge chart of accounts in place. Gradually as time passed, I started to grasp the ropes of how GL works. It was an interesting journey to be part of.

The first hurdle that I came across was an absence of a financial system. The system was not in operation at all for the first half of the year of 2014. This made my life difficult as I thought, how I am going to work without this vital weapon. To make matters worse a parallel system was not in place for us to fall back on, as we went through the implementation of a new system. With the dedicated team of CS we tried very hard to resuscitate the financial system to normal but little did we know that the system was improperly set up. We experienced a wide range of problems, but we never gave up until at a later stage a decision was made that the whole system must be re-implemented.

In the process, I learnt how to deal with the countries. I had little time to do my routine work with them as I had to attend to pastel queries. How does one tackle

routine work when everything depends on an operational accounting system? I enjoyed every minute of working with the country staff when I engaged with them in this Pastel dire straits. Although the new pastel is not yet 100% operational, I still engage with country staff trying to make sure that Pastel works at full throttle.

At the moment this is taking shape, we have managed to generate some reports but with a lot of panel beating. We still have some challenges but we are able to work on the new accounting system. I am proud to be part of this great achievement in my learning journey at GL. It is a legacy which I will leave when my time is up for another mission elsewhere. I was among the special task force team that have ensured the system is working.

My other challenge in my learning journey was the absence of proper finance personnel in a few countries. I was dismayed with what I saw. In finance you cannot work retrospectively. During my learning journey, I tried to correct some of these things but in some cases that proved challenging.

In accounting, knowledge is gained academically and through experience. It is important to have a strong CS department staffed by knowledgeable finance staff. The other arms of GL must be conversant with the chart of accounts at GL as acting outside this will result in generating incorrect reports. The budget must be properly crafted and must be a user friendly tool.



Emmanuel Kelias at work.

Team work works!

By Dudu Mazibuko, Senior Accountant

> *We end where we begin, the foundations set the pace. Be smart, focused, strategized and energetic.* ~ *Unknown*



As I think back to my previous environment and the current GL workspace the two are two totally different. I have always been one for a challenge and consider myself a fast learner. The GL journey has been an interesting journey to be part of.

I joined GL in November 2014, during the implementation of the new financial system. This was a blessing of sorts. The finance system is new and my arrival meant learning ways of doing things in GL. The added work hours and the weekend work, though compensated as time in lieu, took some adapting.

There have been several glitches with the new system implementation. The dedicated CS team tried hard to get the financial system flowing. We have had numerous successes along the way and adjustments too. We experienced a wide range of problems, but never gave up until management decided to re-implement the system. It is said to lead by example is to truly lead. The Director of Operations Mme Miso has been such a leader. She has made my transition to GL comfortable with a firm expectation of results that is not forceful or demanding. I thank her for laying the GL financial orientation groundwork.

Even during the systems re-implementation, we have managed to generate all donor reports. I am proud to be part of this great achievement in my Learning Journey at GL.

One of the challenges we must overcome is retrospective handling of financial documents close to audit time; this leads to working in crisis mode. To prevent the crisis we must have knowledgeable personnel handling finance; organisations cannot compromise with finance.

Work never stops!

By Mathabo Uoane, Finance Officer, HQ

> *Each of us must make the effort to contribute to the best of our ability according to our individual talents. And then we put all the individual talents together for the highest good of the group… Understanding that the good of the group comes first is fundamental to being a highly productive member of a team.* ~ John Wooden



Indeed 2014 was a learning journey for me and I am still learning. I don't want to lie; I have been drained physically, mentally and socially: lost time that I cannot get back with my family, especially being a single parent.

There were challenges as I felt that I had to jump into a moving train and figure out where it was going. Pastel Evolution was the biggest challenge I came across in my seven months at Gender Links. Mme Miso kept us going and at all times would give words of encouragement that it won't last forever. Our IT Officer Albert Ngosa tackled the IT side of things. I believe we have a great team in finance and that's what keeps me going.

Gender Links teaches one diversity. We all come from different backgrounds and every day we learn from each other. Working with foreign currencies is one of the things I learned here at Gender Links.

Going forward my wish is to be able to work smart not hard as we have a system in place which should enable us to produce required reports. And with the cooperation from programmes I believe this is achievable!



GL teaches appreciation of diversity: Mathabo Uoane and Berry Mathe at the GL celebration of Heritage Day.

