

A collection of articles from the Project

# MEDIA PARITY

Promoting gender equality  
in the media in Southern Africa



BOTSWANA • LESOTHO • MALAWI • MOZAMBIQUE • ZAMBIA

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## A WORD FROM CFI

The Media Parity project is fully aligned with the priorities of CFI and French diplomacy, which place gender equality at the heart of their action, notably by supporting a better representation of women in the media and public space.

In Southern Africa, CFI has sought above all to support existing local dynamics in favor of gender equality, in newsrooms and in society at large. The remarkable commitment of our partner media, of their journalists, of our local trainers and of our partner Gender Links demonstrated the strength of such dynamics and the relevance of this initiative.

As a result of four months of mentoring, more than 300 articles and video reports were produced by the 44 journalists involved. These outputs reflect a gender-sensitive approach to journalism, meaning journalism that addresses the systemic underrepresentation of women and their voices in media coverage. While some of the articles directly address issues such as gender equality or the representation of women in society, the gender perspective is also embedded through the journalistic practices applied. Gender-sensitive journalism encourages professionals to critically examine all topics they cover, by paying close attention to biases and stereotypes, and by ensuring a diversity of sources, in particular by giving greater voice to women experts.

It is within this ambition to make women more visible and heard in the media that the Media Parity project operates. Activities aimed at preventing harassment and promoting more inclusive working environments also contribute to this objective, by enabling more women to pursue careers in journalism and to express their perspectives.

Published by the project's partner media, these articles have also sparked a broader reflection within newsrooms. They demonstrate that making women's voices heard helps bring forward issues of general interest and supports the production of quality, rigorous, more representative and inclusive journalism. The selection of articles and reports that follows is a testament to this.

Alan Dréanic  
Deputy General-Director, CFI

## A WORD FROM GENDER LINKS

From inception 25 years ago, Gender Links has held fast to a core conviction: gender equality must be advanced in and through the media. Not as an add-on. Not as a special feature. But as a fundamental principle shaping what is covered, whose voices are heard, and how stories are told.

Yet the reality remains disappointing. According to our monitoring, women make up just one-fifth of news sources in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region - a figure that has barely shifted in two decades. At a time of global backlash against rights and equality, gender-aware reporting is more important as ever. This is why we do this work.

This publication features a selection from over 300 stories produced by journalists across five countries over six months. Through training and mentorship, journalists interrogated dominant narratives, asked probing questions and sought out voices often unheard.

The result is journalism that is sharper, more relevant and more revealing. These stories do more than “add women to the story” - they uncover the intersections that shape lived realities. They surface underreported perspectives, of women in all their diversity, men and LGBTIQ communities – applying a gender lens across beats where it is often absent.

The stories demonstrate that gender-aware reporting is not a limitation. It's an opportunity leading to fresher angles, deeper insight and more compelling storytelling. Gender-aware journalism is simply good journalism.

The evidence is clear: when journalists are equipped with the right tools and support, they tell better stories, contributing to more inclusive, relevant and impactful media.

Colleen Lowe Morna  
Special Advisor, Gender Links

# THE PROJECT

## *Presentation*

In Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia, gender equality in the media remains a key challenge. Women are still underrepresented and often portrayed through stereotypes.

To address these disparities, CFI launched the Media Parity project, aiming to promote high-quality, gender-sensitive journalism and ensure women's full participation in the media landscape.

Through training in gender-sensitive reporting, personal development and harassment awareness, the project equips media professionals with tools to increase women's representation — both as sources and as decision-makers.

Media Parity also contributes to raising public awareness by improving how women are represented in media content.

Finally, the project strengthens South-South cooperation, fostering exchange between journalists and building a regional network across the five partner countries. In Southern Africa, CFI has sought above all to support existing local dynamics in favor of gender equality, in newsrooms and in society at large. The remarkable commitment of our partner media, of their journalists, of our local trainers and of our partner Gender Links demonstrated the strength of such dynamics and the relevance of this initiative.

## *Project Goals*

- Strengthen media capacity to produce content integrating gender equality issues
- Improve representation of women's perspectives and experiences
- Support women's access to editorial leadership positions
- Strengthen media organisations' ability to prevent and address sexual harassment

# KEY RESULTS

Drawing on more than 300 stories produced across five countries, the Media Parity project demonstrates that gender-aware journalism does not simply increase representation — it fundamentally improves the quality, depth and relevance of reporting.

The stories produced reflect a clear shift in journalistic practices. Rather than simply “adding women into the story”, journalists apply a gender lens across a wide range of topics, resulting in more original, nuanced and compelling narratives.

A key strength of the reporting is its integration into core news coverage. Gender perspectives are embedded in areas such as politics, elections, economy and climate, demonstrating that gender-aware journalism is not a niche approach, but an essential dimension of high-quality reporting.

The content also highlights a strong move towards solutions-oriented journalism. Beyond documenting challenges, stories increasingly explore responses, community initiatives and pathways for change, contributing to more constructive and impactful media narratives.

Another important outcome is the development of more inclusive and intersectional storytelling. Coverage reflects the diversity of lived experiences, including those of women with disabilities, young people, rural communities, as well as the evolving roles of men. This broadens the scope of representation and deepens public understanding of gender dynamics.

Importantly, the results show the immediate impact of capacity building. Journalists have directly applied the skills gained through training and mentorship, producing content that is more balanced, relevant and responsive to real-world contexts.

Ultimately, these results highlight a broader shift in how journalism is practised.

**Gender-aware journalism does not limit storytelling — it enhances it.**

**5**

**Countries**

**112**

**Journalists  
Trained**

**303**

**Stories  
Produced**

## Botswana's Legal Void On Surrogacy

By Laone Rasaka

- **A breeding ground for exploitation of foreign nationals**
- **Zimbabwean domestic workers recruited as surrogate mothers**

Surrogacy remains a largely unfamiliar and complex topic for the average Motswana. Yet, according to the Oxford Constitutional Law website, surrogacy is defined as an arrangement whereby a woman (the surrogate) consents to carry a pregnancy and deliver a child on behalf of another individual or couple (the intended or commissioning parents).

Unlike neighboring South Africa, Botswana lacks any statutory framework or regulatory oversight addressing surrogacy. In essence, surrogacy does not legally exist within Botswana's jurisdiction. Nevertheless, the practice persists covertly and appears to be relatively widespread. This legal vacuum has created conditions ripe for exploitation, with victims often left without legal recourse or protection. Investigations by Weekend Post have uncovered that Zimbabwean domestic workers are frequently recruited as surrogate mothers under these unregulated circumstances.

A notable surrogacy dispute recently surfaced on Botswana's Court of Appeal (CoA) docket at the end of August 2025, under the cause of action concerning the ownership of a child. To safeguard the privacy of the minor involved, the identities of the parties have been withheld in this report.

### CASE BACKGROUND

An inquiry with Legal Aid Botswana (LAB) revealed that what initially appeared to be a straightforward custody application heard in June 2023 evolved into a multifaceted surrogacy dispute. The presiding judge acknowledged that while the matter was framed as a custody case,

“a holistic approach is called for so that the court could at the end of the day determine where the best interests of the child lie.” The court recognized that despite the hierarchical relationship between the Applicant and Respondent, described as master and servant, nothing legally precluded them from entering into a valid surrogacy agreement.

The Applicant alleged that he and his wife, married since 2013, had been unable to conceive. His wife employed the Respondent, a Zimbabwean national, who voluntarily offered to assist by conceiving a child on behalf of the Applicant's wife after hearing their difficulties.

According to the Applicant, a mutual agreement was reached in August 2021 whereby he commenced sexual relations with the Respondent for the sole purpose of conception. The Respondent became pregnant in November 2021 and gave birth in July 2022. The Applicant asserted that, pursuant to their agreement, the Respondent handed over the child to his wife, after which the Respondent returned to Zimbabwe. When filing the custody application in February 2023, the Applicant claimed they had been raising the child since birth and sought lawful custody.

The Applicant further contended that he was best suited for custody given his stable employment, contrasting with the Respondent's unemployed status. He expressed concern that the Respondent had threatened to take the child to Zimbabwe, where she lacked the financial means to provide adequate care, potentially exposing the child to hardship.

Conversely, the Respondent maintained that she arrived in Botswana in June 2021 to work as a domestic worker for the Applicant and his wife. She recounted that shortly after starting work, the Applicant's wife solicited her help to conceive a child on their behalf, promising finan-

cial support for the child's needs. The Respondent insisted that she was to remain the child's mother and continue living in the household.

The Respondent disputed any agreement to relinquish the child after birth. She expressed shock and distress when the Applicant's wife took the newborn from her, denying her the opportunity to nurse the child. Subsequently, adoption papers were presented for her signature, which she refused, resulting in her eviction.

Legal Aid Botswana reported the court found compelling evidence that the parties had agreed not only to the conception but also to the transfer of custody to the Applicant and his wife. The court observed that the Respondent's claim of remaining part of the household was incompatible with the surrogacy arrangement's nature, noting that her continued presence could destabilize the child's bonding with the Applicant's wife.

The court concluded that enforcing the surrogacy agreement was in the best interests of the child. It found the Applicant and his wife suitable parents capable of providing the necessary care and affection. The court also deemed the Respondent's proposed arrangement self-serving and detrimental to the child's welfare. In a decisive judgment, the court declared, "I therefore sever the umbilical cord between the Respondent and the child. Henceforth, the child is given to the Applicant and his wife, who will bring him up as their own."

Legal Aid Botswana and the Respondent filed an appeal against the High Court's ruling. However, the appeal was not heard before the Court of Appeal in August 2025 due to the Appellant's unavailability. Efforts to contact the Appellant since September 2023 were unsuccessful. Investigations revealed the Appellant had relocated from Botswana to Zimbabwe and then to South Africa. Given the case's sensitivity, particularly regarding access and visitation rights, the court removed the matter from the roll, with a view to reinstating it once the Appellant could actively participate. LAB noted that similar cases have been brought before them previously.

## **THE LEGAL VOID ON SURROGACY IN BOTSWANA: INSIGHTS FROM SOUTH AFRICAN LAW**

When queried, Principal Public Relations Officer Tshireletso Dichekenyane from the Attorney General's Chambers confirmed that Botswana currently lacks any legal definition or regulation relating to surrogacy. "The attorney general's chambers are not aware of any plans to introduce such legislation in the future," she stated.

By contrast, surrogacy is legally regulated in neighboring South Africa under the Children's Act, which outlines strict procedures and conditions to ensure legality. According to Legal Wise South Africa, surrogacy is an option when a couple is medically unable to conceive or carry a child due to a permanent and irreversible condition.

South African law defines surrogacy as a voluntary agreement where a woman consents to be artificially inseminated to bear a child on behalf of another person or couple, referred to as commissioning parents. For legality, all parties must enter into a written surrogate motherhood agreement, which must be confirmed by the High Court in the jurisdiction of the commissioning parents.

Legal Wise clarifies that surrogates hold no parental rights or responsibilities, cannot retain custody, nor reclaim the child. While a surrogate may terminate her pregnancy under the Choice of Termination of Pregnancy Act, she must consult the commissioning parents beforehand. Importantly, surrogacy must be voluntary, and surrogates cannot receive payments or gifts intended to coerce them. Commissioning parents may cover pregnancy-related expenses.

## **CALLS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY FOR SURROGACY LEGISLATION TO PROTECT WOMEN AND CHILDREN**

Dumi Gatsha, Director of Success Capital, frames surrogacy within the broader sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) discourse in Botswana. Gatsha argues that the existing narrow policy landscape creates significant barriers

for women and girls. "Like many SRHR issues—abortion, family planning, C-section—surrogacy remains an issue of affordability," Gatsha explained. "Those with means have the power of choice and access, whilst those without bear the brunt and consequences—poor recovery, lack of support, criminalisation—for trying to make those choices. We have seen this with some members of our community who have had the privilege to parent because they can afford it."

Gatsha further highlighted challenges surrounding bodily autonomy and integrity for surrogates, noting the absence of legal provisions governing ethics, care, and support pre-, during, and post-pregnancy. The lack of frameworks also restricts access to IVF, adoption, and legal instruments like power of attorney, which are crucial when termination may be necessary for the health of the baby or mother.

"There is stigma, discrimination, and misconceptions about surrogacy as a family planning

option precisely because the government does not provide guidelines, processes, policy, information, support systems, or jurisprudence," Gatsha lamented. "It remains a privilege, rarely accessible to those from poorer backgrounds due to the stigma attached to bearing children while living in poverty. As a democracy, the state should provide clear guidance and equitable access to all Botswana, especially given its commitments to universal health coverage."

Desmond Lunga, Team Leader of Men to Boys for Gender Equality in Botswana, echoed the call for policy reform. He emphasized that the best interests of the child must remain paramount, in line with the Children's Act, which affirms the child's right to know both biological parents. "There is a need for policy change and to address gaps in existing frameworks to prevent hazardous situations and ensure such incidents do not recur," Lunga stated.

### **AUTHOR'S COMMENT**

' This story started when I discovered that Botswana has no legal framework to guide surrogacy. Initially, I just wanted to see if the Attorney General had any plans to enact laws and if any surrogacy disputes had ever actually reached our courts.

What I found was much deeper. My sources confirmed that the practice is happening, but it's often tied to the exploitation of Zimbabwean women. They are brought into Botswana on the pretense of domestic work, but in reality, they are brought here to bear children for couples who cannot conceive.

During my inquiry, I found that many surrogacy cases have already been reported and some even had their day in court. Many stay unresolved because the parties involved become hostile. In one case I looked into, the surrogate mother "simply disappeared", which is incredibly unsettling. It was surprising to realize just how common this practice has become in Francistown and Gaborone.

This issue needs much more reporting. According to sources in the legal fraternity, this is not just exploitation but it's human trafficking and sex trafficking. After publishing the initial story, the feedback I received made it clear that the government has a long way to go in amending our laws to prevent backstreet procedures and illegal cross-border surrogacy. These issues exist, and we cannot look away from them.

The investigation has not been easy. Finding relevant photos was a major challenge. Beyond that, Legal Aid Botswana tried to dictate our coverage, claiming that too much is at stake since the matters are still before the court. We also tried to track down a surrogate to understand the recruitment network in Zimbabwe, but she had vanished. Authorities eventually advised us to stop looking for her, citing sub justice concerns.'

# When Education Fails, Boys Turn to Crime

By Nchidzi Masendu

## Rehabilitating Botswana's At-Risk Boys

When the education system falters in nurturing latent potential, the streets too often become an unwelcome refuge. In Botswana, a quiet crisis has been unfolding beneath the surface of the nation's steady progress: boys are increasingly abandoning school and slipping into cycles of criminality. This pattern is not just a statistic but a warning signal, revealing fractures in social support, education policy, and economic opportunity that, left unattended, threaten to undermine Botswana's future. Yet amid this troubling trend, the Botswana Prison Service (BPS) stands as a beacon of cautious hope, showing that with determined intervention, rehabilitation and redemption are possible—even for those who seemed lost to the streets.

At the heart of this crisis lies a deeply gendered challenge. Studies from the Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis (BIDPA) and Statistics Botswana reveal a persistent pattern: boys disproportionately drop out of school prematurely. The reasons are complex but often coalesce around poverty and the urgent demands of family responsibilities. In remote and rural areas especially, children may feel compelled to leave school early to support the household, sometimes trailing their parents to pursue traditional ways of life, a stark contrast to the urban educational opportunities available elsewhere. This premature departure from school drastically narrows their future pathways, pushing many toward a precarious existence marked by limited employment options and heightened vulnerability to crime.

On the streets and within the juvenile justice system, this attrition from education translates into tangible patterns of offending. Superintendent Kabo Khuduga of the Botswana Prison Service brought forward a snapshot that is striking in its clarity: among juvenile detainees nationwide, the most common offenses are stock theft and store

breaking, crimes born of economic desperation and a lack of alternatives. Currently, correctional institutions in Botswana hold 33 male juveniles and a lone female detainee, highlighting not only the gendered nature of youth criminality but also the urgency with which these issues need addressing

What distinguishes Botswana's approach, however, is the Botswana Prison Service's commitment to rehabilitation rather than mere punishment. Khuduga emphasizes that the mandate goes beyond incarceration to genuine reform, with structured programs promoting education, vocational training, performing arts, and psychosocial support. Literacy education alongside primary and secondary schooling programs helps to close the gap created by earlier dropouts. Vocational training in trades such as carpentry, welding, and agriculture provides practical skills directly linked to employability, while performing arts and sports nurture confidence, teamwork, and a sense of purpose.

This holistic approach to rehabilitation aligns with international best practices. Research by UNICEF and the World Bank has demonstrated that correctional frameworks that include education, skill training, and emotional support can reduce juvenile reoffending rates by more than 40 percent. The key takeaway from this evidence is clear: education and mentorship within correctional settings do more than punish—they offer a second chance at life. More importantly, this model signals the importance of upstream preventative measures, suggesting that embedding mentorship and vocational pathways in schools could act as a crucial buffer to keep boys from veering off course in the first place.

Yet prevention remains a frontier that Botswana must urgently embrace. Khuduga's insistence that correctional facilities be the last resort encapsulates a vital truth. Early identification of vulnerable boys through schools and com-

munity structures could divert many from a path leading to incarceration. It's a call not only to law enforcement but to society at large to rethink how it nurtures its youth, with a focus on social inclusion, educational retention, and purpose-driven mentorship.

Botswana's educational system struggles with marked urban-rural disparities. Schools in rural areas often battle limited access to qualified teachers and insufficient resources and infrastructure—challenges that exacerbate dropout rates. Furthermore, household poverty remains the single largest influence on school attrition, underscoring the interplay between socio-economic factors and educational outcomes. As studies show, 72 percent of dropout variation is attributable to household-level factors such as parental education and occupation, symptoms of broader inequalities that education policy alone cannot solve without complementary social programs.

The long shadow cast by school dropout extends beyond the classroom and correctional facilities. When boys leave school prematurely, they lose critical social support networks and pathways to stable jobs. With few legitimate options on the horizon, the lure of the streets, with its counterfeit promises of belonging and income through petty crime, becomes a tragically easy escape.

Botswana's challenge is thus systemic, requiring a multi-layered social response to disrupt the vicious cycles of poverty, exclusion, and crime.

Vocational training appears to be a lynchpin of successful rehabilitation. Globally, evidence from correctional programs demonstrates that vocational education substantially reduces recidivism rates while enhancing post-release employment prospects. Studies have found that participation in vocational programs can lead to as much as a 43 percent reduction in reoffending within three years. This is because training equips young offenders with practical skills and a renewed sense of purpose—both critical defenses against falling back into crime once released.

The BPS model offers lessons for not just rehabilitation, but prevention. Expanding these educational and vocational programs into schools, coupled with robust mentorship frameworks, could provide at-risk boys with alternatives before criminality takes root. This preventive approach aligns with shifting global attitudes on juvenile justice, which increasingly favor diverting youth away from the formal justice system to community-based supports and personalized interventions. Botswana stands at a pivotal moment where policy, education, and social development can converge for meaningful change.

## AUTHOR'S COMMENT

'I chose this story because it speaks to a growing but often overlooked crisis, the silent disengagement of boys from the education system, and the consequences that follow. In Botswana, conversations around education tend to focus broadly on performance, but less attention is given to the gendered dynamics of failure and dropout. I wanted to explore how gaps within the system can push young boys toward crime, not as a choice, but as a last resort shaped by circumstance.

While writing the story, what surprised me most was how early the disconnection begins. Many of the boys I encountered had already mentally checked out of school long before they physically dropped out. Equally striking was how systemic the issue is—from overcrowded classrooms to lack of mentorship and limited vocational pathways it became clear that this is not just about individual failure, but structural shortcomings.

One of the biggest challenges [to write this story] was gaining trust. Many of the individuals affected by this issue especially those who had brushes with crime were understandably reluctant to open up. It was also challenging to balance empathy with accountability, ensuring that the story did not excuse criminal behavior, but rather contextualize it within broader social and institutional failures.'

# The gender gap in Botswana's judicial caning

By Amanda David

Botswana's constitution is said to be gender neutral, guaranteeing equal protection under the law, yet a clause in the Penal Code under the Customary Courts Act still allows judicial caning for men only. The law that permits caning presents an undeniable gender gap which excuses women from a punishment that men can receive for the same offences- a double standard that undermines the rule of law.

The Customary Courts Act reads (1) Subject to the provisions of subsections (2), (3) and (4) and section 21 and to the provisions of any other law for the time being in force a customary court may sentence a convicted person to a fine, imprisonment, corporal punishment or any combination of such punishments but shall not impose any punishment exceeding those set out in its warrant. (2) No customary court shall sentence any female or any person who is, in the opinion of the court, of the age of 40 years or over to corporal punishment.

In an interview recently, seasoned criminal law practitioner and Lead Attorney at Jeremia Attorneys, Mishingo Jeremia warned that though corporal punishment is an important part of the country's law and rehabilitation efforts, it is discriminatory because it is a punishment for men only. "The Penal Code is gender neutral, it says any person who commits a crime, it does not say any man or woman in terms of offences," he added.

Jeremia further argued that before a man is caned, a medical doctor must first certify that the accused is physically fit to receive the punishment, an examination that could also be applied to women, adding that the exclusion disregards the constitutional guarantee of equality while at the same time failing to offer reasons for excluding women were the fitness safeguard could be used for all genders. "As long as a man is under 40 years and is certified fit by a doctor, then he

is caned, but when it comes to women, there is no such thing. It could be argued that it is unconstitutional because it does not afford people who are similarly circumstanced the same rights, it doesn't guarantee equality even though people are facing the same charges. There are no offences specific to men or women, crime is crime. Men can be charged with the same crimes as women," he reiterated.

For his part, Pogisego Mosarwe, Court President of the Donga Customary Court in Francistown observed that the offenses frequently appearing within his jurisdiction are assault common, which is contrary to Section 246 of the Penal Code and theft common which is contrary to section 271. He noted that assault common is overwhelmingly committed by men, which in his view justifies corporal punishment. Mosarwe considers caning an effective sentence because it offers offenders an opportunity to redeem themselves without imprisonment. Asked what would happen if a man and woman are convicted of the same offence and are both of an age at which corporal punishment is permissible, Mosarwe highlighted that the decision would rest on the discretion of the presiding officer. He however noted that as fact-finders it is crucial to uphold basic human rights and avoid any appearance of inequality, adding that applying caning to one gender while excluding the other would be unacceptable socially. Mosarwe resolved that in that instance, the court would likely waive corporal punishment for both offenders to ensure the sentence appears fair and does not trample the human right of anyone. In conclusion, Mosarwe who has been a court president for 26 years said he does not view the gender specific application of corporal punishment as discriminatory because of the physical makeup of a woman, he explained that women could not endure the pain of caning; adding that it further raises health concerns for women more than men, which he

believes justifies excluding women from corporal punishment. Onkagetse Rannowa, a 33 year old casual laborer at the Francistown bus rank was summoned before a customary court earlier this year after his partner of three years reported him for assault. The Monarch Customary Court found him guilty of assault common, and under the penal codes provision for corporal punishment in such cases, he was sentenced to 4 strokes on the buttocks. In an interview, Rannowa revealed that the strokes left him bruised for weeks and he was unable to lift heavy loads for almost two weeks.

