





gender links for equality and justice





LEARNING JOURNEY

2012/2013







GL Learning Journey 2013
Edited by Colleen Lowe Morna, Ruth Ayisi,
Mukayi Makaya and Vivien Bakainanga
Design and layout: Stride Graphics (Pty) Limited
© Copyright: Gender Links

Learning the hard way; learning the fun way: GL is once more proud to step back in order to step forward. Now in its fourth year of production, the *Learning Journey* offers us the opportunity each year to reflect about where we have come from so that we can reposition the compass for where we want to go. The reader will find in these pages much to smile about, as well as much to think about. At GL, we work hard and we play hard. Ours is a serious mission - a region in which women and men are able to realise their full human potential in both their public and private lives in accordance with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. As this book goes to print we are near the end of twelve national summits that will culminate in the largest ever regional summit on the SADC Gender Protocol. The process has led to the gathering of nearly 800 good practices, and it has involved some 1500 people. This has taxed our 58 staff. But it has also afforded us the opportunity to visit communities in every corner of Southern Africa as part of the verification efforts that preceded the summits, with many light moments and human touches. The reader will also find several references to the human resource management training provided early this year by Anna Harris and Associates, for example Johari's window into secrets about members of our team that we might not have known. There are revelations in these pages that will help us to understand each other better, as well as the pearls of wisdom that can only emanate from lived experience. One of the participants at a previous summit made the observation that when you get enough "I" stories you end up with a "we story". This is GL's "we story" for 2012. We count our blessings for a fruitful and productive year, as we gather energy for the countdown to 2015. *Yes we can, and yes we must!*

Colleen Lowe Morna, CEO
March 2013

CEO's Office

The heart of the matter

Colleen Lowe Morna, Chief Executive Officer

> *Time is, time was, and time shall be no more.*
> ~ William Shakespeare.



"Call your doctor urgently!" This e-mail header, among the dozens that float into my inbox, made my heart skip a beat, literally and figuratively, at the end of a long day of meetings at Gender Links (GL) last October.

I had dropped medical aid several years ago, opting instead to go to the gym and to lead a healthy lifestyle. I could count on one hand the number of times I have been to the hospital. I have a cordial relationship with our family doctor, but never before had I received such a message!

This past year has been one of painful truths and experiences, on several fronts. A battery of tests showed that contrary to my belief that my health is infallible, I actually have a weak heart. In June, my 26-year-old nephew, who suffered from bipolar tendencies, took his life. At work, we made strides on the financial front yet seemed constantly to struggle to put in place the right human infrastructure at GL. Getting to know more about my heart has helped me to think more deeply about the heart of several matters: work-life balance, the important over the urgent, resilience, and many more.

It all started when my daughters insisted I go for medical tests because of a long family history of cancer. On one of my several work-related flights, I read about a

controversial new technology - "scan for life" - that gives you a three dimensional view of all five vital organs. With the help of a close friend who did all the necessary research, I subjected myself to this grand photocopying procedure. When the specialist took me on the virtual tour of the results, it all seemed like wonderland until we got to the heart, where I could see for myself the clots threatening this vital organ.

How many times, the specialist asked, have you heard of a perfectly healthy person dying of a heart attack? "Several," I responded. "You are in the ninetieth percentile of those in danger of a heart attack!" he blurted, leaving me feeling like the day I narrowly escaped a bomb outside the ANC offices just before South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994.

Cholesterol tests would go on to show that contrary to the myths about a low cholesterol diet and healthy lifestyle, my genes bequeathed me a weak endocrine system exacerbated by stress. As a specialist put it, "Think about a perfectly strong car that you put on the road and accelerate beyond normal speed. Eventually, something gives!"

My only reprieve came when I visited the cardiologist who gave me the treadmill test. He asked what incline and what speed to set it. When I suggested maximum for both, he opted to start lower, but gradually upped the ante until we hit the upper limits.

"How old are you?" he shouted.

"Fifty three," I responded.