Change is good!

By Fikile Maviya Procurement Officer

> *The only constant in life is change. ~ a quote by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus that has been repeated so many times in the past year since I joined GL that I can never forget it!*



The year 2014 will forever be engraved in my mind. Never have I experienced so much change in a way that was so traumatic in such a short space of time. Changing jobs after nine years was the hardest thing that ever happened in my life. Suddenly I was stripped of all powers, could make no decisions, could not take pride in my job, could not focus. The environment was very different and I even had to learn to work in a pool for the first time in my working life. Coming from a stable system to a system that was continuously changing was not easy to adapt to. It felt like a baptism of fire!

As the Procurement Officer at GL my responsibilities include travel booking and accommodation for staff, maintaining Consultants and Service Providers databases, being the green champion and assisting the HR manager on the wellness of staff. It is also part of my job to oversee the driver who looks after the GL vehicles. In all the different aspects of my position it is very essential that Value for Money is achieved.

I have made plenty of mistakes since arriving at Gender Links. The new environment, culture and systems compounded matters. I made mistakes in the quote comparisons by copying and pasting, forgetting to change some information only to have the CEO return this for correction. Like a true student I'm learning to be more detailed and careful before submitting my work.

Learning does not end is a popular saying, and indeed in the past year I have been introduced to quite a number of new systems at Gender Links, such as the MS Project, Pastel Evolution, and the 360 degrees evaluation system. I have also become very green - a passion for me as an outdoor person.

In the past year I have had the opportunity to learn from the CEO, Colleen Lowe Morna, who has a great mind. I admire that she had a dream and has tirelessly put in 200% if not more to bring it to life. She constantly tells me that the devil is in the detail. I constantly remind myself to put this into practice.



Fikile Maviya packs Christmas gifts in the wellness room.

The Corporate Services team has also contributed to my learning at GL, each in their own way. HR and Asset Manager Vivien Bakainanga is always there to give an ear and advise when I feel frustrated and a walking comrade. Mathabo has that calming effect in the midst of a storm, nothing seems to rustle her feathers. Director of Operations Mme Miso is a great example in hard work and diligence. She is never too busy to guide and advise. Then there's the driver, Clever Zulu, who is always making sure the finance team is well fed and transport is available for all on time. What more can I say about Dudu and Emmanuel who have this dry sense of humour! I guess it's an accounting thing.

I have learnt about Value for Money (VFM); writing M&E reports that are time consuming but tell a story at the end of the day. VFM can be practiced in one's personal life and one can instill the same values to one's children and even friends. I recently asked my daughter to help compile a list and I found myself critical of the layout and even the captured information. Change has indeed changed me. GL can put more effort in the wellness and retention strategy for staff. GL is an environment that is conducive to learn if you have the right attitude. I could learn to surrender what I am so that I could become more! Most important, I have learned to embrace change.

Hitting the ground running!

By Monica Ntebe, Receptionist

> *People will forget what you did, people will forget what you said; but they will never forget how you made them feel.*
>
> *~ Maya Angelou*



Gender Links is an environment full of change. If you cannot become a chameleon and adapt to the surroundings, you will have a hard time here. In my service of less than two years I can tell you that I have worked in three different departments within the organisation. I joined GL as an intern, capturing M and E data. This was a great experience for me and a good starting point, as I had recently graduated.

I later joined corporate services which Mme Colleen always refers to as the "engine room." I became the finance intern under a very good leader and mentor Mpumelelo Mlilo, then Head of Finance and IT. Coming from a non-finance background I was not very confident about my abilities within the department. He showed confidence in me affording me a great learning experience. Working with a team like Corporate Services made it possible to overcome challenges. Mme Miso knows there was never a day I didn't go into her office confused. She would calmly explain over and over again. Truly I never felt out of place or out of my depth.

I moved from finance to reception where I get to interact with various colleagues from various departments within the organisation; as Sis Fikile puts it I am now the face of GL. It is a great experience working in the front office, because I get to be exposed to every aspect of Gender Links. I call the reception the four way stop where Governance, Alliance, Corporate services, and Media get to meet at one point or the other: making copies, scanning, or just passing through.

Working at the reception I have had challenges and made some mistakes, but learning from those mistakes is what I regard as the best experience of working. Because you learn and improve the way you did things before.