Rannowa further shared that this was not the first time violence had occurred between him and his partner, adding that his partner had also assaulted him on multiple occasions, though he never reported the incidents. "The law only protects women; I accepted the punishment because it is a cultural norm. Even if I had reported her, she would not be punished like me," he described.

End Corporal Punishment is an initiative hosted by the World Health Organization which acts as a catalyst for progress towards the universal prohibition and elimination of corporal punishment

on children, but also essentially advocates for its abolishment altogether. A summary of necessary legal reform to achieve full prohibition under the country report for Botswana which was last updated in January 2025 reads, "Prohibition is still to be achieved in the home, alternative care settings, daycare, schools, penal institutions and as a sentence for crime."

Further along, the report highlights that for Penal Institutions, "Provisions for corporal punishment in the Prisons Act 1980 and the Prisons Regulations 1965 should be repealed and corporal punishment prohibited as a disciplinary measure in all institutions accommodating children in conflict with the law," and under the Sentence for crime, "Provisions for corporal punishment in the Penal Code 1964, the Magistrates' Courts Act 1974, the Customary Courts Act 1961, the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act 1939, the Criminal Procedures (Corporal Punishment) Regulations 1969, the Corporal Punishment (Designation of Places for Administering) Order 1982 and the Customary Courts (Corporal Punishment) Rules 1972 should be repealed and all judicial corporal punishment explicitly prohibited,"

## AUTHOR'S COMMENT

' While a majority of nations have moved to abolish corporal punishment in accordance with global human rights treaties, Botswana remains among the few countries that still practice judicial caning as a legal sentencing for male offenders only.

This article investigates the inequality presented by judicial caning, and whether the exemption is a deeply rooted tradition or an outright violation and discrimination of male offenders in comparison to their female counterparts. It examines why the law shields women while mandating physical discipline for men only.

I chose to investigate this because while the world moves to abolish corporal punishment, Botswana retains the gender inequality presented by the country's dual legal system. I believe that everyone is equal in the eyes of the law, and as such punishment should be uniform regardless of the offenders gender. It was shocking to realise that traditional community leaders believe that women are not physically fit for whipping, though male offenders require a medical examination to determine whether they can withstand whipping.

The discriminatory nature of corporal punishment has been normalised in Botswana and no one dares to question it, culturally it is okay. The biggest challenge was making people aware of the gender disparity judicial caning presents.'

## Where are the ladies?

By Nancy Ramokhua

### Botswana enjoys athletics success but...

Questionably for several years now, ladies in athletics have their representation visibly missing at international level. With minimum representation of ladies at reputable events such as the Paris 2024 Olympics as well as the just ended world athletics championships in Tokyo, there is a great need to involve and groom the girl child.

As though legendary 400m star Amantle Montsho has not passed on the baton, the representation of Botswana ladies in athletics at global level continues to lessen. However, commendable Oratile Nowe, the only lady who represented the country at the Paris Olympics last year in France and secured herself a spot in the semi-finals after finishing second in her 800m race with a time of 2:00.9 in Tokyo, remains a rising dime to look forward to.

Nowe, who finished 4th in the semi-finals expressed her wish to have more ladies by her side. "It is an honor to have made it to the semi-finals, but it is also a little bittersweet being the only woman here at this stage. There are so many talented female athletes out there but the path to this level isn't always equal. Some face barriers when it comes to support, exposure and even opportunities to qualify," she said.

### EMPOWER WOMEN

As shared by Nowe, empowering women in athletics is crucial and means investing in them from grassroot to elite levels. Adding further, she highlighted that representation matters, noting that eventually when young girls see women succeeding on world stages, it rightfully sends a powerful message that they too can do it. Nowe said there is a great need to challenge stereotypes and create systems that don't just include women, but genuinely support their growth and success. She concluded by stating that her performance in Tokyo was a learning curve and that

the success of the men's team has been of much encouragement to her.

"The men's team has shown strength and consistency. Watching how they prepare and how they handle pressure has been motivating. There's a lot to learn, not just technically but mentally. Their commitment reminds me that no matter the gender, success comes from hard work, discipline and believing in yourself. In essence, the championships have been a learning curve as I have learnt the importance of mental toughness especially when you're standing on the line as the only woman," she expressed.

As highlighted by Nowe, preparation in the form of intense training is critical and requires the highest form of concentration and determination. "I have learnt to trust my preparation, to stay focused under pressure and most importantly understanding that I belong here (on the track). Consistency in preparation is key and remains one thing that has brought me this far," explained Nowe.

Additionally, she said, great legends such as Amantle Montsho who broke barriers before are a constant reminder that she is walking in the footsteps of greatness.

### LADIES SUPPORTED

With the hope to do better going forward, Botswana Athletics Association (BAA) acting president, Oabona Theetso said they are equally concerned about the low participation of women in athletics. "We only had one lady in Tokyo recently and she advanced to the semis. However, we are worried that we don't have many women qualifying for these competitions and this poses a very serious threat in terms of the girl child development," he lamented.

Though not too late to change the status quo, Botswana has a series of events to look forward to including the famous Golden Grand prix and

the 2026 World Relays as the host country, as some of the big events slated for the year 2026.

Theetso highlighted that the Golden Grand prix is invitational, sharing that in the past they had only qualifiers taking part in the relays. However, he said since they are the host, the women have qualified already for the relays and this puts them in a good position to prepare. According to

Theetso, BAA will continue to encourage more ladies and get them involved through training and mentorship. "As Botswana Athletics, it is part of our strategic plan to include women in our competitions. Those who qualify for some scholarships will also be supported to the latter," he explained.

### AUTHOR'S COMMENT

' I chose this story because it gives male and female gender representation, offering both a chance to express themselves.

However, what I didn't expect while writing the story is finding additional sources not being able to participate or comment, particularly women within the sports field.

Although I aimed at giving women the spotlight they needed, I did not fully achieve this goal. Therefore this made my story lack certain information inclusive of experience shared by "renowned" retired female athletes.'

## Mauteng rises from ashes

By Masekonyela Makhaba

Following the 1992-2004 conflicts in Mauteng in the outskirts of Maseru town which robbed people of their human and constitutional rights as some were left dead, children orphaned, women widowed, some homeless and displaced, the community has managed to pick-up the pieces and rebuilt their lives.

The community members, community leaders and the police joined hands to bring an end to the conflicts and their efforts were not in vain, there are signs that restoration of the glory of the area is possible.

With the current peace and stability in the area, the community has started believing in themselves and that they have a potential to contribute meaningfully to the development of the country instead of making headlines for the wrong reasons.

Although illegal mines, commonly known as 'Litotomeng', among Basotho, which are found in South Africa have attracted a large number of young men from Lesotho, and are a problem in most parts of the country, the community of Mauteng is singing a different tune.

Illegal miners, commonly known as zama zamas often engage in criminal activities and conflicts which result in deaths and destruction of property. This are often a result of the fights which occur between them through their rivalry groups and they take them back into the country. The conflicts often affect innocent lives as well as the country's peace and stability.

They also affect relations between Lesotho and South Africa as they are often in the latter unlawful. This makes it difficult for other job seekers from Lesotho to secure employment or stay in South Africa.

For the community of Mauteng, the zama zamas are ordinary community members who continue to contribute to the development of the

area. They say they significantly participate in rebuilding the area adding that they are not a threat to the progress already made to restore peace.

The Agency took a trip to Mauteng to see the current state of the area and how the community is coping since the conflicts stopped.

The chief of Mauteng, Chief Sanaha Tuma-ki-Leuta who was forced to flee the country and stay in South Africa as his parental home was burned down and his wife injured, stated that after the situation came back to normal he returned home adding that he is gradually rebuilding the home. He indicated that there are more people who are returning to their homes where they reconstruct the damaged houses, erect new ones and get their lives back.

He said people are now united, adding that they are working together towards a common goal which is to rebuild their area and ensure sustainable peace, stability and development.

The Chief indicated that life is normal at Mauteng adding that the youth engage in sports especially soccer, further adding that they are eager to develop their talent. He also added that women are playing a significant role in the restoration process. He said they are involved in community development through their various associations. He further said the community is always united in looking after the sick and the orphans adding that no one is alone in the area.

He indicated that lack of access to electricity and absence of woolshed, frequently maintained roads as well as telecommunications network, which makes communication difficult for the community, have not discouraged them from wanting what is best for them and the area together with the entire country. He said they continue to focus on enhancing agriculture to ensure food security and that their livestock is well taken care of.



Chief Tumaki-Leuta remarked that in the past, visibility of the law enforcement agencies used to scare members of the community. He however said there is currently a relationship, trust and cooperation between them. He acknowledged the police through the Mofoka Police Station, members of the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF) and the community for their joint efforts to restore peace and stability in Mauteng.

The Chief pointed out that he is confident that the zama zamas from his area will not do anything to reignite the conflicts and jeopardize the prevailing peace. He said they are law abiding citizens adding that they participate in all community activities. He added that instead of engaging in criminal activities or causing instability, they are focused on improving their lives and developing the place.

“I am now proud to stand before the Principal Chief to present reports because they are always positive”, he said.

A still hurting ‘Mamothobi Thakabanna related how she survived a shooting that left her husband dead, thus rendering her widowed, and their houses burned down.

She stated that on the fateful day, while still at

home, she only heard gunshots, the next thing she was in hospital. She said she was hospitalised for a month and lost her memory. She pointed out that she was able to recover in 2000, although she still battles with chronic diseases which she contracted following the incident.

Mrs. Thakabanna lamented that no one from the government has ever come to the village to check on the victims since the conflicts occurred and stopped.

“The government abandoned us. What happened to us was a disaster but nothing was done about it. We were left to pick up the pieces on our own,” she added.

She indicated that they had hoped that the government would relocate them. She stated that the intervention they got was from God as all the perpetrators are now dead. She added that the only organisation that came to their rescue is the SOS Children’s Village which introduced a programme intended to uplift the community.

Just like the chief, Mrs. Thakabanna expressed confidence in the zama zamas of their area saying that they jealously guard the peace in their area. She said they have seen worse adding that the suffering was unbearable. She added that no

one would want to go back to the past.

Responding to the question of why her office did not intervene in the situation, Disaster Management Authority (DMA) Assistant Public Relations Officer Ms. Mahlape Koali, stated that an incident is considered a disaster when a large number of people in one area have been affected. She gave an example of COVID-19 and poverty adding that a disaster is declared.

She indicated that in situations where the DMA assists people is when a report is made about the incident and an assessment is carried out before action is taken. She pointed out that in cases where assistance is required, the Ministry of Social Development is the right one to approach.

Another member of the community Mrs. ‘Mampho Abele attested to what was said by the previous interviewees about Mauteng being a peaceful place.

“Living in Mauteng has never been as enjoyable as it currently is,” she said. She stated that people who caused the conflicts are now dead, hence the peace and stability.

She pointed out that although she was deeply hurt when her father was killed after his house was burned down as he was accused of being a snitch, she learned to live with the pain and eventually managed it. She said her male relatives who wanted revenge were convinced to drop it and they relocated.

Mrs. Abele indicated that illegal mining is working in their favour as the Mauteng community. She stated that it is an answer to the escalating unemployment rate adding that as soon as boys come of age, they are recruited into the illegal mines.

She said when they come back home, they bring along development while also ensuring sustainability of peace. She emphasised that they are breadwinners in their families adding that whatever conflicts they get involved in, back at the mines, have never affected the Mauteng villagers.

Former Councilor for the Makhoarane Community Council in the Mauteng Electoral Division, Mr. Tlhako Telekoa told the Agency that when he was first elected as the Councilor in 2005 at the age of 21, dealing with the aftermath of the conflicts was challenging. He however said through concerted efforts between the community leaders, villagers and the Mofoka Police resolutions were made. He said a lot of sacrifices and dedication were made in order to secure peace for Mauteng.

He stated that crime prevention committees were established through which tip-offs were provided about possible criminal activities. He indicated that there were times when, after suspicious movements were reported, armed suspects would be apprehended.

He added that they would also receive tip-offs from South Africa about people planning to cause havoc in the village. He said criminal activities were addressed before they could be committed.

Mr. Telekoa said the involvement of members of the community in curbing the conflicts made a huge impact. He said that there was unity adding that those who alienated themselves were often overpowered further adding that troublemakers could be easily spotted.

He acknowledged the SOS Children’s Village Lesotho for their contribution in rebuilding Mauteng and bringing hope to those who had lost it.

According to information from the SOS Children’s Village Lesotho, a three-year Family Strengthening Programme implemented in Mauteng which started in 2017 focused on children from struggling homes. It stated that the programme was intended to promote self reliance, access to education and ability for families to provide for the essential needs of the children.

The information also shows that working together with a Community Based Organisation (CBO) called Nts’etsopele Ea Basotho, the community was provided with training on psy-

chosocial support, and economic strengthening projects. It further added that income generating projects were established with the aim to promote access to education and improve livelihoods of the community members.

It revealed that primary schools in Mauteng were also equipped with skills on economic empowerment so that they could establish income generating projects..

Secretary for Ntsésopele Ea Basotho Association Mrs. 'Makhotsa Ntoi said the SOS Children's Village Lesotho provided an intervention when most needed. She stated that through the association, information about access to social grants is shared. She added that vulnerable children who are eligible for the grant are assisted with funds to cover transport, when need arises, in order to access the service.

She stated that they have been able to instill the spirit of job creation among the youth. She indicated that about 20 youths received training after which they were able to establish their own businesses.

A 30-year-old Motloli Makhotla who benefitted from the training organised under the Family Strengthening Programme stated, although he has not been able to secure employment after going to a driving school, he has not lost hope. He stated that the training has taken him a step further adding that he just has to improve his skills so he can get employed in the transport sector as he now has code B driver's licence.

He pointed out that regardless of being unemployed, he has a vision to have a sustainable business in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) eight, (Decent work and Economic Growth). He said he now owns a small business which he hopes to expand in future.

Speaking on the issue of the Zama zamas, Makhotla stated that despite being unemployed, he is not interested in taking that route. He pointed out that he has heard that people die in the illegal mines therefore he is scared to explore it.

He indicated that the people in his village who

work in the mines are progressing in life. He added that they always ensure that their rivalries do not spread to the village adding that they often reprimand those who try to cause trouble because of their issues from the mines. He insisted that, for him, illegal mining is a risk not worth taking.

The Mofoka Police through Detective Police Constable (DPC) Moloi Modia confirmed Mauteng image has been restored, further noting that the place which was known for serious crimes, especially murder, is now an ordinary place.

He indicated that the crime rate has significantly dropped adding that in the past five months, no crime has been reported from Mauteng. He said the work done by crime prevention committees from that area is outstanding and they are swift to address crime.

DPC Modia shared the same sentiments with the people of Mauteng that there is no sign that the zama zamas are posing a threat to the progress made in ensuring that the area is peaceful. He remarked that it seems they belong to one group and are united, therefore being involved in conflicts that might spread back home is difficult.

He appealed to the Mauteng Community and surrounding areas to comply with the law, report crime and provide the police with information. He emphasised that policing is everyone's responsibility therefore every community member must take part in it.

A member of Parliament (MP) for Matsieng Constituency Mr. Makotoko Moshe stated that the only solution to everlasting peace for Mauteng and its surrounding areas is job creation. He indicated that it is only when the people have something to do when the conflicts will come to a complete stop.

"All over the world, women are leading movements for peace and rebuilding communities in the aftermath of conflict", said UN Women on this year's International Day of Peace. They called for inclusion of women in peace processes

in order to achieve a peaceful and gender equal world.

While men are always at the forefront of conflicts and when resolutions are made ending the same, the women of Mauteng are seen taking a participatory role in rebuilding the homes and the lives. They have demonstrated strength, courage and resilience as they travel with their community through the journey to recovery.

Despite the devastation left behind by the conflicts in Mauteng and the credibility the area together with its people lost, the community still believes in the area and its potential to contribute to the country's economic development as well as maintain the peace that Basotho are known for, the peace which the founder of the nation King Moshoeshe I so cherished.

#### AUTHOR'S COMMENT

'The story stands out because the community of Mauteng has been neglected following the conflicts. The media has not been reporting enough about the aftermath.

Mauteng is located in the rural areas where less focus is placed. The people affected by the conflicts include children and women who are some of the most vulnerable community members and they are not often quoted as sources in our daily stories.

One would expect that victims are still filled with revenge and that the Zama Zamas engaging in illegal mining in South Africa and belonging to different rival gangs are making the situation worse and engaging in criminal activities. However, it was discovered that all the community members including those zamazamas are working together to ensure peace and stability as well as rehabilitation of their area. The Mofoka Police even confirmed that Mauteng is not among the areas where crime rate is out of control.

The people interviewed especially Chief Sanaha Tumaki-Leuta were cooperative and excited to have their stories told and shared. The only challenge was not being able to talk to any of the zamazamas from the village because they are particular about their privacy.

This was one of the most enjoyable stories to work on.'

## Invisible work keeps Lesotho's families afloat

By Mapule Motsopa

**Domestic work is one of the most common forms of employment for women in Lesotho, yet it remains among the least protected.**

In private homes across the country and in cities beyond its borders, Basotho women cook, clean, iron, and care for children, the elderly, and people living with disabilities under conditions shaped by informality, low wages, and weak enforcement of labour laws. Their labour sustains households and economies, but often at the cost of their own security, dignity and family life.

For most women, domestic work is not a free choice but an economic necessity. Lesotho's labour market has grown increasingly fragile, with unemployment stuck in double digits and broader labour under-utilisation affecting a far larger share of working-age people, according to the Lesotho's 2024 Labour Force Survey and World Bank assessments.

With limited opportunities for steady income, particularly in rural areas, women are pushed into domestic work as one of the few immediately accessible ways to support children and elderly dependents.

This pressure has intensified as Lesotho's narrow economic base has come under strain. Manufacturing, especially the garment sector, and remittances remain central to the economy, yet repeated factory shocks and retrenchments have squeezed household incomes. As jobs disappear at home, migration for informal work across the South African border has become a survival strategy rather than an aspiration.

For many Basotho women, access to domestic work in South Africa is facilitated not through formal recruitment agencies but through informal social networks: neighbours, friends, relatives, and community contacts. While these routes shorten the path to employment, they also strip away protection.

According to the International Organization

for Migration (IOM), most Basotho women migrants end up in unskilled, informal roles such as domestic service, where written contracts are rare, wages are negotiated verbally, and workers depend entirely on a single household for income, shelter, and legal safety. That dependence heightens vulnerability, particularly for undocumented workers who fear dismissal, non-payment, or deportation.

Speaking to the Agency, one woman in her early 40s began domestic work in Maseru as a teenager after completing Standard 7. Her parents could not afford school fees and encouraged her to find work to meet her basic needs. Through a neighbour, she became a nanny and housekeeper.

"I had to leave Lesotho because the woman's treatment was bad," she said. "She knew my situation at home and took advantage of it. She wanted to give my wages to my parents, not to me."

She later migrated to South Africa and has worked for five households over nearly two decades. In Lesotho, she earned as little as M150 a month back in 2004 at the age of 17; in Gauteng, she now earns about M2,800.

Each job, she said, followed a familiar pattern: initial understanding, coupled with expanding duties, denial of rest days, and growing hostility once she became settled.

"Our understanding was always short-lived," she said. "Once I got comfortable and knew people, it became a problem. I was never given time off, but I stayed because I needed the money."

Marriage and motherhood complicated her choices further. Unable to remain a stay-at-home mother and later separated from her husband, she continued working. In one household, she left after discovering used toilet paper deliberately placed on a bed she had to make.



In another, she endured weeks of verbal abuse after being forced to wash towels used by her employer and her partner after intimacy.

Despite the humiliation, domestic work allowed her to educate her children. "Sometimes after being paid, I leave myself with just M100 for cosmetics so my children can have everything they need," she said. "It's very painful to go home empty-handed after working for someone for years."

She plans to leave domestic work later this year to start a small business and says she will never work as a housekeeper again. "There should be contracts," she said. "Rules change along the way, but the money never does."

In Qacha's Nek, an 18-year-old domestic worker from Thaba-Tseka described caring for three children, including a 12-year-old living with cerebral palsy, "as difficult". She was recruited through a neighbour and left her own two-year-old child behind.

"I was not told the truth about the job," she said. "Had I known, I would never have agreed." Her employer sometimes leaves for weeks at a time, leaving her without food. With no training and limited supplies, she improvises care having to feed children pap mixed with water and sugar.

"Sometimes he loses consciousness and every time, it's scary," she said. "I don't know what I am doing, but I do it anyway because I need the money."

Advocates say such experiences are far from isolated. Martha Mosoang-Ocran, founder of the Kopanang Domestic Workers Association of Lesotho, describes domestic work as "deeply sys-

temic" in its challenges. Chief among them is the lack of written contracts. "Most domestic workers start on verbal agreements. Salaries are very low, sometimes not paid at all. Some employers even hire relatives and refuse payment, saying food is enough," she explained.

Long hours, insufficient protections, and limited benefits compound the problem. "By law, workers are entitled to eight-hour workdays and mandated rest periods," Martha said, "but domestic workers start at 4 or 5 a.m. and only rest after everyone else is asleep." Protective clothing is rare, public holidays and leave days are ignored, and women are often dismissed when pregnant or sick, despite legal provisions.

Training gaps further entrench vulnerability. She said domestic work spans household roles from cooking and cleaning to caring for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, but workers often receive no instruction. "We take it for granted that they know what to do," she said. "Sometimes they don't know how to use an iron safely, which can cause serious accidents." Without opportunities to develop skills, workers remain trapped in low-paid, insecure employment.

Gendered discrimination is stark. She said women are taken for granted, especially regarding pay. "Even when money is available, women are paid less than men doing less demanding work," she said. Sexual abuse is another common danger, particularly in South Africa, where migrant workers risk underpayment, loss of documents, or deportation. Martha's association advises workers never to hand over their passports.

Despite legal recognition under Lesotho's Labour Act of 2024 and a minimum wage of M872 set by Legal Notice No. 27, enforcement is weak. Martha emphasised that attitudes matter as much as laws. "Domestic workers are treated as if they are not human, even when the law specifies pay and protections."

She advocates actionable solutions such as unionisation and formalisation of domestic work under International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 189, ratification and domestication

of laws protecting women, and bilateral labour agreements akin to those historically protecting Basotho miners in South Africa.

Through training supported by IOM, she said domestic workers now learn about contracts, their rights abroad, and protections against trafficking, sexual abuse, or child labour. Counselling services are also provided locally to support victims. “Women should receive the same protections as men, whether working locally or abroad,” Martha said, framing a vision for recognition, safety, and dignity in the sector.

Labour law consultant Advocate Shafiq Isaacs describes Lesotho’s 2024 Labour Law as a welcome step forward, formally recognising domestic workers and defining their responsibilities. “Previously, domestic workers were invisible under the law. There were no job descriptions, no protections, and no clear path for recourse when they were dismissed,” he said.

Yet, he said legal recognition alone does not resolve the sector’s systemic problems. “The law treats domestic work as temporary, even when someone works for five, ten, or more years. The only entitlement is severance pay. Social security is excluded, and without contracts, there is no job security.”

He said migrant workers face similar vulnerabilities abroad. “Even in South Africa’s formal sector, domestic workers can struggle with contracts, pay, and employment rights.” The Act includes provisions for gender-based violence and harassment, but enforcement remains uneven.

“Reporting abuse is risky when workers fear losing their jobs, and inspection capacity is limited. Employers, employees, and government all share responsibility, but currently enforcement is weak, and awareness of rights is low,” he said.