"Do you climb?" he asked.

"Try the Inca trail!" I laughed, in reference to the sacred 43 km hike that the ancient peoples of Peru used to climb to their scared place of worship, Machu Picchu, or the Lost City.



Reaching Machu Picchu. *Photo: Kofi Morna*

"I can safely say I have never had a 53-year-old move at your pace on the tread mill," the cardiologist said, prompting me to send an immediate SMS to my husband: "He says I'm not going to die!'

I needed that boost. Shortly before my trip-of-a-lifetime to follow the Inca trail in July my nephew Jonathan (my brother's son) took his life. As a family (my parents are both late) we have tried and failed to find answers to this dreadful tragedy. My walk became a vain attempt to understand the meaning of life at a time when life had lost all meaning.

At GL we preach the gospel of healing through writing. Over the months, I have seen this at work as my brother has sought to deal with his grief through putting pen to paper. I have run *"I" Story* workshops before, but this is so painful, because it is my flesh and blood. I stay up late to read his drafts and give him comments, knowing there is solace in these words, in his efforts to get to the heart of the matter.



Back to my roots: Chikore Secondary School. *Photo: Kofi Morna*

On Christmas Day we retrace our steps to the remote rural mission in south east Zimbabwe where we grew up. I had not been back there for 30 years. Perhaps I feared the memories of war - the blood stains that soaked the car park; my classmates who gave up their lives for a bigger cause. So much has happened; so much has changed. Yet I can still find the corner where I sat, reading the books that would make me who I am today.

I wish desperately for the time to run barefoot to the Nyagadza River as I would have done those many years ago, but my vacation is barely a week. Bridget Marango, our able former head of corporate services, announced unexpectedly towards the end of the year that she would be leaving to start a new venture. Once more, I am

picking up the pieces. Is there ever an end to the human challenges of running an organisation, I ask?

In January, Anna Harris, our new HR consultant, runs a much-needed leadership course that offers some chance for reflection. She touches on stress and the heart. She says the best way to deal with stress is to avoid stress. She uses the word "resilience" often. I remember the teachings of my mother who struggled with depression most of her adult life. She countered depression with what she called the power of positive thinking. I realise that I am who I am today because of the daily habit she taught me of counting my blessings.

The refresher course on time management is a powerful reminder of putting the important over the urgent. In a tough and painful year, I have learned the importance of putting my health and family ahead of work; of counting my blessings; appreciating those around me; of mentoring over despairing; and of resilience.

As I write this piece, I have just successfully completed three months of medication to bring my cholesterol levels down and received a pat on my back from my doctor, whom I see more regularly now.

Taking these regular medical tests is a constant reminder of the important over the urgent. My favourite moments last year included watching my heart pound rhythmically through an ultra sound device, the way I used to watch my unborn babies in my womb; the wonder of nature; the heart of the matter.

Alliance and Partnerships

Seeing the bigger picture + working smart = success

Loveness Jambaya, Alliance and Partnerships Manager

> *We've all heard that we have to learn from our mistakes, but I think it's more important to learn from successes. If you learn only from your mistakes, you are inclined to learn only errors*
>
> ~ Norman Vincent Peale



Norman Peale's words resonate as I look back at the six and a half years that I have been at Gender Links (GL). I am sure I am not the only one who considers GL as a winning organisation.

As I reminisce, a number of mistakes I made that I have learnt from come to mind. But there are also many more successes that have contributed to my learning journey.

I also reflect on key ingredients for success: passion and committing yourself to excellence sets you apart from the rest; then combine this with good planning and sound organisational systems, good routines, hard work, a culture of reflection and a "focus on the prize". You might not even be able to contain the success!

Although I have not internalised all of the above, these lessons are ingrained in my mind, body and soul. They form the springboard that will propel my career to greater heights.

I cannot talk about my learning journey without mentioning the name of sisi Colleen, the Chief Executive Officer of GL, who has been my mentor - consciously and

sometimes unconsciously. Whether I am arranging chairs or writing up a strategy document, I have learnt from her that I need to do a task with all my heart, mind and soul.