A lot has contributed to my learning experience here at Gender Links: foremost, good mentors, people who know and have had experience working here. I must say I have interacted and had a lot to learn from them. Sometimes it's hard taking criticism but if it is constructive you learn a lot from it. I have hit the ground running here at reception in that I have had to learn some of the things as I go along. I must say I am still learning and growing in my "WOW" - ways of working.

It's really an uplifting experience to be part of GL in that you learn multiple skills. I speak now having gained so much knowledge in finance and financial systems, and also assisting the HR manager with some tasks. I can boldly say that I can handle anything to do with finance and I am very confident of my abilities, such that I have redirected my future studies to finance.

I have learnt a lot at Gender Links about how planning can help you perform better or rather achieve better results and how "proper planning prevents poor performance." I have been exposed to Gender studies, and information regarding gender equality issues in and around South Africa. Interacting with colleagues that are from different countries has given me a different perspective generally, and gender issues specifically. I can safely say I have travelled the world sitting at the comfort of my desk thanks to this globalised organisation!



At GL, Monica Ntebe has the world at her fingertips.

Going forward, my life changes every day, my environment changes every day. For me to adapt and learn and grow I definitely have to hit the ground running every time a challenge or set back comes. This is the life lesson I have come to learn at Gender Links: always be up and willing to accept change because whether we like it or not change will forever be a part of us!

Going back to my roots!

By Clever Zulu, Logistics and Maintenance Officer

> *It does not matter how slowly you go so long you do not stop.*



I think the biggest problem as human beings is forgetting where we come from. I started my journey at Gender Links as a casual labourer, doing garden work once a week. I believed in myself and knew that I had to start from somewhere. Everything was new to me: the people, environment and the culture of GL. I had to put

Each time our CEO Mme Colleen Lowe Morna speaks to her staff, she always reminds us to count our blessings. I take it as a blessing that I have moved from being a casual labourer to being a Logistics and Maintenance Officer. All it takes is hard work, dreaming big and enthusiasm because one cannot plough a field by turning it over only in one's mind.

I am writing this as a very proud person because of what Gender Links has made me become today. I have learnt things that I wouldn't have even if I had attended the highest class on earth. Yes, we often learn our most important lessons outside the classroom. The vision of the organisation itself - a region in which *"women and men are able to participate equally……"* is visionary. The slogan *"Wathitha mfazi, wathitha mbokodo (You strike a woman, you strike a rock)"* had made me start looking at women from a different perspective.

I was born in a community where women were regarded as inferior compared to men. This philosophy started fading away gradually after I started working for GL. Truth be told, GL has made me go into a reverse gear so that I can revise the roots and culture of the community I was born in. It made me discover few mistakes that we could follow from childhood without questioning. Today, in my community, I am regarded as one of the first gender activist because of GL …. Another blessing!

“Seeing is believing” as the saying goes. Gender Links has done that for me. I was a fan long time ago of history and geography. I learnt a lot about the culture of different tribes and geographical position of countries. GL has helped me to complete my task of actually seeing and proving what I learned. I have done country visits to Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana and Zimbabwe to mention but a few. These visits have broaden my knowledge in terms of people's culture and behaviour.

The past year, 2014, I promised myself not to be solely a driver but also to participate in new and challenging tasks within the organisation. I started getting involved in IT matters with the help of IT Officer Albert Ngosa. I went for the daily basics such as Internet connectivity and what to do with the servers soon after a power failure. I could not have picked a better time with all the Eskom load shedding! I got the test of my life when we had a power failure while Albert was away in the Lesotho office.

I took ownership and acted like a pro. I managed to sort out the problem before it went into a crisis mode. The feeling I got afterwards was like that of stopping a sinking ship. It also gave me the feeling and significance of being a good football substitute. When one player is down, it does not necessarily mean the game is over. The first lesson that came into my mind was “nothing is impossible as long as you put your mind to it”. Secondly, I found out that the server is a bit more complicated than changing a flat tyre, hence, a need to do some training as part of my personal development and to become a valuable member of the team.

GL staff have been my pillars in this journey of growth and achievement. Believe me, a roof cannot stand without strong pillars. People are different. Some are fast learners and others are not. I would describe myself being a slow one. I remember asking Albert something more than once. I got a stern warning from him that if I happen to approach him on the same issue again, I would end up buying him lunch. Literally meant that I should take things seriously, thank you Albert but unfortunately, you have to find another route to score a free lunch from me!