Advocate Isaacs emphasises the need to professionalise domestic work. “These workers handle highly personal and sensitive tasks, yet they receive little training. They should be taught confidentiality, ethics, and technical skills,” he explained, suggesting that domestic work could even be included as a course in technical schools to provide formal qualifications. “Professional recognition would create standards, reduce

abuse, and elevate the sector beyond informal labour.”

He also advocates practical solutions for cross-border employment such as clear contracts, enforceable rights, and awareness of legal protections, particularly for migrant workers. “Formal structures allow workers to report violations to authorities, claim benefits, and protect themselves legally,” he said.

Lerato Nts’ekhe, Executive Director of the Migrant Workers Association of Lesotho, says domestic work remains undervalued and largely unprofessionally categorised. “The Labour Act focuses on factories, security, and construction, but domestic workers are treated as general workers. There are no contracts, no formal job descriptions, and recruitment is mostly informal,” he said.

Informal recruitment, sometimes through social media, he said exposes workers to exploitation, including illegal fees. “Until domestic work is formalized, abuse will continue,” Nts’ekhe warned.

He is candid about why progress has been slow. “Some stakeholders, including employers and even officials, resist formalising domestic work because they benefit from the current system. The moment the sector becomes structured, they would lose certain advantages. That is why little gets done despite advocacy efforts,” he said.

Nevertheless, the association continues to push for reform. “We are working to ensure domestic workers have contracts, clear rights, and protection from exploitative recruitment practices.” Professionalisation, he said, “would reduce abuse, give workers legal recourse, and ensure their work is recognised and respected.”

Efforts by the Agency to engage the Ministry of Labour and Employment were largely unsuccessful.

Migration data help explain why women continue to take such risks. According to the IOM, more than 179,000 Basotho currently work in South Africa, largely in informal domestic roles.

When male mining jobs collapsed from roughly

100,000 in 1990 to about 40,500 by 2006, women increasingly became primary earners, stepping into the economic breach. In 2023, remittances reached US\$485 million, nearly 23 percent of Lesotho’s GDP making the country one of Africa’s most remittance-dependent economies.

Yet the gendered nature of this labour is stark. Research by UN-INSTRAW and SAIIA shows that migrant women earn significantly less than men: about R2,929 per month in domestic work, compared to R5,500 for men in mining.

Despite earning less, women remit between 60 and 80 percent of their income, largely covering food and school fees while men’s remittances are typically lower and more often invested in livestock or property.

At home, parents especially grandparents absorb the social costs, raising grandchildren and managing the emotional strain of long separations

and inconsistent income.

Globally, domestic work is one of the most gendered and under-protected sectors. The ILO estimates that women make up the vast majority of the world’s 75 million domestic workers, more than 80 percent of whom are informally employed, without contracts, social security, or effective labour inspections. Basotho women’s experiences mirror this global pattern: their labour is undervalued, informal, and largely invisible, yet it sustains households and the national economy alike.

Until the sector is formally recognised, regulated, and respected, Basotho women will continue to pay the price for survival through insecurity, separation, and silence. Their labour is not invisible because it does not matter; it is invisible because the systems that depend on it refuse to see it.

#### AUTHOR’S COMMENT

‘I chose this story because it highlights a form of work largely performed by women yet often overlooked in mainstream reporting. It stands out for exposing how domestic labour sustains households and national economies while remaining undervalued, informal, and weakly protected. By centering women’s lived experiences alongside data, labour law analysis, and migration trends, the story demonstrates the structural gender inequalities that shape employment opportunities for women. It also moves beyond describing challenges to highlighting policy gaps and practical solutions, making it a strong example of gender-aware reporting that elevates women’s voices and calls for greater recognition, protection, and parity in the world of work.

While preparing the article, the extent of informality and vulnerability, particularly among migrant domestic workers surprised me. Many women accept jobs through verbal agreements, work long hours without rest days, and sometimes endure abuse while still sending most of their income home. I was also struck by the fact that, despite earning less than men, women remit a larger portion of their income, effectively carrying the economic survival of their families. This revealed how deeply gendered the burden of care and financial responsibility has become.

One of the main challenges was reporting on a sector that operates largely behind closed doors, where many workers fear speaking openly due to job insecurity and dependence on employers. The informal nature of domestic work also meant limited official data and documentation. Efforts to obtain comment from the Ministry of Labour and Employment were largely unsuccessful, making it difficult to include the government’s perspective on enforcement and policy gaps. Balancing personal experiences with legal, migration, and labour issues also required careful reporting to accurately reflect both lived realities and systemic gender inequality.

Overall, the story reinforced how domestic work sustains families and economies, even though the workers themselves often lack dignity, protection, and recognition. And showed me beyond the story, the emotional and personal cost behind this invisible work. Many women leave their own children behind to care for other families’ children, sacrificing their presence at home to ensure their families survive. Their resilience, despite exploitation, low wages, and separation, underscored how essential yet undervalued their labour is.’

## From a 'punching bag' to punching back

By Phongwazana Sakachane

A woman who chose courage over silence

Mary Phenduka's life, once a picture-perfect art display, is today a point of reference, albeit a testimony of hope. She was ever the glare of friends and family looking happy, always smiling in public spaces and sharing joyful moments with her husband. But behind the smiles and celebrations, she was confronted by a hidden reality, one of a life marked by emotional and physical abuse, leaving scars invisible to the outside world.

Phenduka's descent into darkness began quietly. Emotional abuse crept in first, disguised as sharp words, constant criticism, and jealousy, then came the infidelity. Her husband had one particular girlfriend who was object of many of their fights but nothing changed. Instead, she recalls, the affair was being thrown in her face so much that her husband would even bring home some of the other woman's things to use in their house.

"One day he came home with what looked like some herbs, possibly from a witch doctor, to use in our house. I'd had it with him, so I told him to take them to her house," she recalls, highlighting the depth of the emotional abuse, which had transcended to slur and slander.

The insults, mockery, belittling and controlling behaviour gradually chipped away at her confidence, isolating her from family and friends. "I would hide behind makeup and a beautiful smile, but I was dying inside. The pain was unbearable," she remembers.

What started as emotional abuse soon turned physical. At one point the assault meted at her was so severe that she landed in hospital nursing both physical and emotional pain as she grieved the loss of her unborn child. "Yes, I lost the baby. It was very painful. I hid it behind a smile, but the silence was killing me inside," she recounts. Despite the severity of the violence, she kept it to herself, and even lied to her family saying that she had lost the baby due to low blood pressure.

Her breaking point came when the abuse escalated in public. One night, she was forced outside naked



in the rain bleeding and humiliated in front of neighbours. The following morning, her young son told her that his friends had seen her. "The pain, the shame, the fear- it's something I will never forget. My son came crying, and I did not know what to say," she recalls.

That night, Phenduka made a life-altering decision: she would no longer remain silent. She took her son turned her back on what was supposed to have been a home for her, leaving all the possessions, a house, and parts of her past- but gained safety, freedom, and hope.

The story highlights a truth too often overlooked: the isolation and fear that accompany abuse. Today, she speaks openly about her experience, determined to empower other survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) to find their voices.

"It is okay to choose your healing. The world will judge you, and that is okay. You do not owe the world anything, but you owe yourself everything. They will try to silence you, do not allow it. Break the silence. Choose yourself. Love yourself. No one will heal you but you."

Phenduka emphasises the importance of education, self-reliance, and empowerment for women. She believes fear and dependency often keep survivors trapped in abusive relationships. "It is okay to lose everything. It is okay to start over. It is okay to

choose yourself," she says. She also took practical steps: reporting the abuse to the police, seeking legal support, and accessing counseling to help rebuild her life.

Her story makes up part of deplorable statistics of women forced to live with the shame and torment of abuse. Some of these instances escalate so bad that victims do not live to tell the story.

Studies claim that in Lesotho, 86% of women have experienced some form of GBV at least once in their lifetime. Emotional violence- insults, belittling, and verbal abuse- is the most common, affecting more than half of women. Physical, economic, and sexual abuse also remain widespread.

The statistics reveal that abuse is often hidden, especially within intimate relationships. "Many people fear the reporting process or the outcome," says Sub-Inspector Lebohlang Sehlahla of the Lesotho Mounted Police's Gender and Child Protection Unit (CGPU). "When victims come forward, cases are often straightforward and can be resolved. But some require thorough follow-up, and in other cases, victims need encouragement to speak because of fear," Sehlahla adds.

The CGPU has developed several solutions to address GBV. Awareness campaigns in schools, community gatherings, radio programs, and NGO partnerships encourage victims to report abuse. In serious cases, the police work closely with the Ministry of Gender to shelter and protect survivors during investigations. The goal is not just to punish perpetrators but also to ensure survivors' safety and dignity.

The Lesotho Gender and Development Policy (2018–2030), highlights other measures in place by government to promote zero tolerance toward all forms of GBV, protecting women, men, children, the elderly, LGBTIQI individuals, and people with disabilities.

SHE Hive Lesotho, a women-led non-profit organisation, attempts to combat GBV by providing psychosocial support, legal and medical referrals, and counseling. They focus on all stages of prevention: prevention through education and awareness, secondary prevention with direct support and interventions, and tertiary prevention through advocacy, legal strategies, and challenging harmful policies. Communities are encouraged to speak out, support survivors, and work with local leaders to prevent abuse.

Phenduka's journey mirrors these solutions. By seeking help from the police and support organizations, accessing counseling, and relocating to safety, she demonstrates that recovery is possible. She is living proof that breaking the silence is the first step toward healing.

"Break the silence. Speak your truth," she urges. "Your life, your safety, your healing- it matters more than anything else." Her story is a call to action for women trapped in abusive relationships "you are not alone, help is available, and it is never too late to choose yourself, educate yourself, seek support, and build your independence. Healing is not instant, but it is achievable.

As Phenduka's life shows, courage combined with the right support systems can transform a story of pain into one of hope and empowerment.

### AUTHOR'S COMMENT

'The reason why I chose this story is because gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious problem worldwide. Many women, including our sisters and mothers, are being killed every day. At the same time, many victims are afraid to speak out. Some fear losing financial support, their children, or being judged and laughed at by the community. However, when brave people like Mary come forward, they inspire others who are still in abusive relationships or marriages to find the courage to leave and start a new life.

What surprised me the most while working on this story was what I discovered during my visit to the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) Gender and Child Protection Unit (GPU). I learned that not only women are abused, but men are also victims of abuse. Another concerning issue is that before opening a case, officers often sit down with both parties. In many instances, women choose to forgive their partners, but shortly after, they return to report the same incidents again.

After reporting this story, I was left feeling emotional but also proud of Mary. She made the difficult decision to leave everything behind in order to protect herself and start over from nothing.'

# She Leads the Classroom: Women Principals Reshaping Education in Lesotho

By Lintle Tsita

Women form the backbone of Lesotho's education system, filling classrooms as teachers across the country. Yet leadership at school level remains largely male-dominated.

For the women who do rise to principalship, leadership often comes with delayed recognition, intense scrutiny, and the pressure to excel in systems not designed with them in mind.

At Lesotho High School, Matisetso Ramothamo is redefining what effective school leadership looks like – through inclusive decision-making, emotional intelligence, and resilience.

## A LEADERSHIP JOURNEY MARKED BY DELAY

Matisetso Ramothamo's journey to the principal's office was neither swift nor straightforward. She rose through the ranks as a Head of Department and later served in acting leadership roles. When the substantive principal resigned in 2012, she was encouraged by colleagues to apply.

She met the requirements, applied, and was appointed – but remained in an acting capacity for several years due to the absence of a clear recruitment and confirmation policy at the time. Her formal confirmation only came a decade later, in 2022.

"I was qualified and recommended, but I stayed in an acting position for a long time," Ramothamo explains.

"That delay affects authority, confidence, and how people perceive your leadership."

Her experience reflects a broader systemic challenge facing women leaders in education: prolonged acting appointments that undermine legitimacy, even when competence is evident.

## GENDER, AUTHORITY, AND EXPECTATIONS

As a woman principal, Ramothamo says her authority has sometimes been questioned – often because she does not fit traditional, masculine leadership stereotypes.

"People doubted whether I could lead because I am quiet and introverted," she says.

"But leadership is not about noise. It is about results."

A senior female teacher at the school confirms this reality.

"Women leaders are judged more harshly," she says.

"Mistakes that are tolerated in men become proof of incompetence in women."

A male teacher adds that expectations are often unrealistic.

"Women principals are expected to be firm, caring, and perfect all at once," he notes. "The pressure is higher."

These perspectives underscore how deeply gender norms continue to shape authority and leadership in schools.

## LEADING UNDER CONSTRAINT

Beyond gender bias, Ramothamo leads under significant institutional constraints. As a government school, Lesotho High School operates within a centralized system where many decisions require approval from the Ministry of Education and Training.

"Most key decisions are beyond the school's control," she explains.

"When approvals delay, progress delays."



Balancing academic performance, discipline, and learner wellbeing under such conditions demands adaptability and emotional intelligence – qualities often overlooked in traditional leadership metrics.

## INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

Ramothamo describes her leadership style as largely transformational, with flexibility to adopt an authoritative approach when necessary.

"Inclusive decision-making is important," she says.

"When teachers and staff are involved, they support the outcomes."

Conflict management is dialogue driven. Issues are discussed openly, root causes identified, and solutions agreed upon collectively.

Teachers say this approach has strengthened morale and collaboration.

"We feel respected and heard," says one teacher.

"That makes us more committed to the school." Another teacher adds:

"Inclusive leadership reduces resistance. People take ownership of decisions."

## IMPACT ON LEARNERS

For learners, leadership style shapes the school environment in powerful ways. A Form E female student says seeing a woman principal has expanded her aspirations.

"Seeing a woman lead a big school makes me believe girls can be leaders too," she says.

A male student highlights the balance between

discipline and care.

"There is discipline here, but also understanding," he explains.

"You are corrected, not humiliated."

Teachers report improved learner behavior and engagement, noting that emotionally intelligent leadership fosters respect rather than fear.

## ROLE MODELLING AND WHAT MUST CHANGE

For girls in particular, women principals serve as daily reminders that leadership is attainable. One teacher observes a clear shift in learner confidence and participation.

"Most of the girls now want to take the lead in school activities, and they are doing well," the teacher notes.

"We now have more girl prefects than boys."

Despite these gains, Ramothamo believes more systemic support is needed for women leaders to thrive.

"Women in leadership positions need to be equipped with legal knowledge and strong leadership skills," she says,

"So that they can lead confidently and protect both themselves and their institutions."

Education stakeholders agree that strengthening women's leadership is not only a gender equality issue – it is central to improving school performance, learner wellbeing, and future leadership pipelines.

## REDEFINING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Women principals like Matisetso Ramothamo are not only managing institutions; they are reshaping leadership itself. Through inclusion, empathy, and resilience, they demonstrate that effective leadership is about collaboration and care – not dominance.

As Lesotho works to strengthen its education system, recognizing and supporting women leaders is no longer optional. It is essential.

## Uncovering Malawi's TB gender gap

By Meclina Chirwa

Raphael Gwetsani, a 41-year-old man from Kasengere Village, remembers the day he was diagnosed with TB like it was yesterday.

"I was coughing non-stop, I had lost weight, and I felt like I was going to die," he recalls, his voice shaking with emotion. But it wasn't until his wife, Maria, forced him to go to the hospital that he finally sought medical help. "I was scared, I didn't want to go to the hospital. I thought it was a waste of time," he admits.

But Maria wasn't having it. "I told him, 'You're not going to die on me, you're going to get treatment and get better,'" she says, her eyes filled with determination.

And so, Raphael reluctantly agreed to go.

"I was diagnosed with TB in January this year," Raphael explains. "I was put on treatment and I'm now fine. If it wasn't for my wife, I could've died."

Raphael's story is not unique. According to Dr. Kuzani Mbendera, National TB and Leprosy Elimination Program Manager, men in Malawi are often reluctant to seek medical help, leading to a significant gender gap in TB treatment.

"We have a problem with men seeking medical care," Dr. Mbendera says. "They often wait until it's too late, and it's affecting their health and the health of those around them."

Harriet Kakhobwe, PRO for Paradizo TB Patients Trust, agrees.

"We work with communities to educate them about the importance of seeking medical attention. But it's not just about education, it's about changing mindsets. Men need to understand that seeking help is not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength," she said.

But what drives this reluctance to seek medical help?

Peter Shema Yelesani, a gender expert, believes it's rooted in cultural beliefs and societal expectations.

"Many men believe that seeking help is a threat to their masculinity. They think that they need to be strong and tough, and that seeking medical help is a sign of vulnerability," he said

Yelesani points out that healthcare facilities themselves can also be a barrier.

"Many facilities don't have confidential rooms, making it difficult for men to openly discuss their symptoms," he says. "And when men do seek help, they're often met with judgmental attitudes from healthcare workers. It's a turn-off, and they don't come back."

The statistics are stark. According to the World Health Organization, men are more likely to die from TB than women, with a male-to-female ratio of 1.7:1. In Malawi, the gap is even wider, with men accounting for 60% of TB cases.

So, what can be done?

Dr. Mbendera believes it's about changing the narrative around masculinity.

"We need to redefine what it means to be a man. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength. We need to encourage men to prioritize their health and well-being."

But it's not just about the government, it's about individuals. It's about men supporting men, and encouraging each other to prioritize their health.

As Raphael puts it, "I'm not ashamed to say I'm a TB survivor. I'm proud of myself for seeking help, and I'm proud of my wife for pushing me to get it."

## Safe abortion: Joy for youth, hurdle for women

By Chancy Namadzunda

In late October 2025, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) advocates in Malawi celebrated a landmark decision by High Court Judge Michael Tembo, who ruled that minors impregnated through sexual violence or rape are entitled to access safe abortion services.

The ruling followed a case brought by a courageous 14-year-old girl (identified in court as AC for legal and ethical reasons) who sued the Ministry of Health after being denied the service following a rape in 2022.

AC also sued a clinician at Chileka Health Centre for refusing to provide the procedure. The court awarded her damages for injury and loss arising from the mental anguish she suffered after being forced to carry the unwanted pregnancy longer than necessary.

AC argued that by denying her the service, the clinician violated Section 19(1) of the Gender Equality Act (GEA), which guarantees the right to adequate sexual and reproductive health, including access to services such as safe and legal termination of pregnancy.

In response, the court ordered the Ministry of Health to amend the Post-Abortion Care Guidelines within 180 days to ensure that minors in similar situations can access safe abortion services.

### CELEBRATIONS CUT SHORT

While the ruling was a major step forward and worth celebrating, it fell short of delivering full justice. Many women in circumstances similar to AC's continue to suffer in silence.

The court's directive to amend the guidelines applies only to minors, leaving adult survivors of sexual violence without similar protection or access to safe abortion services.

"The court only addressed the issue brought

before it. It took one brave girl to challenge the breach of statutory duties by the authorities. All in all, the judgement has nothing to do with women who are found in the same circumstances," explains Godfrey Kangaude, the Executive Director of Nyale Institute of Reproductive Health.

Malawi's abortion laws are a legacy of British colonial rule. Although the country gained independence in 1964, it continues to uphold several colonial-era provisions, including sections 149–151 of the Penal Code, which criminalise abortion except when the procedure is performed to save the life of the woman.

Section 149 states that anyone who attempts to cause a miscarriage by "administering poison, using force, or any other means" commits a felony and is liable to imprisonment for up to fourteen years. Section 243 further allows surgical operations only when they are necessary to preserve the life of the mother.

Section 150 provides that any person who unlawfully procures, administers or assists in an abortion is liable to imprisonment for up to seven years, while Section 151 imposes a three-year sentence on anyone who supplies instruments or substances intended for an illegal abortion.

### ARE WOMEN FAILING THEMSELVES?

Senior Chief Chikumbu, who is also a women's rights activist, believes that many women still lack adequate knowledge about their sexual and reproductive health rights, including access to safe abortion services and related legal provisions. She notes that this knowledge gap leaves many women vulnerable to misinformation, stigma and unsafe practices.

"There are a lot of women who are ready to do what AC did, but I think lack of information

is making them fail to take bold steps. If these cases are brought to the knowledge of women in the same circumstances, they, too, can take action," she says.

Kangaude believes that tackling the issue calls for collective action involving victims, civil society organisations (CSOs) and rights activists working together to push for change.

"As CSOs, we need to work together with the women who are victims to help solve these issues. We need to lobby for more action from our members of Parliament," he says.

However, according to lawyer and safe abortion activist Mateyu Sisya, many women are afraid to come out in the open because they fear ridicule and the stigma that often surrounds the issue.

"Women are willing to fight for their rights, but they are reluctant to come out because they are afraid of ridicule or being described as sinners. Malawi styles itself as a God-fearing nation, so for women to come forward with these issues, they would be taken as sinners.

"However, there is still chance to use the judgement to address issues affecting women. We must lobby the government to ensure that, as it amends the Gender Equality Act, the rights and needs of all women, not just minors, are also taken into account. Much as it was specifically for minors, women can ride on this success and gain something," Sisya explains.

Malawi remains among the countries with the highest maternal mortality rates, recording 381 deaths per 100,000 live births, according to the Nyale Institute. The Institute notes that unsafe abortions alone account for up to 18 percent of these deaths, many of which are preventable.

It further emphasises that stigma continues to be one of the greatest barriers. Many women who legally qualify for abortion services are still denied care in public health facilities. With limited alternatives, they often resort to unsafe procedures, sometimes with fatal consequences.

The Malawi Government has long expressed

its intention to reform these laws. In 2012, then-President Joyce Banda appointed a Special Law Commission to review the existing abortion provisions, following a request from the Ministry of Health aimed at reducing pregnancy-related deaths.

The commission, comprising doctors, lawyers, faith leaders and chiefs, evaluated local evidence and policies in conjunction with international treaties, and visited several African countries for guidance.

# Cyberbullying: Malawi's Invisible Crises

By Rebecca Chimjeka

When 22-year-old Thoko, a Blantyre-based college student, logged into her Facebook account one morning, she was greeted by the unthinkable—her intimate video posted publicly without her consent.

She had shared it privately with someone she trusted, but he leaked it online. Within minutes, strangers flooded her inbox with insults, mockery, and false rumours.

“I felt naked,” she says quietly. “Every beep of my phone felt like a knife.”

Thoko is one of a growing number of Malawians—especially women and girls—facing cyber harassment as digital access expands. While social media has created opportunities for business, activism, and connection, it has also opened doors to a new, invisible form of violence.

## A SURGE IN ONLINE ABUSE

Malawi's online population has grown sharply over the past decade. Cheaper smartphones and affordable data bundles mean more people now conduct significant parts of their lives online, a trend the Times has observed across urban and semi-urban communities.

But increased access has come with a dramatic spike in digital abuse.

A 2023 Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) Cybersecurity Baseline Survey found that cyber-related violations—including harassment, cyberstalking, impersonation, identity theft, WhatsApp scams, and non-consensual distribution of intimate images—are rising. Yet 85 percent of victims never report their cases.

ICT expert Matthews Banda, a digital safety consultant based in Lilongwe says “Many suffer in silence”.

For women and girls, online platforms mirror offline inequalities—but with louder, harsher, and more public forms of humiliation. Digital gender-based violence (DGBV) now includes threats, extortion, deep fake images, blackmail, and “leak culture.”