I have always wondered how she manages to do this but I believe it takes discipline and working smart. I wish that for me and the many younger women and men who pass through her hands Colleen's work ethic would rub off naturally.

"Guys, let us see the bigger picture here," and then pen in hand sisi Colleen draws the picture of what she envisions would be the end-result. She always hastens to say "… but let's work smart". And sisi Colleen goes on to break it down with such clarity even if the task is enormous. Building on inputs from the team, she puts forward suggestions on how it could all be achieved by working smart. Then an action plan is put in place and … ACTION!

It is during the ACTION that I have learnt many lessons. The most recent and vivid one is when I realised that it is not always about working hard but working smart.

The production of the regional SADC Gender Protocol Barometer is not an easy feat. After a few disappointments with a number of consultants missing deadlines the previous year (2011), I thought that perhaps in 2012 the Alliance team - being myself and the Programme Officer Lucia Makamure - should do much of the work.

Girl, was that a wrong idea? My supervisor, who happens to be sisi Colleen, went away on leave for about 10 days. We thought by the time she returned we would show her that we have been putting in the hours. Yes, by the time she got back we had made progress: for example the SADC Gender and Development Index (SGDI) (it measures progress on achieving gender equality by Member States) had been calculated and the major graphs had been drawn for the executive summary as they came from the extensive monitoring and evaluation exercise. Colleen was delighted, but we still needed to do the more difficult work of finalising the many chapters. This time, we had no in-house editor and we had not sought much help from colleagues or consultants. I did not want to chase after people. But the days that followed showed me that as manager of the programme I should have put together a team using internal and external resources. Then I could have concentrated on my main role of coordination and co-editing.

But as Jack Welch says "An organisation's ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage." I have learnt that this ability is what continues to set GL apart.



Loveness Jambaya, Rethabile Pholo, Mukayi Makaya at awards.
Photo: Trevor Davies

In the end the CEO, the Chief Operating Officer Kubi Rama, the Media Manager, Sikhonzile Ndlovu, and the Gender and Media Diversity Centre Manager, Saeanna Chingamuka, stepped in to get us to the finishing line. Two external editors also came on board. I probably should have also recommended a technical person to assist with analysis of the monitoring and evaluation data from the 15 SADC countries.

There was a silver lining. It was during the 2012 Barometer period that I also had to write a major proposal to a donor. I have written many before but this was a big one. In line with seeing the bigger picture sisi Colleen prompted me, "This is the future guys... we just have to get it in". I dropped the Barometer and worked on the proposal from home. We got the grant. It has been one of my proudest moments in my career.

On a different note, the management and leadership course that we went through at the beginning of 2013 was a revelation - a must for all managers. I understand myself and others better; thank you mama Viv, Ann and Gary.

All in all, I have gleaned many lessons from our successes as well as from the collective and individual mistakes. I cannot name them one by one.

Sisi Colleen, I have learnt from your 'giant footprints', I just still have to practice them. Among the many things I celebrate, thanks to you, is that I do now see the bigger picture!

“Be content to act, and leave the talking to others.” Baltasa

Lucia Makamure, Alliance and Partnerships Programme Officer

> *Whatever you vividly imagine, ardently desire, sincerely believe, and enthusiastically act upon... must inevitably come to pass!*
>
> ~ Paul J. Meyer



There are certain moments in life that, no matter how much we try, we can never describe merely by words. Poets and romantics would describe these as 'breath-taking' or ‘out of this world’ moments. Mine came recently when I held not only one but four country SADC Gender Barometers bearing my name as co-editor. I will never be able to put into words my feelings on that day but I know that the moment is forever engraved at the bottom of my heart.

To appreciate the immensity of the moment I will have to go back to where it all began - the 2012 staff awards. I unexpectedly heard the chief executive officer, Colleen Lowe Morna, call my name as the winner of the special staff writing award. It was such an honour to get my work recognised by one of the best writers I have ever come across.