Narrating successes rather than failure is just human nature! What is important to remember is that in life, there are no mistakes but only lessons. We all have friends but the mistake of mixing it with business, can sometimes yield sour fruits. I happen to be friends with officers at the bank. We trusted each other so much that the word

"Yes, meant Yes and No, was No." One day, I went and delivered financial documents. I found this person very busy. Considering the trust between us, I wrote the persons' name under "received" on his/her behalf. When the finance team started to follow-up, the person denied having received the documents!

As I embark on the 2015 journey, here are some of my resolutions from this above experience:

- Never mix friendship with business. These two are like water and paraffin. No matter how vigorous you stir, they will never mix.
- If I happen to deliver anything to anyone including GL staff, I will make sure the person does not get the parcel before I see the signature. This will be nothing personal but rather a business decision.
- To work very hard but smart.

Before I put my pen down, let me take this opportunity to thank my wonderful wife, Gertrude for her support, love, understanding and encouragement. I sometimes come home very late at night or work on weekends. She has neither complained nor doubted me about my whereabouts. "*Mulungu akhale nawe* … May God be with you."



Clever and Gertrude Zulu at a GL function. *Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini*

Whatever you want to do you can do, all you need is determination

By Josephine Chinyamakobvu, Office Assistant

> *Look at the bigger picture in all you do and wherever you go, conduct yourself with worthy intentions.*



As an organisation Gender Links is championing going green and becoming environmentally friendly. I contribute and play a part in the going green movement, together with the wellness walks. On a weekly basis I ensure that recycled paper gets to the right place and is placed in the correct bin for recycling timeously.

There are many things I have learnt while at GL, for example computer basics which I intend to advance through more computer practice. I have also learnt to use the scanning machine and photocopier. I hope to soon be able to assist my department CS with scanning and copying annual audits.

I have become a mother at the GL house over the past year. Several staff have transferred back and forth to the HQ office and lived in the GL house. This has meant my role has been that of mother/ instructor. Showing the in and out to guests such as Kevin, Abigail, Thando and Joy is an enjoyable part of my work. For example, I have shown them how to use the washing machine to wash their clothes. I am the motherly voice asking them to wash dishes when they pile up in the house and explaining and showing them where to shop for food and other necessities.

The past year has been one of a consistent stock taking system, which has allowed me to transfer the skill to the new procurement officers and finance officers who joined GL. I have become confident in my area of expertise and possess institutional knowledge that has assisted staff when they periodically come to HQ.

GL has changed my life in so many ways and the above mentioned are snippets of that change. The CS team have been incredible in supporting me and patiently assisting in my growth.

GL is my University!

By Ricardo Sibanda, Finance Intern

> *Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.* ~ *Mahatma Gandhi*



In simple terms one must learn as much as possible. I remember the first day at Gender links on the 3 November 2014. I was asked to arrange documents in the files. To be frank in my heart I was like, "this is simple!" I went on to arrange files accordingly. One wise man once said, "Take care of cents then the dollars will take care of themselves." The secret is in learning to do these simple things like filing the best you can, then you will be on the professionalism ladder.

All of us we are born with pride one way or the other and it takes small things to teach us how to deal with the issues of life. I thank God for allowing me to come to GL so that He can give me this big lesson. Through the process of filling I have also learnt how to notice small things and not to overlook anything.

I remember in my studies at varsity I used to struggle with the concept of journals. Mme Miso, Dudu and Mathabo have made my load lighter and interesting. At Gender links I have dealt with reconciliations (Recons). I can assure you this teaches one to be a problem solver, to really get to the bottom of the problem.

Living in a microwave (easy way out) society, I had to learn by doing a Recon. One day I came early in the morning, struggling to finalise a recon. It took Mme Miso to explain the whole concept to me until I got it right. Henceforth yes I can! Mme Miso was like a hen in the department, with us as chickens. Unfortunately she must leave but I get consolation in Romans 8 verse 28, " All things work together for good." I must say it has been worthy and a wonderful journey for me.

GL Cottages

I have a dream...

By Debrah Mukuku, GL Cottages Manager

> *A dream doesn't become reality through magic, it takes sweat, determination and hard work.* ~ *Colin Powell*



"I have a dream..." These were simple words, but from a great legend of all time, Martin Luther King. I am sure in his mind he could see the dream, he could see the end from the beginning. I too, subscribe to this concept of seeing the desired result through the eyes of faith, even though it's not always clear from the on-start how the dream will unfold into reality.