“It's violence,” says gender activist Maggie Kathewera Banda. “Just because it happens behind a screen doesn't mean it hurts less.”

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE FACE THE HARSHTEST ATTACKS

Female journalists are among the top targets. A simple Facebook post or investigative article can trigger waves of insults, vulgar messages, doctored photos, and anonymous threats.

“Jane\*,” a Lilongwe-based reporter, says her political commentary once attracted days of vicious online attacks.

“I started questioning my career,” she says. “If speaking truth comes with this much abuse, is it worth it?”

This fear pushes many women away from public debate, weakening Malawi's democratic discourse.

## UNIVERSITY GIRLS AND THE HUMILIATION OF LEAKED IMAGES

For university students, leaks of private images are becoming disturbingly common. Some are shared to humiliate girls who reject romantic advances; others are circulated “for entertainment” in WhatsApp groups.

The consequences are devastating: depression, panic attacks, self-isolation, and even dropping out of school.

## BARRIERS TO JUSTICE

Malawi has strong laws in the Electronic Transactions and Cyber Security Act, yet enforcement remains weak. Few victims go to the police—some fear judgment, others blame, and many simply don't know where to report.

“I wanted to report, but I thought the police would laugh at me,” says Thoko.

Perpetrators hide behind anonymous accounts, foreign numbers, or “Chigoba” profiles. Evidence dis-

appears quickly. Cyber-forensics capacity is limited.

## WHEN CYBERBULLYING BREAKS A LIFE

When 32-year-old Maggie Banda\*, a Malawian based in London, checked into a mental health clinic earlier this year, she carried no visible wounds—but inside she was breaking.

Court documents show she had been spiraling for weeks: sleepless nights, no appetite, constant fear. The trigger came from her phone.

She was relentlessly cyberbullied by a Malawian social media influencer living in the UK. Private messages about her were posted publicly, mocked, twisted, and spread across thousands of accounts.

“She broke down completely,” a close friend said. “She felt like the whole world was watching her suffer.”

The High Court in London has since ordered the influencer to remove the messages posted without consent. Maggie is seeking £5,000 in damages for emotional distress.

For her—and many others—the harm is irreversible.

## A HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS

As Malawi marks 30 years of the Beijing Declaration, the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC) says cyber harassment is now one of the fastest-growing forms of violence against women and girls.

MHRC Executive Secretary Habiba Osman says the rise in digital abuse reflects deeper structural inequalities.

“What we are seeing today is GBV simply migrating to digital spaces,” she says. “The platform may change, but the violence remains—and sometimes it becomes even more vicious.”

A 2021 study by Dr. Mary Malanga, titled Cyber Violence Against Women in Malawi, found, Most Malawian women online experience at least one form of cyber violence. Over three-quarters reported harassment or bullying. Many had faced threats, sexual exploitation, or non-consensual image sharing.

Osman says the lack of accountability is fuelling impunity.

“We cannot allow impunity to thrive online,” she says. “Digital rights come with responsibilities. Anyone who violates another person's dignity or privacy must face the law.”

She calls for stronger online policing, improved forensics, and safer digital ecosystems for women.

“We must build a digital Malawi where women participate freely—without fear, intimidation, or humiliation.”

## THE MENTAL HEALTH TOLL

Mental health expert Catherine Thangalimodzi says Maggie's experience should be a wake-up call.

“Social media monetization has created a new breed of content creators,” she warns. “Platforms reward scandal and humiliation. Safety becomes secondary.”

She says online abuse follows victims everywhere.

“The internet doesn't switch off. Once bullying starts, it invades your bedroom, your workplace—even your dreams.”

## FINDING STRENGTH AFTER TRAUMA

For Thoko, healing has been slow but possible. She deleted her social media for six months. She still panics when she hears a notification.

But she has now found strength in sharing her story.

“I speak to girls in my community,” she says. “I tell them to protect themselves online—and to speak out. Silence gives abusers power.”

## THE QUESTION MALAWI MUST ANSWER

As internet access grows, Malawi faces a defining question: Will digital spaces empower or endanger women?

For thousands like Thoko and Maggie, the answer depends on the action taken today.

And for MHRC's Habiba Osman, the way forward is clear:

“We must create safe digital spaces. Women and girls deserve to thrive—online and offline.”

\* Some names changed to protect identity.

## Stigma and survival: Women at Malawi's edge

By Chimwemwe Mikwala

Brandina Kantsamwa's nights are spent navigating a world that offers her little choice and even less compassion.

As a sex worker striving to make ends meet, she faces not only the daily uncertainty of her trade but also the sting of abuse from clients and the harsh ridicule of a community that refuses to see her humanity.

Blandina's story is not just about survival, it is about resilience in the face of stigma, and the unspoken questions of dignity, safety, and acceptance that linger at the margins of Malawi's society.

"I joined this trade due to economic challenges at home." She narrates. "But the challenges that come with it are immense."

Operating in Mwanza border district, Brandina says most of the abuse she suffers comes from clients men who sometimes refuse to pay after agreements, or who become violent during sex. She recalls one harrowing encounter when a client beat her severely for demanding the payment they had agreed upon.

"I thought I was going to die that day," she says. "Thankfully, I am still here to tell the story."

Beyond the abuse she endures, Brandina also faces ridicule and discrimination within her own community. She recalls the pain of being removed from the beneficiary list of the Social Cash Transfer program because she is a sex worker.

"The leaders explicitly said, 'She's a prostitute, remove her from the list,'" she recounts.

For Brandina, such exclusion reinforces her sense of isolation. It pushes her deeper into the work she does, as she believes there is no help available to her outside of the solidarity she finds among other women in the same trade.

Another person in the trade facing similar challenges is Jamilla, president of the Sex Workers in Mwanza district.

However, her path into sex work was shaped by a different kind of hardship. Unlike Brandina, it was not poverty that drove her into the trade, but the abuse she suffered at the hands of her ex-husband. The violence and mistreatment she endured at home eventually pushed her out, leaving the streets as her only refuge and source of survival.

Jamilla, too, speaks of the abuse she endures not only from clients but also from the wider community. The stigma attached to her work follows her everywhere, making even the most basic needs difficult to access. She explains that seeking health services can be a challenge, as she is well known in the area for her trade.

The discrimination she faces at clinics and hospitals leaves her feeling unwelcome and unsupported, reinforcing the isolation that already defines her life. For Jamilla, the violence of clients is compounded by the quiet cruelty of a society that denies her dignity, even in moments when she seeks care.

Health rights activist Dorothy Ngoma has strongly condemned the discrimination and stigma faced by women in sex work.

"It begins with the name we call them," she says. "The moment one says 'sex worker,' people are already judging. It's high time we found a better name for them for example, I call them sly queens."

Ngoma warns that unchecked stigma carries serious consequences. "With the nature of their job, if these women are denied access to health services, the chances are high they will infect their clients who are our brothers, fathers, and uncles," she cautions.

She has since called for a shift in mindset and better coexistence between the community and sex workers.

"Believe it or not, this trade practiced not only by women but by men too is not going anywhere. The best we can do is ensure that we live with them amicably, while protecting ourselves." She concludes.

FemWise Malawi project coordinator, Tionge Kalua Mhone, stresses that sex workers must first be recognized as human beings.

"We should not treat them based on their work," she emphasizes. "Because despite everything, they are human working to fend for themselves and their families."

Mhone calls for empathy and a shift in perspective, reminding society that dignity and respect should never be conditional on one's occupation.

Jamilla, who also serves as president of female sex workers in Mwanza, is determined not to take these challenges lying down. Together with her colleagues, she has introduced measures to strengthen their safety and protection.

"We know that we have a duty to protect ourselves," she explains. "So, we alert each other whenever we have a client and where we are going, so that our colleagues know and can come help whenever needed."

Jamilla also revealed that, unlike in the past, they now enjoy a better working relationship with protection service providers including the police victim support unit. She says officers there give them time and attention when they report cases, a shift that has offered them a measure of reassurance and recognition.

Her leadership reflects a growing determination among sex workers to reclaim agency, build solidarity, and demand accountability from institutions meant to safeguard their rights.

The stories of Brandina and Jamilla reveal the harsh realities faced by sex workers; realities marked by violence, stigma, and exclusion. Yet they also highlight resilience, solidarity, and a

growing demand for recognition.

It is a narrative that insists sex workers are human first, deserving of respect, healthcare, and protection. Their voices remind us that ignoring their plight does not erase their existence it only deepens the risks for them and for society at large.

For Malawi, the challenge is clear: to move beyond judgment and embrace coexistence, ensuring that every citizen, regardless of their work, can live with dignity and safety.

## No more under water deals: women challenging lake Malawi exploitation

By Tamandani Hau

The Sun had just begun to rise above Vinthenga Beach in Nkhotakota but the shoreline was already alive with the sharp smell of fresh fish and the hum of women calling out prices as the morning catch arrived.

Among them stood Mariam, a widow and mother of three who agreed only for a written consent. She owns two fishing boats, the assets that have transformed her life and challenged a system that has exploited women for decades.

According to Mariam, She hires the boats depending on the catch of the day with a minimum hiring fee of K30, 000 per day.

Before joining Vinthenga women's initiative, Mariam carried years of silent trauma and experiences she said still clings to her. She remembers braving icy lakeshore nights after her husband's death in 2018, standing in queues where the unwritten rules of the trade required sex more than just cash.

"Those nights were the hardest. Sometimes it felt like what they really wanted was sex more than the cash I had work hard for to bring. I did not want it but I also had children to feed and then men knew I had no choice," she said.

Mariam evoked that male boat owners often demanded sex, a situation that made her feel unsafe but had no choice.

In 2020, she said the pressure had grown unbearable and she was coerced twice into unprotected sex for fish with different men, each incident carving a wound she struggled to name.

She recalled that the most painful incident happened in 2021, when she was forced to have sex with a man who knew her deceased husband but unfortunately she had nowhere to report the issue since it was regarded as a 'norm' at the lake.

"It's a permanent memory. I walked home with an empty basin despite having K58, 000 required for one to purchase fish of that quantity after I denied sex to the friend of the first man. After joining the cooperative, I realised my falling in and it still pains me," she recalled.

A landmark qualitative study published between 2009 to 2011 through the London School of Hygiene and Tropical medicine (LSHTM) established that in Malawi, transactional sex in fishing communities ranged from informal gift exchange to direct coercion.

The research also highlighted that women often negotiate from a weaker position because men control access to fish.

In addition to that, a 2023 Aljazeera investigative report done by Rabson Kondowe at Luwuchi fishing camp in Rumphu district linked that persistence of sex for fish was mostly orchestrated by boat owners who have control over fish while highlighting that unequal power dynamics made it difficult for women to deny.

The report revealed that fishermen demanded sex in exchange of 'usipa', a continuous malpractice that shows the extent of the problem.

Mariam is one of 60 women in Nkhotakota who each contribute K5, 000 per week into a savings pool through a cooperative supported by the Responsive Fisheries and Livelihoods (REFRESSH) project. Their collective savings have enabled members to purchase boats, improve fish –processing skills and introduce strict rules that directly challenge the once-normal 'sex for fish' system.

She now earns one million kwacha per month (USD 575), and owns two –licensed fishing boats by the Nkhotakota department of fisheries and marine.

In July 2024, the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC) released a report which documented widespread coercion into transactional sex to access fish from male boat owners, a situation which exposed violation of women's rights.

According to the report, lack of targeted policies and enforcement mechanisms within the fishing communities had created an environment where women were vulnerable to sexual exploitation and left without recourse when faced with unwanted pregnancies or abuse.

A 2025 research brief by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine documented similar patterns across Malawi's transactional sex as an economic survival strategy.

A separate analysis supported by the International Union for Conservation of Nature warned that HIV prevalence in fishing communities across East and Southern Africa ranges from four to 14 times higher than the national averages, with mobility and gender- imbalanced trade systems driving the risk.

Deputy Executive Secretary for MHRC, Winston Mwafulirwa said the commission engaged in capacity building for Beach village committees on the Human Rights and Gender Equality Acts to help deter human rights violations in the district.

Program Manager for Equity Champions, Felisters Rano said through the organization's training's, women are now experts in entrepreneurship, price negotiation and marketing skills.

This shift is also evident at Bondo fishing dock, where another woman, Lonely Kanjere reflected on her past. Lonely, in her early thirties, revealed that she once relied entirely on sex for fish transactions just to survive.

"I have a four year old boy but I cannot even recognise his father. He came from Nkhatabay as a fisherman at Bondo fishing dock but left before I even realised it. The situation forced me to join cooperatives run by my fellow women", recalled Lonely.

A local male fisher from Nkhotakota, speaking on

condition of anonymity admitted that the shifts unsettles some middle fishermen because most of them make business through working as agents between boat owners and women who seek to buy fish.

On the role of traditional leaders to end the vice, Senior Chief Mphonde whose jurisdiction spans seven fishing beaches said he has helped to institutionalize strong by-laws in Beach Village Committees as anyone caught in such malpractice risks being banned from landing sites.

"Our by-laws are clear. The women brought this demand for credibility and I support it. Everyone must follow proper trade standards and before operating in any of our fishing docks, fishermen are already enlightened and warned on the vice," he said.

The organization's interventions and by-laws engagement are proving that across Nkhotakota's fishing beaches from Vinthenga to Bondo, women are moving with a shared purpose.

## Experts raise concerns over agency relocations

By Augustine Muwotcha

When the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) transferred its head offices from Blantyre to the capital, Lilongwe in 2023, followed by the Malawi Prison Service from Zomba in 2024, and later the Malawi Housing Corporation (MHC) and Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) from Blantyre—the moves were part of a decentralisation agenda under former President Lazarus Chakwera.

The objective was to strengthen coordination among state agencies by bringing them closer to the administrative capital.

However, earlier this week, President Peter Mutharika issued an executive order reversing those relocations—directing that the institutions return to their original bases in the Southern Region.

In justifying his decision, Mutharika said the move aimed to “strategically realign and relocate certain government institutions to promote effective governance, balanced regional development, and improved service delivery across the country.”

He further instructed that the relocation process be completed within three months.

The directive has sparked debate among experts, with some welcoming it as an opportunity to stimulate regional growth, while others warn that it could impose significant governance, logistical, financial, and administrative burdens on the government and employees.

### POLICY AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

In an interview, Dr. Tiyesere Mercy Chikapa, Senior Lecturer in Public Administration and Human Resource Management at the University of Malawi (UNIMA), said the move presents several service and logistical challenges.

“The decision has both advantages and disad-

vantages,” said Dr. Chikapa. “However, from a policy and cost perspective, the disadvantages outweigh the benefits.”

She explained that most government ministries, policy-making institutions, and major development partners are headquartered in Lilongwe, making it more cost-effective and administratively efficient for public institutions to operate from the capital.

“When institutions are located in Lilongwe, they minimize travel costs and maintain stronger working relationships with other organizations and policymakers,” she noted. “Relocating them weakens these institutional linkages and increases logistical expenses associated with meetings and consultations.”

Dr. Chikapa added that the move could reverse strategic decisions that were made to improve institutional performance.

“For instance, MEC’s relocation to Lilongwe was based on its strategic plan for administrative efficiency. Reversing that decision contradicts the rationale that guided its earlier move,” she said.

She further warned that such decisions can easily be interpreted through a political lens, potentially fuelling perceptions of regional favouritism.

“When such decisions are interpreted politically, they can create unnecessary regional divisions,” she cautioned.

### ‘IT AFFECTS WOMEN MORE THAN MEN’

Dr. Chikapa highlighted that the relocation will likely have unequal effects on women and men employees, reflecting broader gender dynamics in Malawi’s labour market.

“In cities like Zomba and Blantyre, there are limited job opportunities,” she explained. “Many women working in these institutions are in

Lilongwe because their spouses work there. Relocating these offices forces them to choose between their jobs and their families.”

She said the situation could lead to an increase in commuter marriages—where couples live apart due to employment demands—or households maintaining two homes, one in Lilongwe and another in the relocated city.

“At the end of the day, this affects women more than men,” Dr. Chikapa said. “Women are often expected to follow their spouses, and relocation decisions like these can disrupt their careers and family stability.”

Dr. Chikapa recommended that government adopt a gender-responsive approach in implementing administrative reforms and relocation decisions.

“Before relocating any institution, there should be a gender impact assessment to identify potential effects on women and men,” she advised.

She also called on government to provide adequate disturbance allowances to all employees who will be affected by the move.

Dr. Bernadetta Malunga, a law lecturer at the University of Malawi, said the executive order does not appear to violate any law, provided the decision was made in consultation with relevant authorities.

“I don’t know of any law at the moment that would make the actions of the President illegal,” she said.

Dr. Malunga explained that the relocations have both economic and administrative implications.

“For instance, when institutions such as MACRA, MHC, and MEC were moved to Lilongwe, they had to rent new offices, thereby incurring additional expenses,” she observed. “So, depending on where one sits, you may justify or question the decision based on cost, convenience, or regional balance.”

From an economic perspective, Economics Association of Malawi (ECAMA) president Ber-

tha Bangara-Chikadza acknowledged both the challenges and potential benefits of the relocation.

In an interview, Chikadza said that while the move may initially strain government resources due to relocation costs, it could, in the long term, help reduce expenditure on office rentals in Lilongwe.

“Despite the financial burden, it will also help government to save rental costs for institutions such as MEC, MACRA, and MHC,” she said.

## Thirty Years After Beijing: Why Digital Spaces Remain Unsafe for Malawi's Women and Girls

By Ivy Mwanyongo

Nearly thirty years after the Beijing Declaration on gender equality, Malawi is facing a new wave of abuse against women and girls not on the streets or in workplaces, but online. As social media becomes deeply woven into daily life, women and girls are increasingly exposed to cyber bullying, body shaming, sexist insults and targeted harassment.

Interviews with a woman who once worked in the media industry and Jessica Mponda, the current Miss Malawi, reveal a troubling rise in digital violence that threatens the progress Malawi has made on women's rights.

For the former media worker, the harassment began after she posted a picture and a short narration on Facebook detailing the alleged sexual harassment she faced while working at a local media institution.

Minutes after posting, her story spread across several pages and the comments turned vicious. Strangers mocked her appearance, dismissed her claims, accused her of wanting to wreck her former boss's marriage, and said her dressing attracted the abuse.

She says the backlash was overwhelming. "People talked about my dressing, but they did not know that the experience I went through left me depressed. For almost a year, I had no motivation to work," she said.

She added that attempts to seek help internally did not yield results. "I tried for six months. I was only referred from one person to another, and the system started pushing back. At some point, I was called for warning meetings and denied some duties."

Although she is outspoken, she says her husband encouraged her not to respond to the online attacks. "At least I had someone by my side. But many girls out there are broken because of bullying," she said.

Despite the experience, she remains active online and uses her platform for charitable work, including mobilizing food donations through her page.

She explained that her intention was never to embarrass anyone. "Had it been that I wanted to go to court, I could have done so because I have evidence, "but it would break a lot of people and I didn't want that. All what I am hoping for is for the institution I once worked for, reflects on its systems because there are many women still working there", She added.

Efforts to obtain a right of reply from the institution were made through the office of the Managing Director, but no response or acknowledgement was received by the time of publishing this story.

Even public figures are not spared. Jessica Mponda, crowned Miss Malawi in 2022, shared her own experience of online hostility. She says she received mixed reactions, including people discrediting her win.

"Being a competition, I expected reactions because people had their favourite contestants," she said. Ironically, she only learned about the online attacks weeks later because her phone had been stolen during her crowning night.

Jessica believes digital bullying has forced many women and girls to shrink themselves in spaces where they should be vibrant. "Women and girls have been silenced. Everything they do, say or wear is judged by people who don't even know them. Digital bullying has made many girls think less of themselves, and that's a shame," she said.

She argues that the real issue is society's mentality. "Policies are there, but do perpetrators face the law? The efforts by authorities will never be enough if the mentality doesn't change," she said.

Digital violence is now one of the fastest-growing forms of gender-based violence in Malawi. Women face body shaming, sexualized insults, threats, defamation and online stalking.

A recent example involves journalist Cathy Maulidi, who was working with the Times group now

serving as Press Secretary at State House, who was targeted by online falsehoods after writing an article about the state of Kamuzu Palace while working with the Times group.

Social media users circulated claims that she was paid by a political party to tarnish the image of the former ruling administration.

The Association for Women in Media (AWOME) acknowledges the rising cases. Chairperson Dorothy Kachitsa says female journalists increasingly face harassment, misinformation, stalking and coordinated attacks online. She said the association has handled two cases of online harassment this year alone.

"We worked hand in hand with the Media Council of Malawi and MISA Malawi and engaged the victims, but we wish we had successfully prosecuted the perpetrators. Tracking them has been a big challenge," she said.

Kachitsa said AWOME condemns all forms of digital abuse against women and calls for collective action. "We reaffirm our commitment to empowering women in the media, promoting digital safety awareness and advocating for stronger systems and policies that safeguard women's voices both online and offline," she added.

Although the Electronic Transactions and Cybersecurity Act criminalizes cyber harassment and stalking, few women pursue legal action. According to the Women Lawyers Association, fear of stigma, delays in the justice system and limited awareness prevent many victims from reporting.

Its president, Golda Rapozo, said more awareness is needed. "Even a single reported case goes a long way in ending gender-based violence. But the gap between the law and real protection remains wide," she said.

Government acknowledges the seriousness of the issue. Minister of Gender Mary Navitcha says digital violence is increasingly becoming a threat to women's rights.

She said government is conducting awareness campaigns, training law enforcement officers and partnering with civil society groups to support survivors.

"We cannot talk about gender equality if women do not feel safe online," she said. She added that more collaboration is needed, especially with MACRA, to help trace perpetrators and ensure stiffer punishment.

MACRA, as the communications regulator, is mandated to promote safe digital use, monitor harmful content and enforce standards. However, critics argue enforcement remains weak.

MACRA spokesperson Limbani Nsapato says the institution continues raising awareness about Malawi's cyber laws and works closely with the Malawi Police Cybercrime Unit, which handles harassment cases.

National Police Spokesperson Lael Chimtembo requested more time to provide statistics on cases successfully prosecuted but he had not yet responded by the time of publication.

However, speaking during the official launch of the 16th days against Gender Based Violence campaign (GBV) in Balaka district, Minister of Gender, Mary Navitcha indicated that 73 percent of women face various digital forms of violence and one of three children also face various forms of cyber bullying hence the need to join efforts to eliminate the malpractice.

As Malawi marks the 16 Days of Activism, experiences shared by women like the former media worker and Jessica Mponda highlight the urgent need for coordinated action.

Protecting women online requires stronger enforcement of cyber laws, accessible reporting mechanisms, digital literacy, and collaboration among government, MACRA, civil society and the media. Digital spaces should empower -not endanger - women and girls.

Three decades after the Beijing Declaration, Malawi's fight for gender equality has entered a new frontier. The threats may be digital, but the harm is real. As more women speak out, the message is clear: the country must act now to make the internet a safer space for every woman and girl.

# Womens votes decide Malawi's 2025 election outcomes but not women's power

By Catherine Tinto

In a turn of events, women voters emerged as the central force in Malawi's 2025 general elections, influencing both the presidential and parliamentary outcomes.

According to preliminary data published by the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), women's participation in the 2025 elections was exceptionally high.

With 57.2% of the 7.2 million registered voters being women, their collective voice proved pivotal in shaping the nation's political landscape.

However, this show of civic engagement did not translate into an equal share of leadership positions for women.

MEC further indicates that the 2025 elections saw a remarkable turnout, with 76.39% of registered voters casting their ballots. Women, constituting the majority of the electorate, demonstrated an unprecedented level of participation and enthusiasm.

For first-time and middle-aged voters, the motivation to participate stemmed from a desire to influence change in a country grappling with persistent economic and social challenges.

First time voter Sangwani Nyirenda, a 26-year-old teacher from Phalomba District, said she decided to vote because of the struggles the country was and continues to face, hoping the new administration would bring positive change.

"Looking at challenges that the country was facing, I thought it was a very good idea to be part of the people that make a change by voting—making a better decision for our country," she said.

She, however, expressed concern that women's issues were not adequately prioritized.

"I don't think that women concerns were taken into consideration very much. But I'm impressed that some women were considered for running mate positions. There is still some hope that our leaders will consider women's issues."

Middle-aged voter, Jane Mungomo hoped that the situation in the country would improve if she participated in the election through the ballot.

"If things improve, our lives make change. But I noted that on the polling day also noted that women with young children were not given the opportunity to vote early. Following the change of government, we expect to buy things at a better price compared to before," she said.

However, this strong voter presence did not translate into proportional representation in elected positions.

MEC spokesperson, Sangwani Mwafurirwa confirmed that women played a proactive role in the electoral process but made up a small percentage of candidates who contested for various positions.

"The number of women contesting as candidates, if you compare it with men, they form a very small percentage of candidates. Most of the candidates that excel or voted to office, majority are men if you compare to women which is converse of what we see of women as registered voters," he said.

With 48 women elected in the September 2025 elections up from 40 in 2019 Malawi is making steady progress toward a more inclusive democracy.

However, the gap between women's participation as voters and their representation in leadership remains a pressing concern.

Mwafurirwa explained that several factors contributed to this imbalance.

"It could be the structural or cultural systems. Women's engagement has been unprecedented, particularly in rural areas where civic education campaigns encouraged registration and voting" he said.

Political parties have acknowledged the growing influence of women voters and are responding by increasing outreach programs and pledging to include more women in leadership roles.

Director of Women at the ruling Democratic Progress

sive Party (DPP), Mary Navitcha, said the number of women who expressed interest in contesting the 2025 elections was higher than in previous years.

However, many faced financial and logistical barriers.

"To organize just a rally requires a lot of money, and this has caused a good number of women to withdraw midway," she said.

She added: "we are going to campaign for women we are going to lobby for more women in parliament and other departments" Navitcha said.

Navitcha further pledged to advocate for women so that they can be considered in top positions.

"We are going to influence our leaders to consider women in some positions as we always believe in women empowerment. This has been demonstrated through the appointment of women legislators as chief whip and deputy," she said.

Gender equality advocates emphasize that Malawi's progress depends not only on voter turnout but also on policy reforms that ensure women's inclusion in governance.

Chairperson for the NGO Gender Coordination Network, Maggie Kathewera Banda, said adherence to the Gender Equality Act is essential, especially when making public appointments such as cabinet positions.

"So it says that for any public appointments, there should not be more than 60% and not less than 40% of high-end sex. Banda says by doing so, many

women will also find their way to higher positions despite not making it as MP's.

"The cabinet is has to follow the gender equality act because it's a law, and therefore it has to be implemented because most of the time people will say, oh no, why is it that women are demanding this? So when it's a law, then that law has to be implemented. So that's what we are looking for," she said.

The 2025 elections highlighted both the power and responsibility of Malawi's female electorate.

While women's numbers were decisive in shaping the polls, experts insist that sustained efforts are needed to ensure their voices influence governance, policies, and leadership beyond Election Day.

It is therefore crucial that authorities empower women so that the number of female voters translates into the number of women voted into power.

This way, Malawi will continue moving closer to achieving the 50:50 Campaign, a national goal conceived in 2004 but yet to be realized.

The 50:50 Campaign in Malawi has not yet achieved equal representation of women in political leadership, and progress has been inconsistent over the years.

While the campaign has increased awareness and led to some gains, particularly with the election of the country's first female vice president and president, these advances were followed by significant backslides.



## Against all odds; Women with disabilities dare to redefine political participation

By Eric Msikiti

For 34-year-old Mphamvu Miracle Kalima, it was about overcoming the limits she felt society had placed on her.

Mphamvu is a fighter.

She has always fought for inclusion and recognition in a society which does little, or nothing at all, to promote and respect women as key decision makers.

Apart from being a woman, Mphamvu has, over the years, faced constant challenges due to her short stature.

“Growing up, I faced challenges, from primary to secondary school, as I could not be in the company of peers without facing any form of ridicule such as being called a child and Kafula, for example,” Mphamvu narrates.

However, Mphamvu fought against such ridicule to sit the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) examinations and pursue a course in Administrative Studies.

Indeed, she was among women with disabilities who dared to run for public office in the general elections on September 16, 2025.

As a candidate for Nyamadzere Ward in Nsanje District in the Local Government Election, Mphamvu says she fought to claim her rightful place in society and encourages others to do the same.

Her fighting spirit already earned her a place in communities under Traditional Authority Malemia in the district.

Mphamvu has served in various roles, including those of Nsanje District Youth Network vice chairperson and the Area’s Development Committee (ADC) chairperson.

She also served in a local non-governmental



ple with Disability.

“I have always wanted to actively fight and amplify the voices of the youth, people with disabilities and the elderly in my community,” she says.

It is this passion that inspired her run for public office.

She plans to raise more awareness and encourage the participation of marginalised groups in society.

“It was in 2022 when I decided that I was ready to run as ward councillor in the general elections after undergoing training that non-governmental organisations were organising in the area,” Mphamvu says.

But the new terrain provided yet other new challenges.

“Lack of resources and ridicule on the political front have been some of the challenges, I have had people calling me names just because I was not able to give them handouts,” she says.

She, however, says support from various stake-

holders, including her male counterparts, proved useful during campaign.

Apart from that, it was her resolve to take part and be counted that kept her going in a sector dominated by men.

“For me, quitting was never an option because I felt that doing that would have discouraged many women and people with disabilities from running for public office because I know that having a disability is not a crime and is not supposed to limit my dreams,” she says.

Like Mphamvu, Emelia Chapaheya, who run for the Mulanje South West Constituency parliamentary seat, believes disability is not inability.

“Being a person with a disability does not necessarily mean I cannot do anything because I have discovered that those who are considered able and have been representing people have not done well in bringing development in their areas,” Chapaheya says.

Chapaheya says she has managed to weather various storms such as being denied access to hold rallies in other areas and receiving threats from opponents to the extent that a vehicle she used to hire for campaign was torched.

“But some chiefs supported my courage and provided spaces for me to hold rallies and, through support from other people, I managed to get another vehicle,” she says.

In Blantyre, Elipher Mvula prepared for myriad rallies in her Bangwe Namiyango Ward.

But lack of finances and difficulties in mobility are some of the setbacks she faced.

“I got motivated to join politics in 2006 after a meeting with several organisations that were encouraging women with disabilities to join and actively participate in politics, which everyone was describing as a dirty game at the time,” Mvula says.

Mvula says the journey has not been smooth.

She, however, says she took strength from her goal to make positive contributions to society.

“Most candidates and the electorate are used to giving or receiving handouts, which makes it difficult for visionary people to embrace politics with ideas only.

“Despite all that and the limited support, I managed to push so that I could provide an alternative choice to the people,” Mvula says.

Ezekiel Kumwenda, who run for the Mzimba Hora parliamentary seat, also faced challenges in as far as participation in politics is concerned.

A visually impaired person, Kumwenda says access to infrastructure and materials were some of the challenges people with disabilities faced in their pursuit for political office.

“There were instances when, at first, people could dismiss us just because of our disabilities but, eventually, as we continued sharing ideas, progress was being made,” Kumwenda says.

According to Kumwenda, working together with other candidates assisted people with disabilities to reach out to more people in their areas.

Mphamvu Kalima, Elipher Mvula and Ezekiel Kumwenda are among the 78 candidates with disabilities who were approved by the Malawi Electoral Commission to contest either as members of Parliament (MPs) or ward councillors.

At least 18 people with disabilities run for office either as MPs (15 males and three females) or



## Justice rewritten

By Kelvin Tembo

For decades, the cultural norms in the area of Group Village Headman (GVH) Chelechele under Traditional Authority (TA) Mwenewenya in Chitipa District upheld a strict belief, one that said women should not lead, particularly in local judicial structures like village tribunals. Leadership and justice were the area for men; and women, no matter how aggrieved, stood at the mercy of male-dominated panels that lacked impartiality.

But within the area, a revolution is now taking place, not with banners or protests, but through bold voices, balanced judgment, and a quiet courage to challenge centuries-old norms. At the heart of this shift is the inclusion of women in village tribunals, an idea once unthinkable, now proving transformational.

And leading this transformation is GVH Chelechele, a traditional leader who once believed that women have no place in the administration of justice.

“I did not believe in women holding leadership positions,” GVH Chelechele admits. “I heard about involving women in tribunals in 2013, but our culture said no, so, I did not dare to go against it.”

Nevertheless, that long-held conviction began to change ten years later in 2023, when Smallholder Producers Development and Transporters Association (SPRODETA) delivered a series of transformative trainings in his area.

These sessions focused on gender equality, access to justice, and inclusive governance. Through the meetings, traditional leaders were encouraged to rethink exclusionary practices, and after the training, something clicked for GVH Chelechele.

Inspired by the new knowledge, GVH Chelechele did what few chiefs in the region have ever done. He restructured his village tribunal from a male-only panel into a gender-balanced committee. Five women were selected to sit alongside men in the tribunal. This was a quiet yet radical act, one that brought fairness and diversity into the community’s judicial system.

“I came to the realization that justice was not being

served fairly. When women came to report cases, especially violence, they were often not believed. So, I realized that we needed balance and empathy, and women bring that,” he says.

The change did not stop there. GVH Chelechele issued a directive that every committee within his area must alternate leadership positions between men and women. This policy marked a new dawn, sending a strong message that governance, fairness, and justice was no longer reserved for men only.

Among those who rose through this change is 34-year-old Monica Kafunda, who never imagined herself sitting in judgment beside men.

“At first, I could not even speak. I was shy, afraid that men would not take me seriously. But after going through the training, I embraced the challenge. Now, I sit on the tribunal, I am trusted, I feel empowered, and would like to see other women doing the same,” Kafunda says.

“Together with my fellow women, we are not just filling seats. We are changing how justice works and we are showing our daughters that their voices matter too,” Kafunda adds.

Lonely Mbale, a community member who has witnessed this change firsthand says the difference is striking. Mbale says unlike in the past where women struggled to get fair treatment, things are now different.

“Women are no longer afraid to report cases, even GBV survivors feel heard. Justice is finally becoming gender-blind as what used to be a biased system, where men usually protected their own has changed. Women feel protected and we speak freely without fear,” Mbale says.

The tribunal has also influenced how cases of GBV are handled. Survivors now approach the village panels without hesitation, knowing they will be heard and treated fairly. GVH Chelechele himself has noticed the change.

“Now that women are on the bench, evidence is easier to gather because survivors feel safe to speak up. Men are becoming more cautious and respectful;



Government Elections (51 males and nine females).

According to information provided by the Malawi Council for Disability Affairs (Macoda), of the 78 candidates with disabilities, 34 contested as independent candidates.

Political exclusion at political party level has been cited by many of the independent candidates as the main reason of their candidature status, says Harriet Kachimanga, communications specialist at Macoda.

“We have been facilitating the creation of a conducive environment that ensures that persons with disabilities thrive in the electoral and political spheres. This included engaging the Malawi Electoral Commission and other stakeholders to ensure that the elections were inclusive.

“We have also been conducting community engagements and campaigns highlighting this right to participate in politics and public life so that persons with disabilities themselves are encouraged to participate and that other citizens as well as political parties have a positive attitude towards candidates with disabilities,” Kachimanga points out.

She goes on to say that Macoda closely worked with other organisations to ensure that existing programmes aimed at supporting persons with

disabilities in the electoral and political processes are effective.

The Disability Act of 2024 provides for deliberate policies and measures to guarantee the participation in political and public life of persons with disabilities.

“The government shall, through deliberate policies, create a conducive environment for persons with disabilities to effectively and fully exercise their political rights, directly or through their freely chosen representatives,” the Act reads.

On the other hand, the Gender Equality Act encourages equal participation of women in decision-making processes.

But despite this, women continue to lag behind when it comes to participation in political spaces.

In 2022, the Malawi Electoral Support Project was established as part of efforts to assist key national authorities and development partners to perform core functions for inclusive participation and representation.

Key priority areas include encouraging participation and representation of women, youth, the elderly, people with disabilities and people with albinism in the electoral processes.

Despite all such efforts, Elipher, Mphamvu, Emeilia and Ezekiel have not done well in the election, but their audacity to participate against all odds will go along way in encouraging marginalised groups of society— notably women, the youth, people with disabilities and people with albinism—to come out of their shell, participate and be counted in public life.

you can see the change in behavior. This has helped to reduce GBV cases in the area,” he says.

Evidence from the wider district supports his observation. Chitipa Police Station Spokesperson Gladwell Simwaka confirms that GBV cases have been steadily declining as a result of both community-level and institutional interventions.

“Generally, cases have dropped at the district level. This is due to several interventions we have employed including those from our stakeholders such as what is happening under GVH Chelechele,” Simwaka says.

He adds; “Minor disputes are now resolved within communities under what is known as primary justice. I cannot give exact figure of the decline because normally, when issues are handled at village level, they are recorded there and are rarely escalated to the police. What we know is that there has been a reduction of GBV and general cases in most area due to these interventions.”

This decline in reported violence has become one of the clearest signs of cultural and behavioral transformation. Communities that once silenced women are now giving them authority to shape justice and that inclusion is reshaping mindsets.

SPRODETA’s Monitoring and Evaluation Officer Austin Moyo, believes this change is proof that inclusive justice improves fairness and community trust.

“In most areas in the northern region, decision-making has always been done by men. Including women in village tribunals gives them leverage to contribute to meaningful decisions. Before, it was difficult for women to access justice because all the decision-makers were men, and bias was inevitable. Now, with women present, justice is more balanced,” Moyo says.

However, the change has not been without resistance. According to Moyo, in the first place it was difficult for men and the community to accept the idea but through continuous engagements with the community, perceptions have changed.

“People are now able to understand the importance of including women in these village tribunals such that the reception is now good,” Moyo says.

**Legal experts agree that such community-level reforms are aligned with Malawi’s legal frame-**

**work and gender equality commitments. Christon Ghambi, a legal practitioner says including women in customary justice systems help bridge the gap between traditional authority and constitutional justice.**

“When decisions are made without women’s involvement, they tend to be one-sided and sometimes unjust. Including women ensures that their unique experiences and interests are considered. This promotes fairness and empathy in judgments,” Ghambi says.

“What GVH Chelechele is doing is a practical reflection of what the law envisions, justice that is inclusive, participatory, and representative. It also helps communities align customary practices with national gender policies,” he says.

For gender activist Jennifer Mkandawire, the progress in Chelechele is an example of what true equality looks like at the grassroots.

“This development shows that even at community level, people are beginning to understand the important role of women. When women are part of tribunals, decisions are fairer and more just. It also inspires more women and girls to take up leadership positions,” Mkandawire says.

She adds; “This is a very positive development and I wish districts like Mzimba, Rumphu and others could emulate this so that we take the women’s role in leadership positions at that level.”

Malawi’s national gender policy promotes women’s inclusion in decision-making and the elimination of cultural practices that hinder their participation. The policy aligns with constitutional guarantees of equality and the Gender Equality Act, which calls for temporary special measures, such as quotas and affirmative action, to increase women’s representation in governance and justice systems.

In GVH Chelechele’s area, these laws and policies have found a living proof of their power. Justice, once the domain of men, has been rewritten by inclusion. Cases that once silenced women now empower them and decisions once shaped by bias are now informed by empathy and fairness.

“I used to think culture was unchangeable but now I see that culture can grow. When women lead, justice grows stronger,” GVH Chelechele says.

# MOZAMBIQUE

## Protecção e defesa do direito da criança longe das expectativas

Por Helena Mudança

**No cruzamento entre as Avenidas 24 de Julho e Tomás Nduda, na capital do país, está um adolescente de sexo masculino, sentado ao lado dos semáforos, com panos enrolados nas pernas, com uma camisa sem mangas, que estende insistentemente as mãos por quem passa por perto. “Tia, estou a pedir”, clama. Muitos desviam o olhar, mas outros têm compaixão e atiram uma moeda. Para o adolescente, a rua não é local de trânsito, é a sua casa e fonte de sobrevivência.**

Chama-se Cristêncio Zeca, tem 11 anos, fugiu da casa onde vivia com o pai e madrastra, no distrito da Manhiça, província de Maputo, alegando maus-tratos por parte do casal. Zeca é órfão de mãe e conta que o seu sofrimento começou, justamente, quando o seu pai decidiu casar se novamente.

“Me batiam muito, por tudo e por nada, por vezes não me davam comida. Não havia dia que não me batiam e por isso decidi fugir de casa para Maputo”, revela.

Zeca não se recorda do ano em que abandonou a casa do pai, mas sabe dizer que nessa altura frequentava a terceira classe, o que sugere que tinha 8 anos. Disse viver, relativamente, melhor nas ruas da cidade de Maputo, porque já não sofre os mesmos castigos que sofria antes. “Aqui não sou castigado, e nem levo porrada todos dias. Na minha casa me batiam bem”, conta.

Acrescentou que na rua fez novas amizades, que, aliás, são sua nova família, com quem partilha o pão, que nem sempre é fácil obtê-lo, mas mesmo assim resiste em regressar a casa por conta da violência sofrida.

O caso de Zeca é um exemplo de milhares de crianças espalhadas pelo país que trocaram o lar familiar pelas ruas. No passado dia 20 de Novembro, o mundo celebrou o dia internacional

dos direitos da criança, que resultou da adopção da declaração dos direitos da criança e da convenção sobre os direitos da criança.

Aqueles instrumentos determinam a necessidade de garantir os direitos das crianças, tais como o direito à protecção, educação, dignidade e afecto. A realidade de Moçambique demonstra centenas de crianças que continuam a pedir esmola, no trabalho infantil expostas a todo tipo de violência, exploração e abandono. Especialistas e instituições que trabalham em defesa dos direitos das crianças classificam este tipo de fenómenos como violência directa e estrutural contra a criança.

Residente no bairro KaMaxaquene, Cristina tem dois irmãos mais novos, sendo que a sobrevivência da família depende dos pedidos de esmola nas ruas da capital do país, que nem sempre aparece.

“Dependemos dos pedidos diários de dinheiros para ter o que comer, há dias que não conseguimos nada e dormimos sem comer”, lamenta com lágrimas nos olhos.

### NEGLIGÊNCIA INSTITUCIONALIZADA

A directora-executiva do Fórum da Sociedade Civil para os Direitos da Criança (ROSC), Salomé Mimbir, descreve a situação como profundamente preocupante, e afirma que o que vê nas ruas de Maputo não é apenas pobreza.

“A mendicância infantil é uma violação grave dos direitos das crianças, e ela vai representar depois uma escalada de violências, de exploração de crianças. A mendicância é negligência institucionalizada”, explica.

Para Mimbir, a mendicância tem raízes na pobreza multidimensional, fragilidade dos laços familiares, desemprego, e falhas ou ausência de políticas de prevenção e uma protecção social incapaz de responder à escala do problema.

“São várias as causas que alimentam a mendi-

cidade, a pobreza multidimensional, a falta de programas de protecção social, que depois associam a questões de orfandade, famílias desestruturadas, fraqueza de programas alternativos, não só aqueles que são regidos pelo Estado”, revela Mimbir.

A directora-executiva do ROSC reconhece que, numa situação ideal, nenhuma criança deveria estar na rua, mas afirma que a realidade moçambicana está longe desse cenário. Disse que os programas do Estado de protecção social básica são insuficientes e precários para responder às necessidades das crianças em maior vulnerabilidade.

“Numa condição ideal em que o Estado estivesse a funcionar na sua plenitude para a protecção da criança, não teríamos tantas ou teríamos nenhuma criança na rua. Mas essa não é a nossa situação”, referiu.

Segundo Mimbir, esse fenómeno afecta todo o país, e as capitais provinciais acabam sendo a fotografia de muitas crianças em condição de vulnerabilidade, sublinhando a necessidade de uma maior intervenção.

“Não diria que nada está sendo feito, mas acho que é necessário que se multipliquem os esforços para poder atender às necessidades concretas destas crianças em condição de vulnerabilidade que lhes empura para a mendicância.

O Estado tem programas de protecção social básica, são precários, mas existem”, afirma Mimbir.

### POLÍTICAS FALHADAS

O sociólogo Abílio Langa reforça que a mendicância infantil é resultado previsível de desigualdades estruturais. “As crianças são empurradas a esta questão de viverem ao relento, por não terem qualquer tipo de apoio ou de amparo, seja na perspectiva das instituições, seja familiar. Uma criança na rua não é um acaso. É o produto de políticas que falharam, de famílias esgotadas, e de um Estado que tem respostas fragmentadas e insuficientes”, explica.

Langa sublinha que muitas vezes a rua é para as crianças uma escola brutal, pois muito cedo a criança aprende a desconfiar, a negociar violên-

cia, a construir identidade longe de qualquer protecção, por falta daquele amparo necessário, tanto da família, da sociedade em geral e por parte das políticas públicas.

“É uma criança que estará em situação completa de vulnerabilidade, ou até por um lado, tornar-se vilã, tudo porque não há acompanhamento, não há políticas públicas que visam a erradicação deste mal”, disse.

Para o sociólogo, ignorar aquelas crianças é acarretar custos sociais ao país, é preparar um futuro de exclusão, delinquência juvenil, consumo de drogas e perda de capital humano. Fez notar que este pode ser um problema inter-geracional.

“A criança que mendiga hoje, é o adulto que amanhã o sistema chamará de delincente. Quando estamos perante o menino, muitas vezes está associada a questão de consumo exacerbado de drogas. É um indivíduo que estará relacionado a várias questões, até de delinquência juvenil”, explica.

Deste modo, defende que um dos passos mais eficazes para reduzir a mendicância infantil é deixar de dar dinheiro às crianças na rua, prática que acaba por alimentar o ciclo da dependência.

“As instituições governamentais e não-governamentais, que têm como propósito macro esta questão da assistência psicossocial têm tido algum impacto. É claro que há muito poucas crianças abrangidas por este sistema estabelecido, devido à falta de políticas públicas que visam a erradicação deste mal. Infelizmente, este mal não temos como, de forma alguma, erradicar por completo, mas nós podemos ir mitigando aos poucos, começando por desencorajar a oferta de dinheiro e reforçar programas de reinserção familiar e comunitária”, explicou Langa.

### PROTECÇÃO INSUFICIENTE

Por sua vez, a jurista Ornília Siteo, explica que a mendicância infantil em Moçambique constitui uma violação grave dos direitos fundamentais da criança, protegidos pela Constituição, pelas convenções internacionais ratificadas pelo país e por várias leis específicas, como a Lei de Protecção da Criança e a Lei da Organização Tutelar.

“O Código Penal em si, no seu artigo 268, pune as pessoas que incentivam a mendicidade, com pena de prisão de dois a oito anos, e multa correspondente”, exemplifica.