My duties as the GL Cottages manager involve administration, daily operations, human resources management, marketing, organising, procurement and financial management. Above all, my office calls for strategic planning, which is the most critical of my roles. At the beginning of the year 2014, I had to envision financial targets for the year ahead, at a time when GL Cottages was coming from the very infant stages of profitability and I knew that a lot had to be done to move to the next level.

As I sat down putting goals and objectives, rands and cents to the financial strategy, I almost felt like this was just a wish list, an ambitious dream! I whispered to my inner self the words: "I have a dream!" I immediately began to feel excited about what I had set my mind to achieve, a triple-fold increase in revenue for GL Cottages! In my excitement I did not realise that the walk would not necessarily be smooth!

In the Hospitality industry, nothing is ever certain, regardless of the amount of good planning you may have done. The industry is generally characterised by radical unforeseen changes which can adversely impact on business overnight. At GL Cottages our income is mainly generated from accommodation and conferencing guests. Marketing efforts are put in place to ensure that month on month bookings generate sufficient income to cover operating costs and retain a decent profit. As the year 2014 unfolded, all things looked rosy for the first half of the year. Our financial and marketing plans seemed to be panning out as per forecast. Little did we know that the second half of the year held an unpleasant surprise for the business!

Initially when news circulated about an Ebola break-out in West Africa, this sounded like just one of the many other breaking news on TV. However before we knew it, one by one all our previously confirmed reservations were cancelled at the last minute! Initially I could not understand why this was happening. I researched further and discovered that the Visa regulations had been tightened and most delegates



GL Cottages dream team!

were not getting cleared for travel. In addition, general travel to Africa became a scare for most oversees visitors for fear of contracting the deadly disease. All I can say about this crisis is that "Experience is a hard teacher, she gives the test first and the lesson later". Was I prepared for such a test at that point in time, not at all! But there was a lot to learn out of it anyway.

This sudden unexpected "dry spell" taught me that going through the fire is not always meant to harm. Even genuine gold is tested through the refiners' fire for perfection. Olive is crushed to make the best oils. Difficult as it was to suddenly find yourself with no business, I realised that there was no time for a pity party. I learnt that management is about making decisions and responding to the radical changes with radical solutions. It was critical to quickly embark on aggressive marketing campaigns in order to revive business. Everything was done from advertising with sports websites, to marketing to hospitals and bringing on board school children on tours to the GL Cottages. Every weekend we had some event going on at the Cottages, be it big or small. It was a period of firefighting, survival of the fittest.

Did all this effort come from one person? Emphatically, no! The GL Cottages staff members are a blessing to me. They are a team that is so filled with zeal for the work that we do. Much as I was largely responsible for the marketing, it would not have been possible to achieve all this alone. I have learnt that each of my team members is critical in the process. When we hold our weekly meetings, I always mention that each and every one of them is a critical part of the business, just like one body with many parts. The head cannot do without the neck and the legs for support. GL Cottages staff members have taught me to keep my head above the water even during a crisis.

Together as a team we have developed staying power. We go through each day's challenges gracefully, even when push comes to shove. Trials and tests bring out the best in us. Perseverance and determination produce character.

The learning point in all this was that one should always anticipate the possibility of things not going as planned, and have an alternative course of action in place. I had made the mistake of counting my eggs before they hatched, and this creates complacency. Thankfully, we made it and still met our targets for 2014. Surely dreams do come true!!

You live, you learn, and you upgrade

By Nancy Padare, House Manager

> *Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep riding.*



Mid- year my son Tinashe, then IT officer at Gender Links, told me he wanted to apply for a post as IT officer at Action Aid. Within three days of him applying they called him for an interview. A few days after that, they told him he had the job. Dear friends I knew that a war had started between him and myself. I tried my best as a mother to negotiate with him not to leave Gender links. It was too late because he had already accepted the position. This was a sad story for me.

On the work front, I do not know where to start because I had such a productive year! In 2014 I taught myself quite a lot of things that helped to ease my work.

My work as house manager is to see that all the customers are happy when they check in or out from their rooms. I must make sure the guest is in the room with nice beddings, TVs working and the rooms without dust and spider webs.

We were very lucky last year to have the Cottages fully booked for at least three quarters of each month. That helped us to have extra money to use for other things such as upgrades and repairs for our GL Cottages. All our Cottages have a new look from the floor to the walls. Even the Cottages names have been changed to African names. Guests have been very excited to find that each room is now named after their countries! They come along with artefacts from their countries to decorate the rooms.

All the people who used to come to the GL Cottages before the new look are praising us and pleased with our hard work. Most of our guests are very happy going round our gardens, they look very beautiful. Unfortunately towards the end of the year we had a series of robberies that damaged some of the repairs we had done.

One day I made the mistake of putting a guest in a room without checking if the geyser was switched on. If that was not bad enough, the bed had not been made up. The guest did not complain she only said: "Can you please check the hot water, I bathed with cold water this morning." When I went to check the room I met with one of the cleaning women who asked why I put a guest in a cottage without linen!

I went to the guest to apologise. This mistake is not a mistake to be repeated. From that time up to now I make sure that I first check the room before sending someone to occupy the room.

Ride your bicycle and keep your balance ladies and gentlemen! Or shall I say fasten your seat belts? I must add as a post script that 2014 ended with me being one of the very lucky ones to attend the wedding of our CEO Colleen Lowe Morna's daughter in Cape Town. It was my first time to fly and to visit Cape Town - another Learning Journey for me!



Nancy Padare with the bride and groom. *Photo: Vivid Blue*

Creativity is the name of the game!

By Kgomotso Baloyi, Head Chef



I have been head chef of GL Cottages for almost two years. I am still learning, refining my skills and realising my potential.

My job requires both mental and physical strength, but it mostly needs creativity. After two years there is only so much cooking one can do until one runs out of ideas on how to vary menus. We sometimes receive guests with totally different and odd dietary requirements staying for more than two weeks and we must cater for them and keep changing the menu over and over and at the end it feels like we have cooked, what in other hotels, is a menu for two years.

It does take strain both mentally and physically, especially since business has definitely picked up and we sometimes feel short staffed when we have to be the chefs, waiters, scullery and also trainers for the help we get when we are busy. But through all the hustle and bustle of the work, you realise the change: most things are now easier to do. It just requires patience, because for some of us it is not just a job, it is a career.



Kgomotso Baloyi doing what he loves.

Learning leads to growth!

By Reratilwe Berry Mathe, Assistant Chef

> *Every day is a chance to change what yesterday was!*



Gender Links Cottages is a home away from home. We cry, we smile and dance at the same time and in all this our house is kept in order.

Being on time and a tasty meal is my first responsibility. One time I put in too much lemon rind in my lemon and herb marinade which did no justice to my chicken. That day I got negative feedback. This was not to get me down but to help me work on my skills and to improve.

As a chef my main concern is the food I cook and the people who are going to eat, so feedback is very important in my profession. I try my best to keep the customers happy so that GL Cottages gets a good reputation for making tasty meals so that guests come back again.

I try to keep calm and not take everything personal. I know that our backgrounds are not the same. I have learned to breathe before I say anything. This technique has helped me to reason better and achieve my goal. Knowing and accepting that we are not the same can make you understand that we see things with a different eye!

I have grown in my work and through multi-tasking. I have broken away from a culture of just being chef!



We cry, smile and dance - Berry Mathe and Thandokuhle Dlamini at GL's Heritage Day celebrations. *Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna*

Learning to be a Jill of All Trades!

By Prisca Sheyama, Finance and Administration Officer, GL Cottages

> *Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.* ~ *Ryunosuke Satoro*



I remember applying for the vacancy of Finance and Administration Officer at GL Cottages and asking myself before hitting the send button "Prisca, do you have the relevant work experience in the hospitality industry?" The truth of the matter is, I was just trying my luck since I had no work experience in this industry although I had work experience in other industries.

Amazingly in June 2014 I was given the opportunity to join GL Cottages as the Finance and Administration Officer. To my amazement, right from the first day of reporting to work I had to exercise my multi-tasking skills because it was full house as Gender Links had a summit taking place at the Cottages. I saw every Cottages staff member running up and down I had no option but to join in and try to assist where I could.