Segundo a jurista, embora a responsabilidade primária de protecção e cuidado pertença aos pais, o Estado tem obrigação legal de criar condições, instituições e mecanismos que garantam que essas famílias possam cumprir esse dever. Quando os pais falham, por negligência, abandono ou incitamento à mendicidade, e o superior interesse da criança é posto em causa, a Lei legítima a intervenção imediata do Estado, inclusive a retirada da criança do convívio familiar, para assegurar a sua protecção, bem-estar e desenvolvimento.

Segundo dados do Ministério do Trabalho, Género, Criança e Acção Social (MTGAS), referentes aos meses de Julho a Setembro de 2025, 501 crianças vivem actualmente nas ruas da capital do país, dos quais 339 são rapazes e o restante meninas. Daquele total, 56 estão envolvidas directamente na mendicidade como acompanhantes dos pais, número que, embora não exacto, revela a dimensão de um fenómeno persistente.

Segundo Célia Cossa, técnica do Departamento de Género, Criança e Acção Social do MTGAS, muitas daquelas crianças vêm de famílias desestruturadas, outras fogem de situações de violência doméstica ou procuram autonomia precoce.

“A mendicidade infantil é uma violação dos direitos da criança, uma prática que fere a dignidade e o bem-estar infantil, e continua a ser um problema persistente, porque a maioria destas crianças tem a rua como um lugar de sustento e, pior ainda, como residência, principalmente aqui no distrito de KaMpfumo. Há vários factores que contribuem para este aumento, como a pobreza, a falta de oportunidades, famílias desestruturadas e não só. Também temos aquele famoso ditado que na baixa da cidade tudo pode, na baixa quem vai, volta com pelo menos 100 meticais”, explica Cossa.

Reconheceu que as autoridades não têm conseguido acompanhar a dimensão real do fenómeno, embora existam equipas de monitoria, sensibili-

zação e encaminhamento.

“Temos crianças identificadas e acompanhadas, mas muitas voltam à rua porque as respostas ainda são insuficientes ou temporárias. Os nossos centros de acolhimento nem sempre têm capacidade para acolher todas que precisam”, admite.

A representante do MTGAS, Célia Cossa, explica que o governo tem equipas de resposta rápida que monitoram zonas críticas, onde surgem grupos de crianças envolvidas na mendicidade. Desde Maio, estas equipas, em coordenação com estudantes da UEM, realizam um mapeamento contínuo para identificar quantas crianças estão nesta situação e compreender as causas.

“Há um trabalho de mapeamento contínuo que estamos a fazer desde Maio em coordenação com alguns estudantes da UEM, um trabalho de assessoria, no sentido de sabermos quantas crianças estão nessa condição e quais são as motivações. E como resultado, 33 crianças aceitaram ir ao centro de acolhimento e estão lá até hoje, e 18 crianças estão no processo de reunificação familiar. Já foram reunificadas oito crianças, em Boane e Manhiça”, revela Cossa.

O objectivo final, assinala, é produzir um instrumento legal específico, como um decreto ou artigo, que responsabilize os pais e oriente as instituições e os profissionais sobre como agir e encaminhar casos de crianças em situação de mendicidade, complementando os vários instrumentos de protecção já existentes.

## SOBREVIVÊNCIA NAS RUAS

Julinho, adolescente de 12 anos, conta que perdeu os pais quando tinha seis anos, e de lá para cá, sua vida tomou outro rumo. “Depois disso comecei a viver com meus tios, mas acabei por sair de lá, porque tudo eu tinha que fazer sozinho, e sempre era culpado de fazer coisas erradas. Qualquer coisa que desaparecia lá, eu era culpado. Então me cansei disso, deixei a casa dos meus tios”, explica. Julinho conta que vivia no distrito de Moamba, em Maputo, e vive nas ruas há mais de dois anos, e revela, “tenho muitos amigos aqui na cidade, conheço quase todos. E para comer nós pedimos esmoladas”.

Gabriel Carlos, de 14 anos, revela ter fugido de casa devido à falta de condições mínimas de subsistência. “Fugi de casa porque lá eu passava fome. Ficamos dias sem ter o que comer. Meu pai e minha mãe não trabalham. E meu pai, se consegue fazer biscoitos, só bebia todos dias” lamenta.

Conta que quando tem fome, “eu e meus amigos pedimos esmoladas, as vezes nos dão comida”. Carlos admite sentir falta de casa, mas afirma que, diante das condições em que vive a família, considera as ruas uma opção menos difícil.

## CENTROS DE ACOLHIMENTO PARA CRIANÇAS

No Centro de Acolhimento Lhayiseka, onde chegam parte das crianças retiradas das ruas como referido pela representante do MTGAS, Célia Cossa, recebem anualmente cerca de 200 crianças, muitas encontradas durante as rondas matinais feitas pelas equipas do centro.

Segundo a educadora social do Lhayiseka, Tânia Marisa, o centro acolhe menores dos seis aos 16 anos, faixa etária em que a reintegração ainda é possível antes de a rua os capturar por completo.

“É possível reabilitar uma criança de 10 anos, por exemplo, de 11, 12, porque ela ainda não entrou muito na rua, mas quando a criança já é um adolescente de 16 anos, fica difícil, porque a rua tem muitos perigos. Tem drogas, tem álcool, tem sexo, então, é difícil tirar uma criança de 16 anos da rua, porque ela já está naquele ambiente e ela mesma acha que aquilo é melhor para ela”, explicou Marisa.

Segundo a educadora social, quando as crianças acolhidas chegam aos 16 anos, idade limite para permanência em regime aberto, como o do Lhayiseka, o centro procura sempre reintegrá-las junto das famílias. No entanto, quando a estrutura familiar é instável ou incapaz de garantir cuidados mínimos, são encaminhadas para centros fechados, adaptados por género, onde recebem apoio mais intensivo.

“Em situações em que a família não existe ou está totalmente desestruturada, não há alternativa senão transferi-las para centros fechados, como o que funciona na KaTembe ou instituições religiosas parceiras”, sublinhou a educadora.

Dentro do centro, a vida ganha contornos de normalidade: as crianças acordam cedo, cuidam da higiene, tomam o mata-bicho e seguem para a escola, sempre que têm documentação e condições para serem matriculadas. As que ainda não estão legalizadas frequentam aulas de alfabetização e reforço escolar no próprio centro, onde educadores acompanham cada caso individualmente. Brincadeiras, oficinas de artesanato e actividades criativas ocupam o resto do dia, numa tentativa de reconstruir rotinas que a rua tinha destruído.

Marisa diz que as mudanças são visíveis pouco tempo, após a chegada: o comportamento melhora, a higiene pessoal torna-se rotina, a alimentação regular devolve energia, e as crianças começam a desenvolver pequenas habilidades, desde fazer esteiras ou bonecos até tocar instrumentos ou aprender técnicas de artesanato.

“Tudo o que fazemos aqui é para criar um ambiente saudável e permitir que saiam daqui com alguma ferramenta para a vida”, explica.

Entre as crianças acolhidas este ano pelo centro, está Celso Afonso, que aos 16 anos carrega uma trajectória marcada por perdas, pobreza e uma luta diária pela sobrevivência. Natural de Quelimane, ficou órfão de pai ainda criança e viu a mãe adoecer, sem condições emocionais nem financeiras para o criar. Sem saber ler nem escrever, Afonso acabou por abandonar a escola na 6ª classe, empurrado por uma realidade que lhe retirou cedo demais o direito à infância.

Em Fevereiro do ano em curso, juntamente com dois amigos, usou o dinheiro que um deles encontrou para viajar de Quelimane a Maputo. Nas ruas da antiga FACIM, dormia exposto ao frio, aos mosquitos e à insegurança. Para comer, improvisava refeições com o pouco que conseguiam ou com a ajuda de desconhecidos.

Hoje, Afonso está acolhido no Centro Lhayiseka, onde reencontrou estabilidade e segurança. “A melhor vida é aqui”, reconhece. Entre actividades diárias e pequenas rotinas que antes não existiam, voltou a sentir-se protegido. E recuperou um sonho antigo: ser mecânico. Agora, prepara-se para regressar a Quelimane, num processo de reunificação familiar acompanhado de perto pela equipa do centro.

Miguel Arlindo José, de 15 anos, natural de Nampula, também acolhido pelo centro Lhayiseka no ano em curso, viveu grande parte da infância entre a rua e varandas de casas dos vizinhos, após a morte do pai, em 2017. A família, sem condições financeiras e sem apoio dos parentes, passou a sobreviver com a ajuda dos vizinhos. Aos 14 anos, José decidiu deixar Nampula. Para o efeito, dedicou-se ao trabalho de recolha e venda de latas de alumínio para juntar algum dinheiro. A viagem acabou por ser feita em etapas: parou em Quelimane, onde amigos o ajudaram a seguir até Maputo. Viveu nas ruas das três cidades, enfrentando fome, insegurança e o medo constante de raptos, comuns segundo relata. Hoje diz sentir-se melhor: tem abrigo, alimentação e higiene, participa em actividades, faz artesanato e toca batuque. Ainda sem sonhos definidos para o futuro, José expressa apenas alívio por, pela primeira vez em muito tempo, sentir-se cuidado.

## Mulheres na Beira destacam-se na gestão de valas de drenagem

Por VÂNIA ÓSCAR

### Contribuindo para melhoria do saneamento urbano

Mulheres que trabalham em várias áreas, desafiaram-se e destacam-se nas suas actividades na gestão das valas de drenagem e não só, com vista ao melhoramento do saneamento urbano na cidade da Beira, província de Sofala, como forma de dar o seu contributo para o bem-estar da urbe e dos cidadãos.

Porque de graça só se dá bom dia, Maria Joaquin, sabe que para se ter o pão na mesa é preciso colocar a mão na massa e trabalhar, aliás é o que ela faz, faça sol, faça chuva, empenhando-se diariamente juntamente de outras colegas de trabalho, garantir o seu sustento e dos seus.

Contou-nos que muitas vezes acorda antes mesmo do alarme soar, prepara-se e marcha antes do sol escaldante, controlando sempre o tempo, de modo que de forma atempada chegue ao seu posto de trabalho.

Victória Nhambane, é outra mulher com quem interagimos, funcionária do Serviço Autónomo do Saneamento da Beira (SASB), onde há sensivelmente cinco anos, dá tudo de si, para garantir a desobstrução das sargetas em vários cantos

da cidade, estas que por sua vez, captam as águas da chuva, direcionando-as para pontos de coleta.

Mantendo sempre a comunicação com o sistema central de controlo, situado nas proximidades da principal vala de drenagem, localizada no bairro dos palmeiras, Aida Amade, manuseio as comportas das valas de drenagem, tal como conhece a palma da sua mão.

Conta que as vezes, não tem sido fácil conciliar as suas tarefas laborais com a sua rotina de trabalho, mas da o seu jeito felizmente sempre pode contar com o apoio dos seus superiores hierárquicos, filhos e não só.

Quer de forma manual ou automatizada, Sara Simbe, contou que a capacitação que teve para o efeito, foi fundamental para o exercício pleno das suas actividades, com o sistema de gestão das águas pluviais e não só, essências na prevenção de inundações urbanas, e que o seu trabalho deixou de ser tabu para si e quiçá para os outros.

Segundo o chefe gabinete de comunicação no SASB, Henok Chicumbe, as equipas de trabalho são geralmente equitativas, respondendo muitas vezes às necessidade de cada situação em cada ponto e departamentos.



### COMENTÁRIO DA AUTORA

‘ I chose this story considering how little attention is given to the work women do in sanitation in general, and in the management of drainage ditches in particular. Through my work, I aimed to portray the effort they also undertake, as well as to value and give visibility to their activities, given that their contributions are rarely highlighted in this regard.’

## Mulher luta pelo sustento e prova que deficiência não é o fim da vida

Por Naercia Langa

**Apesar das limitações motoras, mulher em Maputo recusou-se a viver de esmolas nas ruas e decidiu montar um pequeno negócio informal para o seu auto-sustento, inspirando, desta forma, outras pessoas com deficiência a não desistirem e lutarem por aquilo que acreditam.**



De nome Ângela Felipe Sefane, nasceu a 12 de Agosto de 1976, na cidade de Maputo, capital moçambicana. Viveu uma infância normal até aos 14 anos, quando começaram a surgir os primeiros sinais de uma doença que, de forma lenta e irreversível, lhe tirou a mobilidade.

Com os olhos quase a lacrimejar, Ângela abriu as portas de sua casa para contar a sua história de mulher resiliente à reportagem do Diário de Moçambique, para inspirar outras mulheres na mesma condição que ela.

As lágrimas espreitam principalmente quando ela se lembra que não nasceu com a deficiência, mas sim apareceu já na sua fase de adolescência, num dia normal em que ela encontrava-se na

escola e começou a sentir seus dedos das mãos a dobrarem-se.

“Primeiro os dedos das mãos começaram a se dobrar, depois os pés. Quando andava, caía. Foi uma deficiência que evoluiu aos poucos e que se agravou com o tempo. Agora, com a idade, foi piorando e perdi totalmente a locomoção”, recorda.

Explicou que foi aos 21 anos, isto em 1997, que deixou definitivamente de conseguir andar sozinha e na altura os médicos falavam em deficiência poliomielítica, mas sem certezas sobre a sua origem e ao mesmo tempo diziam que não havia cura. “Recomendaram a fazer muitas caminhadas, alegadamente porque ajudaria, mas não resultou”, explica.

### DIFICULDADES E SUPERAÇÃO

Com a progressão da doença, a vida de Ângela tornou-se mais dura, pois para se locomover, passou a depender da ajuda de terceiros, neste caso, tem tido apoio de crianças que vivem com ela. Ela revela que precisa de colocar pão na mesa, não só para ela, como para estas crianças com as quais vive, daí que conta com a ajuda delas para se movimentar.

Concretamente, os petizes a ajudam-na quando ela precisa ir ao hospital, pois mesmo com os diagnósticos definitivos dos médicos sobre não haver cura da sua doença, continua a frequentar serviços de fisioterapia, para pelo menos manter os movimentos dos seus membros.

E porque para manter o seu negócio, que se trata de uma banca de venda de produtos alimentares e não só, às vezes precisa ir ao mercado “gwevar”, tem que ter ajuda para tal.

“As crianças com as quais vivo são emprestadas pelas mães que não têm condições e eu acolho as meninas em casa, e em troca ajudam-me a loco-

mover”, relata.

Sem filhos biológicos, embora já tenha tentado, mas não foi possível devido a sua condição, Ângela encontrou no pequeno negócio de venda de produtos o caminho para se autossustentar.

Conta que tudo começa quando ela conhece um jovem de boa fé, que vendo a sua situação e as dificuldades que apresenta para andar, decidiu oferecer-lhe três mil meticais para iniciar este negócio.

“Às sexta-feira, eu acorria a baixa da cidade de Maputo para receber os donativos que são oferecidos por pessoas de boa fé. Foi num dia igual que conheci um jovem que me aconselhou a organizar a minha vida. Ofereceu-me dinheiro para poder iniciar e daí comprei alguns produtos e comecei o meu negócio. Desde então, vendo para garantir o sustento”, conta, orgulhosa.

#### UM APELO À RESILIÊNCIA

Mesmo diante da dor e das limitações, Ângela recusa a ideia de desistir e ainda apela às outras pessoas na sua situação, para não se deixar levar, alegadamente porque não é o fim da vida, mas sim oportunidade para mostrar a sua resiliência.

“Quero dizer a todas as pessoas com deficiência que não é o fim da vida. É preciso ser firme, enfrentar as barreiras e seguir em frente. Eu batalho pela minha vida. Levanto-me, ando, compro produtos e vendo para colocar pão na mesa”, salientou.

Lamenta o facto de existirem algumas pessoas, no seio social e na sua vizinhança, algumas pessoas que olham para uma pessoa com deficiência com estigma e discriminação. Ela diz que tem passado por estes momentos, mas nem isso a abala porque a força dele vem de Deus.

Houve tempos que se preocupava com as falas e o apontar de dedos de certas pessoas, mas diz que foi superando e agora leva a vida normalmente, sem se interessar com o que falam e diz que para estas pessoas, não sabem o que o amanhã lhes espera.

“O amanhã é incerto, eu mesma nasci bem, a

andar, mas de um momento para outro perdi a locomoção. Então alguém pode me rir, pensando que está bem, quando se calhar pode ter a minha doença que com o tempo vai desenvolver. Não é o que desejo para ninguém, mas é preciso sermos amorosos uns com os outros”, desabafou.

Com vista a reforçar os mecanismos legais de promoção e protecção dos direitos da pessoa com deficiência, Moçambique aprovou, no ano passado, a Lei n.º 10/2024 de 7 de Junho, a qual tem por objeto, a protecção e o respeito dos direitos e liberdades fundamentais da pessoa com deficiência, com impedimento permanente de natureza física, mental e sensorial.

A Lei em alusão tem como objectivo promover e garantir o exercício pleno dos direitos da pessoa com deficiência, eliminação das barreiras, bem como a sua inclusão e participação, em igualdade com as demais pessoas em todas as esferas da sociedade.

Relativamente aos direitos, a Lei determina que a pessoa com deficiência tem direito a especial protecção da família, da sociedade e do Estado; e que o Estado garante à pessoa com deficiência, o pleno gozo dos direitos humanos e liberdades fundamentais, através da adopção de políticas, programas e medidas específicas, que permitem a sua participação e tomada de decisão sobre assuntos da sua vida e da sociedade, privilegiando o acesso à informação, saúde, educação, formação profissional e vocacional, considerando as necessidades específicas, emprego, e demais direitos.

Igualmente, sugere que a pessoa com deficiência goza de prioridade no atendimento na Administração Pública e nas instituições privadas prestadoras de serviços ao público; e de acordo com as especificidades da deficiência, a pessoa com deficiência, de natureza sensorial, mental e autismo deve ser atribuída cartão de identificação.

Quanto à implementação da lei, o Fórum das Associações Moçambicanas de Pessoas com Deficiência (FAMOD) diz sentir que ela não está sendo implementada na íntegra, alegadamente porque o instrumento ainda tem muitas lacunas.

Segundo Zeca Chauque, presidente do conselho de direcção do FAMOD, ainda faltam muitos pontos por clarificar na lei e é por essa razão que a organização está, junto do Governo, através do Ministério do Trabalho, Género e Acção Social a solicitar um regulamento desta lei para clarificação, atribuição de responsabilidades e também para condicionar um e outro ponto.

“Então, aqui nós estamos a lutar para criar condições para que o Governo crie condições para que haja um regulamento desta lei”, esclareceu.

Fez saber que tal regulamento ainda está em discussão nos diferentes ministérios, e que ainda não chegou ao Conselho de Ministros para a avaliação e posterior aprovação.

Sobre o diálogo político em curso no país, garantiu estar haver inclusão deste grupo, destacando que a Comissão Técnica do Diálogo Nacional Inclusivo (COTE) aproximou-se ao FAMOD e, com o apoio de parceiros, está em um processo para garantir a sua participação para garantir a sua participação neste processo.

“O FAMOD, com os seus parceiros, ele está a criar condições para que diferentes instituições do governo, eles sejam, capacitados em matéria de inclusão, em matéria de planificação e orçamentação inclusivas, e também estamos nas comunidades, a criar condições para que diferentes comunidades, ou as pessoas com deficiência das comunidades, elas tenham conhecimento sobre a lei que as protege”, disse, referindo-se ao trabalho específico que a organização está a levar a cabo para garantir a protecção das pessoas com deficiência.

#### COMENTÁRIO DA AUTORA

“The story I chose is the one about the woman who fights for her livelihood and proves that disability is not the end of life. I chose this because it exemplifies this woman’s resilience, as she remains strong even in the face of difficulties. We know that many people in her condition, especially women, turn to the streets to beg, exposing themselves to various risks and vulnerabilities.”

## Protecção e defesa do direito da criança longe das expectativas

Por Helena Madança

**No cruzamento entre as Avenidas 24 de Julho e Tomás Nduda, na capital do país, está um adolescente de sexo masculino, sentado ao lado dos semáforos, com panos enrolados nas pernas, com uma camisa sem mangas, que estende insistentemente as mãos por quem passa por perto. “Tia, estou a pedir”, clama. Muitos desviam o olhar, mas outros têm compaixão e atiram uma moeda. Para o adolescente, a rua não é local de trânsito, é a sua casa e fonte de sobrevivência.**

Chama-se Cristêncio Zeca, tem 11 anos, fugiu da casa onde vivia com o pai e madrasta, no distrito da Manhica, província de Maputo, alegando maus-tratos por parte do casal. Zeca é órfão de mãe e conta que o seu sofrimento começou, justamente, quando o seu pai decidiu casar se novamente.

“Me batiam muito, por tudo e por nada, por vezes não me davam comida. Não havia dia que não me batiam e por isso decidi fugir de casa para Maputo”, revela.

Zeca não se recorda do ano em que abandonou a casa do pai, mas sabe dizer que nessa altura frequentava a terceira classe, o que sugere que tinha 8 anos. Disse viver, relativamente, melhor nas ruas da cidade de Maputo, porque já não sofre os mesmos castigos que sofria antes. “Aqui não sou castigado, e nem levo porrada todos dias. Na minha casa me batiam bem”, conta.

Acrescentou que na rua fez novas amizades, que, aliás, são sua nova família, com quem partilha o pão, que nem sempre é fácil obtê-lo, mas mesmo assim resiste em regressar a casa por conta da violência sofrida.

O caso de Zeca é um exemplo de milhares de crianças espalhadas pelo país que trocaram o lar familiar pelas ruas. No passado dia 20 de Novembro, o mundo celebrou o dia internacional dos direitos da criança, que resultou da adopção da declaração dos direitos da criança e da convenção sobre os direitos da criança.

Aqueles instrumentos determinam a necessidade de garantir os direitos das crianças, tais como o direito à protecção, educação, dignidade e afecto. A realidade de Moçambique demonstra centenas de crianças que continuam a pedir esmola, no trabalho infantil expostas a todo tipo de violência, exploração e abandono. Especialistas e instituições que trabalham em defesa dos direitos das crianças classificam este tipo de fenómenos como violência directa e estrutural contra a criança.

Residente no bairro KaMaxaquene, Cristina tem dois irmãos mais novos, sendo que a sobrevivência da família depende dos pedidos de esmola nas ruas da capital do país, que nem sempre aparece.

“Dependemos dos pedidos diários de dinheiros para ter o que comer, há dias que não conseguimos nada e dormimos sem comer”, lamenta com lágrimas nos olhos.

### NEGLIGÊNCIA INSTITUCIONALIZADA

A directora-executiva do Fórum da Sociedade Civil para os Direitos da Criança (ROSC), Salomé Mimbir, descreve a situação como profundamente preocupante, e afirma que o que vê nas ruas de Maputo não é apenas pobreza.

“A mendicância infantil é uma violação grave dos direitos das crianças, e ela vai representar depois uma escalada de violências, de exploração de crianças. A mendicância é negligência institucionalizada”, explica.

Para Mimbir, a mendicância tem raízes na pobreza multidimensional, fragilidade dos laços familiares, desemprego, e falhas ou ausência de políticas de prevenção e uma protecção social incapaz de responder à escala do problema.

“São várias as causas que alimentam a mendicância, a pobreza multidimensional, a falta de programas de protecção social, que depois associam a questões de orfandade, famílias desestruturadas, fraqueza de programas alternativos, não só aqueles que são regidos pelo Estado”, revela Mimbir.

A directora-executiva do ROSC reconhece que, numa situação ideal, nenhuma criança deveria estar na rua, mas afirma que a realidade moçambicana está longe desse cenário. Disse que os programas do Estado de protecção social básica são insuficientes e precários para responder às necessidades das crianças em maior vulnerabilidade.

“Numa condição ideal em que o Estado estivesse a funcionar na sua plenitude para a protecção da criança, não teríamos tantas ou teríamos nenhuma criança na rua. Mas essa não é a nossa situação”, referiu.

Segundo Mimbir, esse fenómeno afecta todo o país, e as capitais provinciais acabam sendo a fotografia de muitas crianças em condição de vulnerabilidade, sublinhando a necessidade de uma maior intervenção.

“Não diria que nada está sendo feito, mas acho que é necessário que se multipliquem os esforços para poder atender às necessidades concretas destas crianças em condição de vulnerabilidade que lhes empura para a mendicância.

O Estado tem programas de protecção social básica, são precários, mas existem”, afirma Mimbir.

### POLÍTICAS FALHADAS

O sociólogo Abílio Langa reforça que a mendicância infantil é resultado previsível de desigualdades estruturais. “As crianças são empurradas a esta questão de viverem ao relento, por não terem qualquer tipo de apoio ou de amparo, seja na perspectiva das instituições, seja familiar. Uma criança na rua não é um acaso. É o produto de políticas que falharam, de famílias esgotadas, e de um Estado que tem respostas fragmentadas e insuficientes”, explica.

Langa sublinha que muitas vezes a rua é para as crianças uma escola brutal, pois muito cedo a criança aprende a desconfiar, a negociar violência, a construir identidade longe de qualquer protecção, por falta daquele amparo necessário, tanto da família, da sociedade em geral e por parte das políticas públicas.

“É uma criança que estará em situação completa de vulnerabilidade, ou até por um lado, tornar-se vilã, tudo porque não há acompanhamento, não há políticas públicas que visam a erradicação deste mal”, disse.

Para o sociólogo, ignorar aquelas crianças é acarretar

tar custos sociais ao país, é preparar um futuro de exclusão, delinquência juvenil, consumo de drogas e perda de capital humano. Fez notar que este pode ser um problema inter-geracional.

“A criança que mendiga hoje, é o adulto que amanhã o sistema chamará de delinquente. Quando estamos perante o menino, muitas vezes está associada a questão de consumo exacerbado de drogas. É um indivíduo que estará relacionado a várias questões, até de delinquência juvenil”, explica.

Deste modo, defende que um dos passos mais eficazes para reduzir a mendicância infantil é deixar de dar dinheiro às crianças na rua, prática que acaba por alimentar o ciclo da dependência.

“As instituições governamentais e não-governamentais, que têm como propósito macro esta questão da assistência psicossocial têm tido algum impacto. É claro que há muito poucas crianças abrangidas por este sistema estabelecido, devido à falta de políticas públicas que visam a erradicação deste mal. Infelizmente, este mal não temos como, de forma alguma, erradicar por completo, mas nós podemos ir mitigando aos poucos, começando por desencorajar a oferta de dinheiro e reforçar programas de reinserção familiar e comunitária”, explicou Langa.

### PROTECÇÃO INSUFICIENTE

Por sua vez, a jurista Ornília Siteo, explica que a mendicância infantil em Moçambique constitui uma violação grave dos direitos fundamentais da criança, protegidos pela Constituição, pelas convenções internacionais ratificadas pelo país e por várias leis específicas, como a Lei de Protecção da Criança e a Lei da Organização Tutelar.

“O Código Penal em si, no seu artigo 268, pune as pessoas que incentivam a mendicância, com pena de prisão de dois a oito anos, e multa correspondente”, exemplifica.

Segundo a jurista, embora a responsabilidade primária de protecção e cuidado pertença aos pais, o Estado tem obrigação legal de criar condições, instituições e mecanismos que garantam que essas famílias possam cumprir esse dever. Quando os pais falham, por negligência, abandono ou incitamento à mendicância, e o superior interesse da criança é posto em causa, a Lei legitima a intervenção imediata do Estado, inclusive a retirada da criança do convívio

familiar, para assegurar a sua protecção, bem-estar e desenvolvimento.

Segundo dados do Ministério do Trabalho, Género, Criança e Acção Social (MTGAS), referentes aos meses de Julho a Setembro de 2025, 501 crianças vivem actualmente nas ruas da capital do país, dos quais 339 são rapazes e o restante meninas. Daquele total, 56 estão envolvidas directamente na mendicidade como acompanhantes dos pais, número que, embora não exacto, revela a dimensão de um fenómeno persistente.

Segundo Célia Cossa, técnica do Departamento de Género, Criança e Acção Social do MTGAS, muitas daquelas crianças vêm de famílias desestruturadas, outras fogem de situações de violência doméstica ou procuram autonomia precoce.

“A mendicidade infantil é uma violação dos direitos da criança, uma prática que fere a dignidade e o bem-estar infantil, e continua a ser um problema persistente, porque a maioria destas crianças tem a rua como um lugar de sustento e, pior ainda, como residência, principalmente aqui no distrito de KaMpfumo. Há vários factores que contribuem para este aumento, como a pobreza, a falta de oportunidades, famílias desestruturadas e não só. Também temos aquele famoso ditado que na baixa da cidade tudo pode, na baixa quem vai, volta com pelo menos 100 meticais”, explica Cossa.

Reconheceu que as autoridades não têm conseguido acompanhar a dimensão real do fenómeno, embora existam equipas de monitoria, sensibilização e encaminhamento.

“Temos crianças identificadas e acompanhadas, mas muitas voltam à rua porque as respostas ainda são insuficientes ou temporárias. Os nossos centros de acolhimento nem sempre têm capacidade para acolher todas que precisam”, admite.

A representante do MTGAS, Célia Cossa, explica que o governo tem equipas de resposta rápida que monitoram zonas críticas, onde surgem grupos de crianças envolvidas na mendicidade. Desde Maio, estas equipas, em coordenação com estudantes da UEM, realizam um mapeamento contínuo para identificar quantas crianças estão nesta situação e compreender as causas.

“Há um trabalho de mapeamento contínuo que esta-

mos a fazer desde Maio em coordenação com alguns estudantes da UEM, um trabalho de assessoria, no sentido de sabermos quantas crianças estão nessa condição e quais são as motivações. E como resultado, 33 crianças aceitaram ir ao centro de acolhimento e estão lá até hoje, e 18 crianças estão no processo de reunificação familiar. Já foram reunificadas oito crianças, em Boane e Manhiça”, revela Cossa.

O objectivo final, assinala, é produzir um instrumento legal específico, como um decreto ou artigo, que responsabilize os pais e oriente as instituições e os profissionais sobre como agir e encaminhar casos de crianças em situação de mendicidade, complementando os vários instrumentos de protecção já existentes.

### SOBREVIVÊNCIA NAS RUAS

Julinho, adolescente de 12 anos, conta que perdeu o pai quando tinha seis anos, e de lá para cá, sua vida tomou outro rumo. “Depois disso comecei a viver com meus tios, mas acabei por sair de lá, porque tudo eu tinha que fazer sozinho, e sempre era culpado de fazer coisas erradas. Qualquer coisa que desaparecia lá, eu era culpado. Então me cansei disso, deixei a casa dos meus tios”, explica. Julinho conta que vivia no distrito de Moamba, em Maputo, e vive nas ruas há mais de dois anos, e revela, “tenho muitos amigos aqui na cidade, conheço quase todos. E para comer nós pedimos esmolas”.

Gabriel Carlos, de 14 anos, revela ter fugido de casa devido à falta de condições mínimas de subsistência. “Fugi de casa porque lá eu passava fome. Ficamos dias sem ter o que comer. Meu pai e minha mãe não trabalham. E meu pai, se consegue fazer biscoitos, só bebia todos dias” lamenta. Conta que quando tem fome, “eu e meus amigos pedimos esmolas, as vezes nos dão comida”. Carlos admite sentir falta de casa, mas afirma que, diante das condições em que vive a família, considera as ruas uma opção menos difícil.

### COMENTÁRIO DA AUTORA

‘ My choice is driven by the strong impact this topic had on me, especially because it highlights the reality of children who, instead of being protected and enjoying their rights, find themselves exposed to life on the streets — a concerning situation that still persists in our capital city. ’

### CENTRO DE ACOLHIMENTO PARA CRIANÇAS

‘ No Centro de Acolhimento Lhayiseka, onde chegam parte das crianças retiradas das ruas como referido pela representante do MTGAS, Célia Cossa, recebem anualmente cerca de 200 crianças, muitas encontradas durante as rondas matinais feitas pelas equipas do centro.

Segundo a educadora social do Lhayiseka, Tânia Marisa, o centro acolhe menores dos seis aos 16 anos, faixa etária em que a reintegração ainda é possível antes de a rua os capturar por completo. “É possível reabilitar uma criança de 10 anos, por exemplo, de 11, 12, porque ela ainda não entrou muito na rua, mas quando a criança já é um adolescente de 16 anos, fica difícil, porque a rua tem muitos perigos. Tem drogas, tem álcool, tem sexo, então, é difícil tirar uma criança de 16 anos da rua, porque ela já está naquele ambiente e ela mesma acha que aquilo é melhor para ela”, explicou Marisa.

Segundo a educadora social, quando as crianças acolhidas chegam aos 16 anos, idade limite para permanência em regime aberto, como o do Lhayiseka, o centro procura sempre reintegrá-las junto das famílias. No entanto, quando a estrutura familiar é instável ou incapaz de garantir cuidados mínimos, são encaminhadas para centros fechados, adaptados por género, onde recebem apoio mais intensivo.

“Em situações em que a família não existe ou está totalmente desestruturada, não há alternativa senão transferi-las para centros fechados, como o que funciona na KaTembe ou instituições religiosas parceiras”, sublinhou a educadora.

Dentro do centro, a vida ganha contornos de normalidade: as crianças acordam cedo, cuidam da higiene, tomam o mata-bicho e seguem para a escola, sempre que têm documentação e condições para serem matriculadas. As que ainda não estão legalizadas frequentam aulas de alfabetização e reforço escolar no próprio centro, onde educadores acompanham cada caso individualmente. Brincadeiras, oficinas de artesanato e actividades criativas ocupam o resto do dia, numa tentativa de reconstruir rotinas que a rua tinha destruído.

Marisa diz que as mudanças são visíveis pouco tempo, após a chegada: o comportamento melhora, a higiene pessoal torna-se rotina, a alimentação regular devolve energia, e as crianças começam a desenvolver pequenas habilidades, desde fazer esteiras ou bonecos até tocar instrumentos ou aprender técnicas de artesanato. “Tudo o que fazemos aqui é para criar um ambiente saudável e permitir que saiam daqui com alguma ferramenta para a vida”, explica.

Entre as crianças acolhidas este ano pelo centro, está Celso Afonso, que aos 16 anos carrega uma trajectória marcada por perdas, pobreza e uma luta diária pela sobrevivência. Natural de Quelimane, ficou órfão de pai ainda criança e viu a mãe adoecer, sem condições emocionais nem financeiras para o criar. Sem saber ler nem escrever, Afonso acabou por abandonar a escola na 6ª classe, empurrado por uma realidade que lhe retirou cedo demais o direito à infância. Em Fevereiro do ano em curso, juntamente com dois amigos, usou o dinheiro que um deles encontrou para viajar de Quelimane a Maputo. Nas ruas da antiga FACIM, dormia exposto ao frio, aos mosquitos e à insegurança. Para comer, improvisava refeições com o pouco que conseguiam ou com a ajuda de desconhecidos.

Hoje, Afonso está acolhido no Centro Lhayiseka, onde reencontrou estabilidade e segurança. “A melhor vida é aqui”, reconhece. Entre actividades diárias e pequenas rotinas que antes não existiam, voltou a sentir-se protegido. E recuperou um sonho antigo: ser mecânico. Agora, prepara-se para regressar a Quelimane, num processo de reunificação familiar acompanhado de perto pela equipa do centro.

Miguel Arlindo José, de 15 anos, natural de Nampula, também acolhido pelo centro Lhayiseka no ano em curso, viveu grande parte da infância entre a rua e varandas de casas dos vizinhos, após a morte do pai, em 2017. A família, sem condições financeiras e sem apoio dos parentes, passou a sobreviver com a ajuda dos vizinhos. Aos 14 anos, José decidiu deixar Nampula. Para o efeito, dedicou-se ao trabalho de recolha e venda de latas de alumínio para juntar algum dinheiro. A viagem acabou por ser feita em etapas: parou em Quelimane, onde amigos o ajudaram a seguir até Maputo. Viveu nas ruas das três cidades, enfrentando fome, insegurança e o medo constante de raptos, comuns segundo relata. Hoje diz sentir-se melhor: tem abrigo, alimentação e higiene, participa em actividades, faz artesanato e toca batuque. Ainda sem sonhos definidos para o futuro, José expressa apenas alívio por, pela primeira vez em muito tempo, sentir-se cuidado. ’

## Pedaladas que ajudam a escapar das uniões prematuras

Por Cleto Duarte

**Os irmãos mais velhos telefonam do distrito do Gilé, com a mesma ordem: “Manda essas crianças casar.” Isaura Martins, 33 anos, desliga o telefone, sobe a bicicleta e pedala. Nove crianças dependem de cada corrida de táxi que faz pelas ruas de Quelimane. Numa cidade com 5700 taxistas de bicicleta registados e cerca de sete mil não registados, quase todos homens, Isaura é uma das raras mulheres a conduzir o biciclo. Uma filha já casou aos 16 anos, mas as outras oito crianças, entre filhos e sobrinhos, ainda podem contornar este destino. Se ela conseguir pedalar mais rápido que a tradição.**

Em Quelimane, uma taxista luta contra a tradição: nove crianças dependem dela, para não se casarem antes dos 18 anos. Uma delas já não conseguiu fugir do destino. No distrito de Gilé, na província da Zambézia, não se questiona se uma rapariga vai casar, mas sim quando o fará. É uma questão de tempo, não de escolha. As famílias encaram o casamento precoce como uma solução para a pobreza e não como um problema. É uma boca a menos para alimentar. Uma responsabilidade transferida. É um ciclo que se repete há gerações.

Isaura Martins Mukalaia, de 33 anos, conhece bem esta tradição. Nasceu e cresceu no distrito do Gilé, tendo sido a primeira na família a estudar até à 12ª classe. Após a morte da mãe, trouxe três irmãos e três sobrinhos para viverem consigo em Quelimane, tendo a família reagido de imediato e de forma categórica.

“Eles dizem: Te falamos para você mandar essas crianças para casar. Você alguma vez já viu na nossa família alguém que já trabalhou, alguém que já estudou e trabalhar? Você só gosta de tirar ideia na sua cabeça”, conta Isaura, repetindo as palavras que ouve dos irmãos mais velhos que estão no Gilé e querem que ela mande os filhos e sobrinhos casar prematuramente.

Entretanto, Isaura respondeu comprando uma bicicleta e tornando-se taxista na cidade de Quelimane, onde este veículo é o principal meio de transporte, e quatro em cada cinco famílias têm pelo menos uma bicicleta em condições de circular 25 quilómetros por dia. Muitos usam-nas como táxi e ganham algum dinheiro.

Devido ao aumento do número de bicicletas, as autoridades da autarquia de Quelimane decidiram institucionalizar o ciclismo e criaram, em 2013, a ATAMAZ (Associação de Taxistas da Zambézia).

Segundo o presidente da associação, António Bernardino, só na cidade de Quelimane estão registados 5700 taxistas de bicicleta, aos quais se somam outros 7 mil não registados. Actualmente, 12 mulheres exercem esta actividade, poucas em regime de tempo inteiro e outras em regime de tempo parcial.

Isaura é a única que faz táxi de bicicleta de segunda a sábado, não por vocação, mas por necessidade urgente: evitar que as nove crianças, três filhos, três irmãos e três sobrinhos, sigam o mesmo destino de Neima, a sua filha mais velha. Aos 16 anos, Neima saiu de casa da mãe para viver com um homem de 24 anos. Esta união precoce pôs termo ao seu sonho de se tornar ginecologista, que ficou guardado numa gaveta, juntamente com os cadernos do 12ª classe.

Neima tem hoje 18 anos, é mãe de um filho de um ano e vive com o marido, um licenciado em Inglês e actualmente desempregado. Quando fala ao SAVANA do seu sonho de ser ginecologista, a sua voz denota o desejo de continuar os estudos.

“O meu sonho é trabalhar na área da saúde, especialmente em Ginecologia, e tornar-me ginecologista”, diz Neima, com uma força que mostra que ainda acredita.

“Ainda tenho esperança. Não desisti”, garante.

A opção pela Ginecologia não foi por acaso. Neima conta que sofreu durante muito tempo com problemas ginecológicos, sem saber exactamente do que se tratava. Acredita que muitas outras mulheres enfrentam a mesma situação, sem informação ou acesso a um diagnóstico. Por isso, afirma com convicção, quer ajudar outras mulheres a cuidar de si e a superar essas dificuldades.

No entanto, após concluir o ensino secundário, sem recursos para prosseguir os estudos e sem perspectivas de emprego, Neima deparou-se com um dilema: permanecer em casa sem fazer nada ou aceitar o pedido de casamento que já tinha recebido.

“Eu casei com 16 anos. A pessoa me propôs casamento e eu aceitei, por falta de condições. Minha mãe tinha dito que não ia conseguir mais sustentar meus estudos. Então, em vez de eu ficar aqui parada em casa, não fazendo nada, pensando em ideias erradas, me envolvendo em maus caminhos, decidi me casar.”

A decisão foi pragmática, calculada, desperada. “Eu estava aqui em casa e minha mãe não trabalha. Via tudo que minha mãe passava para conseguir caderno para meus irmãos. Eu me vi na responsabilidade de me responsabilizar pelos meus gastos. Como a proposta já tinha aparecido num momento que eu também já estava passando por isso, eu achei o certo a fazer.”

Aos 18 anos, Neima reconhece que a vida que leva tem sido difícil. Questionada pelo SAVANA sobre os casamentos prematuros, ela não romantiza a sua história. Neima afirma que não apoia o casamento precoce, pois retira as raparigas da escola antes do tempo e as coloca numa posição de vulnerabilidade. Segundo a UNICEF (Fundo das Nações Unidas para a Infância), as raparigas que se casam muito jovens geralmente vêm de famílias mais pobres e, uma vez casadas, têm maior risco de continuar vivendo na pobreza.

“Eu sei que é uma coisa errada casar antes da idade, uma pessoa ainda com muitos sonhos

pela frente, mas, às vezes, tem sido falta de opção”, admitiu Neima.

A dor de Isaura ao ver a filha casar-se menor ainda é visível. “Aquilo me doeu. Até agora, eu começo a pensar: será que a finalidade dos meus filhos e irmãos vai ser assim também? Não ter emprego, não ter nada? Eu gostaria que fosse diferente. Se ela tivesse aquela oportunidade de estudar como as outras estudam, casar com a idade recomenda por Lei, casar com o tempo”.

Foi essa dor que empurrou Isaura para as ruas. Antes, ela vendia tomate e trabalhava em quintais de residências, conseguindo mensalmente cerca de 2500 meticais, um valor insustentável diante do actual custo de vida.

Hoje, é vista por muitos como a primeira mulher a fazer táxi de bicicleta em tempo integral. Porém, poucos percebem que, por trás desse trabalho, Isaura luta para impedir o casamento prematuro.

“Infelizmente, comecei a fazer táxi por necessidade. O que me levou a fazer táxi foi que, quando perdi meu marido, comecei a trabalhar em quintais para dar alguma coisa de comer aos meus filhos. Trabalhando ali, sentia que não me estava rendendo muito bem. Havia dias em que eu ia ao quintal trabalhar, cozinhar, eu comia lá, almoçava. Havia dias em que eu não deixava nada na minha casa. Meus filhos não comiam, mas eu comia no local de trabalho. Aquilo começou a me chocar”, relembra Isaura.

Lucas Davi Celemane, agente da polícia, faleceu em 2016, quando Isaura tinha apenas 26 anos e frequentava a 10ª classe.

O marido levou-a de Gilé para a cidade de Quelimane, para que pudesse estudar, trabalhar e ajudar a família.

Deixou três filhos, uma viúva e uma pensão mensal de 1750 meticais paga pelo Ministério do Interior, quantia que a viúva considera insuficiente face ao actual custo de vida no país.

Isaura conta que, com esse valor, nem sequer era possível comprar os cadernos da escola para os filhos, para não falar das demais despesas

domésticas.

A pressão financeira aumentou, quando a mãe de Isaura morreu, e ela decidiu levar os três irmãos do Gilé para Quelimane, como forma de impedir o casamento prematuro.

## A BATALHA CONTRA A TRADIÇÃO

“Na nossa cultura, no Gilé, lá onde nós estamos, por exemplo, eu na minha família, não tem ninguém que estudou, que dá valor a esse assunto de escola”, explica Isaura.

“A minha família prefere mandar as crianças deixarem a escola para casar. A minha luta aqui é que eu queria que eles, pelo menos, estudassem. Eu não estou a concordar com essa ideia da minha família sobre casamento prematuro”, afirma.

É uma batalha solitária que Isaura enfrenta diariamente. Segundo ela, os irmãos mais velhos questionam-na, por telefone, sobre se alguma vez viu alguém na família que tenha trabalhado.

Dos irmãos que deviam apoiá-la na luta, ouve: “Você só gosta de tirar ideias na sua cabeça”.

Enfrenta estas dificuldades na família, mas diz que não vai recuar, porque o seu sonho é ver as crianças estudando e pede apoio para bolsas de estudo.

“Eu sozinha concordo que pessoa pobre pode estudar sim. É por isso que eu luto para meus filhos, irmãos irem à escola”, narra.

Para além do sonho das bolsas para os filhos, Isaura fala com entusiasmo e pede apoio para realizar outro sonho que tem como forma de reverter a situação: abrir uma lanchonete, já que é formada em culinária.

## NOVE SONHOS NA “GARUPA”

Estêvão Fernando Martinho, de 16 anos e irmão de Isaura, frequenta a 9ª classe e sonha em ser operador de câmara. Nos últimos meses, tem feito filmagens com um telemóvel e gostou tanto dos resultados, e pretende seguir essa carreira.

“Se tiver condições, quero tornar-me um grande operador de câmara”, afirma Martinho.

No entanto, as dificuldades financeiras são as mesmas que levaram Neima ao casamento precoce.

“Aqui em casa, às vezes ficamos sem dinheiro para comer ou comprar materiais escolares. Se eu passar para a 10ª classe, ela vai precisar arranjar recursos para matrícula, cadernos, livros e até avaliações. As condições estão piorando”, diz.

Quanto a casamentos prematuros, Estêvão Fernando Martinho é categórico: não os apoia, pois acredita que destroem vidas e colocam as pessoas em condições precárias.

Alestina, sobrinha de Isaura e também aluna da 9ª classe, sonha em ser enfermeira, porque quer salvar vidas e gosta de observar o trabalho dos profissionais da área.

Acredita que o seu sonho pode transformar a família: “Se eu trabalhar, minha irmã vai trabalhar, meu irmão vai trabalhar, todos nós vamos trabalhar.”