Since joining the Cottages I have come to realise that for one to survive at Gender Links, one really needs to be multi-tasking, flexible, willing to learn new things and a very good team player. I must confess that my journey at Gender Links has been quite challenging, especially with regard to the new accounting system (Pastel Evolution) which was introduced almost at the same time that I joined the Cottages. To be honest I have never used this accounting package before, but with the help and support from the finance office at HQ (Mathabo and Fikile) as well as my supportive supervisor (Debrah Mukuku), house Manager (Nancy Padare) and the rest of the team at the Cottages, this road has been worth travelling.

What I like about Gender Links is the way they train their staff to acquire different skills. There are very few organisations who believe in developing their staff members and enriching them with a whole wide range of knowledge and skills. For this reason I would like to applaud Gender Links for taking this initiative very seriously. This helps

not only the staff members involved, but also the organisation itself. This type of initiative keeps work moving in situations where one staff member is not available. For the short period that I have been with the Cottages I have learnt a few basic IT troubleshooting techniques, HR administration, procurement duties, how to book guests on Nightsbridge, how to set a table and working at the reception.

My main duties at the cottages are, but are not limited to the following: preparing payment requisitions, processing payments, loading payments on business online, petty cash reconciliation, creditors and debtors reconciliation, generating quotations and invoices, bank reconciliation, generating financial reports and general administration.

Have I made mistakes? Well, the answer to this question is a definite yes. Being human I am bound to make mistakes from time to time, but the most important thing is I learn from these mistakes so that next time I know how to avoid the same mistakes. One area in which I have made mistakes is with the new accounting system (Pastel Evolution). A number of times I mis-posted transactions. I have also made mistakes when doing guest bookings.

Working for the Cottages has made me realise that every person has got something to share/teach the other despite the calibre, status, position held, gender etc. I must say that today as I write my learning journey, I am not the same person that I was when I joined the Cottages. My outlook towards life has changed drastically. I love the team spirit that exists at the Cottages as well as at Gender Links as a whole. What a loving and caring family to belong to. Thank you Gender Links for making me the person that I am today. I will always treasure the love, care and support that I have received and will continue to receive from this wonderful family.



Let's work and roll

By Felistus Ncube, HouseKeeper



GL Cottages has made me a better person in life. I am learning a lot through observation - who would have thought I would know how conference room set ups are done? I am also perfecting my ability to keep the place clean and smart to attract more customers.

I now strongly believe that the smarter and cleaner the place is, the more customers we attract and attend to, the bigger the company grows.

I have had the chance to meet women from different countries coming to stay here. Some have come to sell their wares ranging from bags to clothing and materials. This has touched my heart and inspired me to notice women working hard to take care of their families.

I have learnt to respect my colleagues and to solve issues and misunderstandings that may arise in a professional manner. I have also learnt that whatever situation arises, being professional in tackling the situation is the best.

GL Cottages has become more than just a work place - it has become my other home and everyday my resolution is how to make this a better 'home' for our visitors.

My resolution this year is to remove 'impossible' from my vocabulary and be successful. I want to inspire young people - help them to understand, love and respect each other as they are the fathers and mothers of tomorrow. I would love to see GL Cottages grow and know that I, in my own way, contributed to the growth.

GL Cottages has given me an opportunity to learn different things and in the process I have also had to prove myself and I hope they will continue giving these opportunities not just to me but to anyone who comes into contact with the company. I love my job and will strive to get better at it!

Learning knows no age or gender

By Naume Zinengeya, Housekeeper @ GL Cottages



It seems like yesterday when I first joined GL Cottages and yet it has been three years… but you know what they say, "time flies when you are having fun". It has been three years of working with some of the most amazing people and in an environment that presents me with different challenges every day.

The past three years have afforded me a platform to grow and have confidence in work as a housekeeper. I have matured enough to be resilient and work well under pressure, gaining the much needed experience in our field of housekeeping.

Working in housekeeping, I have had the pleasure of meeting a lot of different people from different countries with diverse cultures, beliefs and backgrounds.

I have become more humble as I learn how to handle different guests. I remember one time we had guests from Somalia and on cleaning their room there were twigs which I threw away. Unbeknown to me they use cuts from a particular tree to brush their teeth! This really opened my eyes to just how I have to understand different cultures!

Working at GL Cottages, I have learnt to use certain electrical gadgets that I never dreamt I would ever use. I can confidently say that now when I clean, I do it to perfection. I have become a better person as I am now more down to earth and more well-mannered. My experience here is an amazing one for it has grown beyond work to include my most amazing colleagues who are loving, friendly, loyal and are always willing to help me and give me their shoulder to cry on whenever the need arises!

Care for the Environment

By David Makhudu, Gardener



I am David Makhudu. I am 28 years old. I work in the garden. My responsibilities are to cut the grass, take weeds out, trim trees and water all the plants. However, I feel sorry for my roses around this time of year (February), but I will give them the required love and attention so they can blossom when the season is right.

I am thankful to GL Cottages for allowing me the opportunity to explore my gardening skills and I hope to grow them in the near future.

The opportunity to work is a privilege

By Kenwood Banda, Gardener

I am Kenwood Banda, aged 27 years old. I started working at the Cottages mid 2014 as a gardener and also security guard during weekends. I did not have work so when the opportunity came my way I was very happy.



My responsibilities include cleaning the yard, cleaning the fish pond, watering the flowers, planting vegetables, maintaining the garden and removing weeds. I also sometimes help out the laundry ladies and help them to carry the beds. I also learned other things out of my main duties like setting up conferences, carrying bags for guests and also ushering them to their rooms. I love my job and wish to learn more in the coming years.

Multi-Tasking the order of the day

By Chukela Baloyi, Security, Gardener and Driver



I have learnt a lot while working at GL Cottages. I started working as gardener planting vegetables, flowers and keeping the place clean.

As time went on, I started improving in other areas like plumbing by fixing leakages, toilet pipes and other handy work. I have been able to work as Gardener, Security and Handyman. I enjoy my work because I am flexible and never get bored.

I thought I had learnt enough and was getting comfortable doing my duties, when I had the opportunity to take driving lessons. I got a driver's license and now I drive guests to and from different places. I didn't even know the route to the airport, but GL Driver Clever Zulu mentored me until I got familiar with the roads of Johannesburg.

I can now say I'm professional at my job. I get to meet different characters from different countries. I enjoy my job as a security guard, driver and gardener.

I would like to thank Mum Nancy, the house manager, who advised me all the time.

I am looking forward to learning more from GL Cottages.



“Every dark cloud has a silver lining”

By Joe Mathebula, Night officer, GL Cottages



Each day I spend at the GL Cottages is an opportunity to learn something new. Before GL Cottages, I thought I needed to be serious all the time in order to intimidate potential thieves. However being in the hospitality industry and with our motto being, “service with a smile” I had to change my attitude and make sure that I greet all guests politely, even when I am having a bad day.

As Head of Security at the GL Cottages, it is my responsibility that all our guests' safety is guaranteed. For the past three years I have made sure guests never have to worry about their safety, despite the small challenges we sometimes face with people breaking in and trying to steal.

However, earlier this year I faced the most challenging experience of my career. I received a frantic call from a guest at night informing me to quickly come to their room - Artist Corner - as there was someone who was trying to break the window. I called Chukele for backup and together we made our way to Artist's Corner. However when we got there, the thieves had already left and, from past experiences, my instincts told me to check the top of the hill. We ran to the top of the hill and saw a group of people who had a tyre they had stolen from one of the guest's cars so we gave chase. I ran as fast as I could, without any fear, as I needed to arrest them for endangering the lives of our guests. When the thieves realised that we were getting closer they threw the tyre on me, I fell and started rolling down the hill with the tyre.This distraction gave them an opportunity to escape as my focus was now on my knee which was injured.

This experience was the closest that I have ever had to being injured on duty. As they say ‘every dark cloud has a silver lining’ - a few days later GL Cottages management took further steps to tighten security and acquired security cameras. The security cameras have made my job much easier as I now have a bird's eye view of the premises and can spot thieves before they set foot on the property.

Count your blessings

When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God hath done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly,
And you will keep singing as the days go by.

Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God hath done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

When you look at others with their lands and gold,
Think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold;
Count your many blessings—wealth can never buy
Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high.

Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God hath done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

So, amid the conflict whether great or small,
Do not be discouraged, God is over all;
Count your many blessings, angels will attend,
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.

Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God hath done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.







"There are no secrets to success. It is the best of preparation, hard work and learning from failure"
~ Colin Powell
(quoted by Mukayi Makaya GL Services Manager)



"Fingers of one hand are not of the same length, what is important is that they are rooted in the same hand"
~ Matilda Dube
(mother of Sifiso Dube, Alliance and Partnerships Manager)