No entanto, Alestina relata as dificuldades diárias que enfrentam.

“Aqui passamos mal, às vezes não comemos. Se minha mãe vai para a estrada e não traz nada, ela faz táxi e ganha pouco, só 50 meticais, só almoçamos, não jantamos. É assim mesmo.”

Sobre a irmã Neima, que casou aos 16 anos, Alestina é sincera: “Não gostei, porque eu também não queria passar pelo que ela passou. Muitas pessoas casam cedo por causa da falta de condições, mas não é bom. Às vezes, você casa sem escolha e, quando a pessoa não é boa, a vida fica difícil”.

## COMENTÁRIO DA AUTORA

‘ I chose this report as the best because of its impactful approach, which humanizes the issue of early marriage in Zambézia — the second province in Mozambique with the highest rates, according to data from UNFPA and INE, based on the 2017 Census and recent UNICEF reports (2025). ’

## O PESO DOS NÚMEROS

A história de Neima não é exceção na Zambézia, é estatística. A província, a segunda mais populosa de Moçambique, é também a segunda com o maior número de casamentos prematuros no país.

De acordo com a “Análise Estatística sobre Casamento Prematuro e Gravidez Precoce em Moçambique”, com base no Inquérito Demográfico e de Saúde de 2011, mais de 526 mil raparigas moçambicanas, com idades compreendidas entre os 20 e os 24 anos, casaram-se antes dos 18 anos. Este estudo foi encomendado pela UNICEF, UNFPA e pela Coligação para a Eliminação dos Casamentos Prematuros (CECAP) e publicado em 2015. Baseia-se nos dados do Inquérito Demográfico e de Saúde (IDS) de 2011.

A província de Nampula lidera em número absoluto, com 129 604 casos (62,3%), seguida pela Zambézia, com 95.525 casos (47,1%).

Em termos percentuais, a província de Niassa tem 24,4% de raparigas casadas antes dos 15 anos, mais do dobro da média nacional de 14,3%. Quanto à gravidez precoce, 439 453 jovens tiveram o primeiro filho antes dos 18 anos. A província de Manica tem a maior taxa (44,9%), enquanto Nampula lidera em números absolutos, com 107 553 casos, seguida da Zambézia, com 81 126. As províncias do norte apresentam as taxas mais elevadas, ao passo que Maputo Cidade regista apenas 14,9%. A nível nacional, 48,2% das raparigas casam antes dos 18 anos, o que coloca Moçambique na 10.ª posição a nível mundial. A diferença entre as zonas rurais (55,7%) e as zonas urbanas (36,1%) é significativa.

## LEI PREVÊ ATÉ 12 ANOS DE PRISÃO

A Lei n.º 19/2019 de Prevenção e Combate às Uniões Prematuras, aprovada a 22 de Outubro de 2019, estabelece penas severas para os adultos, familiares e autoridades que promovam uniões com menores, no entanto, a sua implementação enfrenta desafios no terreno. Os números revelam um fosso preocupante entre o quadro legal e a realidade vivida por centenas de milhares de raparigas moçambicanas.

A norma impõe penas de prisão de oito a 12 anos para qualquer adulto que se una a uma criança e a familiares que entreguem menores em casamento.

A Lei moçambicana é uma das mais rigorosas da região. Estabelece que nenhuma autoridade civil, religiosa ou tradicional pode legitimar uniões que envolvam menores de 18 anos. As penas são abrangentes e severas: Os pais, tutores ou responsáveis que autorizem, incentivem ou não impeçam o casamento de uma criança enfrentam uma pena de prisão de dois a oito anos, incluindo multa. Se o fizerem mediante coacção ou ameaça, a pena é igualmente de dois a oito anos. As autoridades tradicionais, religiosas ou os funcionários públicos que celebrem casamentos prematuros arriscam-se a penas de prisão de dois a oito anos. Se receberem dádivas ou promessas de vantagens para o fazerem, a pena mínima é de quatro anos de prisão efectiva.

Quem entregar uma criança em troca de bens, para pagamento de dívidas ou para cumprir promessas, será punido com a pena máxima: 8 a 12 anos de prisão. A legislação inova ao estabelecer regras patrimoniais específicas para proteger os menores retirados de uniões prematuras. Os bens destes tornam-se incomunicáveis e, na partilha de bens comuns, dois terços pertencem à criança e apenas um terço ao adulto. Em caso de violência ou abuso, o adulto perde completamente o direito aos bens. A Lei prevê ainda penas agravadas: 12 a 16 anos de prisão por violação de uma criança durante a união, com penas superiores se houver transmissão de doenças sexualmente transmissíveis.

A Lei estabelece também que qualquer funcionário público, autoridade tradicional ou religiosa que tenha conhecimento de uma união prematura e não a comunique às autoridades competentes comete um crime de omissão, punível com até dois anos de prisão. Nos casos já consumados, a legislação permite a anulação do casamento mediante pedido da própria criança, do curador de menores, dos pais, tutores ou de qualquer parente directo. Os tribunais podem ainda determinar medidas cautelares urgentes, incluindo: impedimento de contacto entre os cônjuges, colocação da criança em instituição de acolhimento, garantia de regresso seguro ao lar familiar, suspensão do poder parental em caso de incentivo à união, determinação da guarda dos filhos e pensão de alimentos. ’

## Zambia: Youth friendly safe spaces central to HIV prevention

By Tetiwe Mweemba

Youth Friendly Safe Spaces have been described as central to HIV prevention, treatment support and Sexual reproductive health services for adolescents and young people.

Zambia's young people aged 15-24 account for 38 percent of new infections with adolescent girls and young women facing three times the risk of contracting HIV than their male peers.

Speaking to Live News in an interview, Medical for Quality Healthcare in Zambia-MQHZ Director General Quince Mwabu observed that any disruption to these services threatens to reverse hard won progress and will widen gaps in access, reduce early HIV detection and undermine the support systems young people rely on.

Medical Research and access Platform-MedRap National Coordinator and Chief Executive Officer-CEO Liyoka Liyoka noted that the suspension of the United States of America-USA Government's support from the Ministry of Health threatened the already struggling Youth Friendly spaces' sustainability.

Mr. Liyoka however acknowledged the Government's intervention through the 5 percent increase in the 2026 National Budget towards sustaining these spaces but feels this will not suffice the support that has been lost leaving the entire health sector vulnerable.

He adds that the Government is building maternity annexes across the country, but much emphasis must be placed on building and capacitating adolescent friendly spaces in these facilities.

Mr. Liyoka observed that adolescents are vulnerable to a lack of comprehension service delivery equal to their needs.

### ON THE AUTHOR

Tetiwe defied the odds within the Zambian media landscape by courageously reporting on the barriers faced by key populations in accessing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services. Beyond the boldness of producing such a story, she demonstrated a strong commitment to transforming how news is reported within her institution, influencing both editorial direction and content.

Building on this momentum, Tetiwe went on to produce a powerful story on youth friendly safe spaces as a critical component of HIV prevention. The story went beyond awareness and demonstrated tangible impact, prompting responses from key stakeholders such as AMI-CAALL Zambia, UNICEF Zambia and the Ministry of health who are now actively addressing the issue of youth friendly spaces in all the 116 districts of Zambia.

Tetiwe Mweemba exemplifies a transformed journalist one whose work drives change, shapes public discourse, and redefines how inclusive, impactful journalism is and can be practiced.

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## Jamia Nkhoma, Chief Executive Officer at Live FM 97.3 Radio station on the Project

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Talking about the impact of the Media Parity Project on Live FM, I can say, it didn't just change our content, it has changed how we see stories.

Before the project, we were already doing community-focused programming, but we weren't always intentional about whose voices we were prioritizing.

I remember during the project, one thing really stood out to me. We were telling important stories, about climate change, governance, development, but when you look closely, the experts and voices we kept going back to, were mostly men. And that was a bit of a wake-up call for us.

That's where the Media Parity Project really challenged us.

It pushed us to start thinking differently in the newsroom. We began asking questions like, "Who is missing in this story?" and "Are women and young people being heard, or are we speaking about them without them?"

And I can give a very practical example. We did a feature story on youth-friendly safe spaces and how they are central to HIV prevention in Zambia, especially for young girls. What stood out in that story is that these spaces are not just about services, but about creating an environment where young people feel safe, heard, and not judged.

We all know that many young people avoid accessing HIV and reproductive health services due to stigma or lack of privacy, so these safe spaces become critical in helping them access information, counseling, and even treatment.

Now, for us as a radio station, the difference was this - we didn't just report the story. We made sure the voices of the young people themselves, especially girls, were at the centre of it.

That's something the Media Parity Project really strengthened in us: moving from speaking about communities to letting them speak for themselves.

And since then, that approach has become part of our everyday work.

You'll now hear more women on our platforms, not just as participants, but as experts, leaders, and voices of authority. Even internally, we've become more conscious about inclusion. We already have women in leadership, but now there's a deliberate effort to ensure that diversity reflects in both our content and our decision-making.

For me personally, as CEO, the biggest shift is mindset.

The Media Parity Project has made us more intentional, more aware, and more accountable.

It has reminded us that the media is not just about telling stories, it is about whose stories are told, and who gets to tell them.

Internally, the project has influenced our organizational culture as we have seen gender balance in key positions within the station.

We have now designed a show called "Woman Wednesday" ensuring that women's stories are loudly heard.

As a station we are now more conscious of the importance of fairness and balance in our reporting.

I can also say through the project we now have the Gender and the Sexual Harassment Policies in place, and each staff has been given a copy, which we also attach to the new contracts of employments.

We also have taken practical steps in creating a safer working environment. For example, we now have anti-sexual harassment posters displayed around our station which serve as daily reminders of our commitment to professionalism, respect and zero tolerance for harassment.

In conclusion, I can confidently say, the Project has made Live FM an organized, more inclusive, and impactful radio station.

# List of Stories Produced

## BOTSWANA

### YTV

#### *Bay Tsimane*

- Balete tribe turns to Bogwera initiation to tackle social ills
- Impact of US aid freeze on Botswana NGOs
- NGOs launch a new anti-GBV campaign as cases surge
- Sex Offenders' Registry
- Death Penalty
- Paternity Leave in Botswana
- Corporal Punishment
- Drug shortage in Botswana

#### *Keneilwe Lephoi*

- Why Botswana still has few women in parliament and cabinet
- Unspoken struggles: gender, mental health and suicide prevention in Botswana
- The hidden cost of illicit financial flows in Botswana
- How one woman is turning beauty therapy into economic empowerment
- How LGBTIQ+ youth in Botswana are building peer support networks
- The struggle for recognition of intersex people in Botswana
- Why women are more often blamed for child negligence in Botswana
- The deaf community in Botswana demands broader use of sign language

### Weekend Post

#### *Laone Rasaka*

- Surrogacy in Botswana
- The effects of climate change on women in Botswana
- Crisis in Botswana's international athletics representation
- Marriage Act
- The rehabilitation of children in conflict with the law
- Divorce in Botswana
- Botswana courts struggle to dispose GBV cases
- Child protection and welfare in Botswana

#### *Nchidzi Masendu*

- A community's hope fights gender-based violence

- Equality at a crossroads: is gender policy ignoring boys?
- Boys and crime: when education fails, streets recruit
- Inside the cycle: how power dynamics drive GBV
- Nearly half of Botswana women report online abuse
- Breaking the silence: mental health and gender safety at work
- The cost of being a man: economic pressures fueling toxic masculinity
- From policy to practice: how women access economic relief in Botswana
- The hidden cost of women's marital status and economic rights

### The Patriot Group

#### *Nancy Ramokhua*

- Botswana enjoys athletics success, but where are the women?
- Men affected by breast cancer too
- Creatives hopeful
- Anti-doping law to combat doping in sport
- Healthy living combats non-communicable diseases
- History made in boxing
- Welfare of young girls secured
- Cancer is conquerable

#### *Chose Amanda David*

- Hidden scars of pageant girls: behind the scenes
- The hidden reality of GBV against men
- The gender gap in Botswana's judicial caning
- Breaking the silence: a tale of cyberbullying and triumph
- Embracing the ancestral path: navigating tradition and modernity
- Nurturing parenthood: Ga Nkuku's holistic approach
- The gender bias of mourning in Botswana
- Navigating cross-cultural marriages

### Botswana Radio

#### *Kagiso Ntshole*

- Change of surname
- Arranged marriages in the Zezuru community
- Gendered financial burden
- The boy child

- Systematic inequalities
- Women in farming
- Single mothers
- Cultural identity and pride

#### *Angela Mdlalani*

- Mental health support for men
- Breaking Botswana's drug addiction cycle
- Understanding peer-to-peer sexual harm in Botswana: protecting children
- The women at the heart of Botswana's economic transformation

## LESOTHO

### Informative Newspaper

#### *Phongwazana Sakachane*

- From a "punching bag" to punching back
- Behind the smile: a woman's battle with anxiety
- Women shatter the glass ceiling in carpentry
- When periods make girls skip school
- Making it in manufacturing: Basotho entrepreneurs turning challenges into success
- Bridging the employment gap in Lesotho
- Woman on top: a young woman chief leading change
- Protecting children and fighting cancer in Lesotho

#### *Lintle Tsita*

- Ease of access to home loans for Basotho via LPB x LHLCD
- Love, power and protection: married women negotiating safe intimacy
- China in the eyes of the Deputy Speaker
- The untold story of women cross-border traders
- Women principals reshaping education in Lesotho
- Insights from the AU innovation festival
- Women street vendors making it against all odds
- Basotho women rewriting Lesotho's digital future

### Lesotho News Agency

#### *Mapule Motsopa*

- Caught between tradition and protection: initiation schools bill delays
- Boys and their bodies: navigating SRHR in Lesotho
- Left behind at the cattle post: boys' education challenges
- Boys, mental health and social pressure in Lesotho
- Disabled girls, period poverty and school exclusion

- LGBTQI resilience in Lesotho
- The lives of Basotho domestic workers
- Breaking boundaries: gender-diverse midwives shaping healthcare

#### *Makhaba Masekonyela*

- Mauteng aftermath
- Access to justice for women
- Women raising children addicted to alcohol and drugs
- Coming home for holidays
- The role of religious organisations in women's empowerment
- Exploitation of women during weeding season
- Women and road safety
- Surviving the streets of Maseru as a female informal trader

## MALAWI

### Capital FM

#### *Catherine Tinto*

- The untold story of menopause
- Women's momentum transforming the sporting landscape
- Men's shared role in dismantling GBV
- Digital violence and the 16 Days of Activism
- Women's votes decide elections but not power
- Missing men in the cervical cancer fight
- Girls breaking barriers in STEM
- Beyond the byline

#### *Kelvin Tembo*

- Is Malawi gaining ground in the 50-50 campaign?
- Malawi's 50-50 dream remains out of reach
- Handwashing beyond the pandemic
- Gender balance in Malawi's new cabinet
- Changing land access norms in the north
- Justice rewritten
- Periods of change
- Malawi still divided despite court ruling

### Atlas Media

#### *Chancy Namadzunda*

- Malawi geared to fight digital GBV
- Safe abortion: joy for youth, hurdles for women
- Youth unite in breaking barriers in the extractive sector
- Women with disabilities face election hurdles
- Women making inroads in an unlikely trade
- Stakeholders unite to fight political violence

- Empowering women, realizing dreams
- Court allows access to safe abortion for survivors

### *Meclina Chirwa*

- Nagwira Primary School struggles for clean water
- The story of Elipher Mvula's election journey
- Uncovering Malawi's TB gender gap
- The struggle of obstetric violence in Malawi
- Local men champion menstrual hygiene
- Male caregivers shatter stereotypes
- The long journey to Parliament
- Chlorine dispensers ease women's caregiving burden

### **Ūmunthu FM**

#### *Tamandani Hau*

- Female political pioneers charting a path to the elections
- Women challenging exploitation in Lake Malawi's fisheries
- Women MPs unite to amplify their voices in Parliament
- Women battling illegal gold mining
- Making Malawi's music scene safe for women
- Unsafe abortion and its mental health impact
- Human-wildlife conflict and women defenders
- Beyond the ballot

#### *Ivy Mwanyongo*

- Women fight for parliamentary seats in Nkhosokota
- From social media to livelihoods: women using digital platforms
- Tackling unsafe abortions and teenage pregnancies
- Supporting women's leadership transitions
- Why digital spaces remain unsafe for women and girls
- Restoring dignity through fistula care
- Economic abuse in rural communities
- Women with disabilities demand equal access to SRHR
- Women breaking political barriers in Nkhosokota

### **Yoneco FM**

#### *Chimwemwe Mikwala*

- Hidden struggles of female students
- Low pay, long hours
- From screens to scars
- Shared care, shared power
- Women leading in peace mediation

- Sex work is work
- Brave escape from violence
- Stigma and survival: women at Malawi's edge

### *Augustine Muwotcha*

- Women aspirants face violence ahead of elections
- Activists applaud progress on gender equality
- Relocation of agencies raises concerns
- Women step up for peace
- A hidden tragedy that cost a teen her arm
- Youth unemployment in Malawi
- Women's cooperatives succeeding in agribusiness
- Silent cries: men dying by suicide

### **The Times Group**

#### *Rebecca Chimjeka*

- Female candidates are more than their appearance
- Women's voices still muted in parliament
- Sustaining women's voices in governance
- Concerns over women's rights abuses
- Sisterhood transforming financial futures
- Climate change impacts on women
- Cyberbullying: Malawi's invisible crisis
- Youth labour trafficking realities

#### *Eric Msikiti*

- Women gaining ground in parliament and local councils
- Women with disabilities redefining political participation
- Young women breaking barriers in agriculture
- New voices in parliament
- Progress and challenges 30 years after Beijing
- Milestones in women's political representation
- Race for speakership and women's voices
- Strategies to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy

## **MOZAMBIQUE**

### **Savana**

#### *Cleto Almeida*

- Pedalar contra o casamento prematuro
- Quando o feminicídio provoca sofrimento
- O drama de cuidar e não ser cuidado

- De vítimas a protetoras: as "sentinelas da paz"
- Violência digital contra mulheres: o vazio legal
- Código pela vida: estudante cria plataforma contra suicídio
- A média de cinco filhos por mulher e o acesso à informação
- Taxa Mpesa e o impacto nos rendimentos das mulheres

### *Helena Madanca*

- Marcha pelo fim do feminicídio e da violência contra mulheres
- Mendicância infantil
- O medo e a vergonha
- Violência e estigma após agressão sexual
- Violência baseada no gênero e segurança digital
- Desistência escolar das raparigas
- Gravidez precoce, casamento prematuro e fistula obstétrica
- Pobreza e abandono paterno como violência de gênero

### **Rádio Moçambique**

#### *Lília Langa*

- Mulheres continuam a ser alvo de violência doméstica
- Populações vulneráveis afetadas por inundações
- Parto em cima de uma árvore durante inundações
- Mulheres no setor informal
- A força de uma cobradora de chapa
- Entre estética e saúde: mulheres na atividade física
- Mulheres pedem voz na polícia
- Mulheres líderes abandonam suas casas

#### *Paulino Nhusse*

- Violência de gênero
- Mulheres nas FADM
- Participação da mulher no diálogo nacional
- Mulheres no ensino superior
- Jovem em movimento
- Desafios da mulher rural no acesso à terra
- Vida nos centros de acomodação
- Mulheres na solução

### **TVM**

#### *Petucha Sulemane Goba*

- Vozes femininas do albinismo
- Empregadas domésticas denunciam condições precárias
- Estátuas humanas e expressão feminina
- Impacto das inundações nas famílias
- Apoio psicológico a crianças afetadas por inundações
- O dia a dia nos centros de acomodação

- Reflexões sobre o Dia de São Valentim e GBV
- Mulheres vítimas de abusos na internet

### *Tiorencio Nioveque*

- Negação às mulheres na economia doméstica
- Empreendedorismo feminino em Nampula
- Impacto do cancro da mama
- Mulheres no futebol
- Custos da violência doméstica
- Famílias afetadas pelo conflito
- União prematuras
- Trabalho infantil

### **Diário de Moçambique**

#### *Naércia Langa*

- Aborto seguro como direito à saúde
- Mulher prova que deficiência não limita a vida
- Representatividade feminina nos media ainda insuficiente
- Barreiras socioculturais no acesso à informação
- Sociedade civil exige lei contra feminicídio
- Mulheres e o diálogo nacional inclusivo
- Kits de dignidade para mulheres vulneráveis
- Motorista ajuda parto em Maputo

#### *Vânia Óscar*

- Impacto do uso inadequado de redes mosquiteiras
- Mulheres na gestão do saneamento urbano
- Gestão menstrual nas escolas
- Cancro da mama no Outubro Rosa
- Violência doméstica e necessidade de quebrar o silêncio
- Depressão pós-parto
- Segurança cibernética e assédio online
- Violência contra trabalhadores do sexo
- Participação feminina no diálogo inclusivo

### **Rádio Índico**

#### *Tomas Zaba*

- Papel da mulher na manutenção da paz
- Mulheres empreendedoras
- Masculinidade responsável
- União prematuras e gravidez precoce
- Participação feminina nas forças de defesa
- Jovens mulheres em áreas dominadas por homens
- Equidade de gênero na educação
- Mulher e exploração mineira

### *Anabela Repolho*

- Barreiras culturais no desporto feminino
- Empoderamento económico da mulher
- Igualdade de género no trabalho
- Mulher e segurança
- Mulher, cidadania e participação política
- Mulher na comunicação
- Papel dos homens
- Violência baseada no género

## ZAMBIA

### Your Anthem Radio

#### *Bridget Manda*

- Decrease in maternal deaths
- Cholera outbreak and rural vulnerability
- Myths on women and education
- Sexual fantasies and cancer risks
- Sexual harassment in the mining sector
- Teen pregnancies and child abandonment
- Why men are not reporting GBV
- Income inequality and sexual exploitation

#### *Veronica Chilufya*

- Are education opportunities equal?
- Digital violence in Zambia
- Gender stereotypes in politics
- Increase in suicide cases among men
- Rising voices against GBV
- Social stereotypes on older women
- Amplifying women's voices in media

### KBN Television

#### *Patricia Chilambikwa*

- Cyberbullying and women in politics
- Vasectomy as birth control
- Men and boys in menstrual health conversations
- Disability inclusion in politics
- Zambia's progress towards ending HIV
- Mobile money empowering women entrepreneurs
- Ending child marriage
- Reduction in GBV cases through sensitisation

#### *Josphat Mafuta*

- Esther Phiri and girls' futures
- Back to school for disadvantaged learners
- Equity in sport
- Power of girls' education
- Women becoming land owners
- Women in leadership pathways
- Health impacts of smoking
- Lack of women candidates in politics

### Live FM 97.3

#### *Tetiwe Mweemba*

- Access to sexual reproductive health
- Youth-friendly safe spaces for HIV prevention
- Contraceptive distribution in schools
- Climate change and HIV
- Digital gap and cyberbullying
- Accessibility of development funds
- Women in political leadership
- AI in news content generation

### Diamond TV

#### *Victoria Kayeye*

- HIV infections in adolescents
- Gender-based violence
- Digital violence
- Constitution Bill No.7
- Early marriages
- Water shortages
- Flooding impacts on women and children
- Women with disabilities

#### *Elfi Mwale*

- Visually impaired poultry farmer defying odds

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