I remember sitting in my office the Monday after receiving the award. I was having a private conversation with myself on what the award meant to me as an individual and my unit, the Alliance programme. I then told myself that the award, as much as it was an appreciation of my writing skills, would be the bedrock on which I would build my career.

The annual SADC Gender Protocol Barometer is the flagship publication of the Alliance. It audits the progress towards the 28 targets of the SADC Gender Protocol. I joke with my friends that this research is a product of blood, sweat and tears but it is not a lie. Such research is never easy because it deals with sensitive data. A simple mistake can render the whole report useless. It requires diligence; you can easily

spend a whole afternoon buried in more than 10 reports comparing sources before deciding which one to go with. To have someone like Debbie Budlender on the Barometer team always helps because she is eager to provide guidance.

Although data gathering is challenging, it is only the tip of the iceberg. We also need words to breathe life into the statistics which requires a high level of analysis. Having contributed my usual one chapter to the Barometer I was about to celebrate when my Manager, Loveness Jambaya, delivered what seemed at the time terrible news: the addition of two more chapters on my plate. I wanted to tell her that I could not do it. Then I thought she wouldn't have asked me if she thought I couldn't do it. This was my chance to prove that **YES** I can do it.

What followed was the most inspiring journey in my professional life. Towards the end of the research report we camped at the CEO's house so we could benefit from her support as well as have some quiet time to finish writing it. The experience taught me lessons which one day I hope to pass on to others. Spending time with my two bosses outside the office taught me what it is like to work on a cause that you truly believe in. We worked long hours but through it all we managed to share smiles and work as a good team. We are all proud of the end product - the 360 page research report.

However, I did not know then that researching and writing the Barometer was just the beginning of conquering more "Kilimanjaros".

A few days after completing the report the words that were inscribed on my writing award "Work never betrays the worker", came alive right before my eyes. I got my first Gender Links promotion. This was a defining moment in my 16 months with the organisation. It did not stop there; two months later I held a book cover with my name as co-editor. These successes renewed my urge to reach for the stars. This is surely my own version of a "changing life".

Speaking of changing lives, a trip to Botswana and Zambia gave me the chance to meet the many women and men who work with our governance programme. We travelled more than 2000km by road moving from one town to another. It was a verification exercise on the councils, but it also showed me the amazing work carried out by our country staff.

After eight council verifications and seven "results of change" interviews I remembered the verse from a John Legend song that goes, *'If you're ready we can save the world, believe again, start to mend. We don't have to wait for destiny. We should be the change that we want to see; if you're out there'*. I witnessed people acting the song out in the 13 councils we visited. Women and men more than twice my age were championing a cause that I passionately believe in and it brought a lump to my throat. It was humbling to see how communities are working flat out to ensure that gender is mainstreamed in their work. This for me was an indication that, after all, change is possible.

The highlight of the trips was the red carpet treatment in Kabwe where the Mayor personally welcomed us and accorded us VIP treatment. I felt honoured to be given an esteemed seat next to the Mayor and to share my work with women and men who aspire to achieve our goal of a SADC region where women and men are equally represented in all spheres.

It is so sad that that I am writing this at a time when my manager, Loveness Jambaya, will be leaving the organisation. I can never thank her enough for all the support and the lessons she has taught me. The 20 months that she has been my manager feels more like a decade. Every single day she challenged me to see myself beyond my job description and my performance agreement.



Lucia Makamure in discussion - Kabwe Municipality. *Photo: Steven Malulu*

Multi-tasking: Gender Links number one survival strategy

Daud Kayisi, Gender and Media Diversity Centre Officer

> *The quicker you accept you have to do more with less, the easier it gets to get on with the tasks at hand.*



During 2012, there was one word I was certain that I would hear most Monday mornings - multi-tasking.

Each Monday, the GMDC like any other department is required by Gender Links' house policy to present their weekly planner - a list of tasks that my manager, Saeanna Chingamuka, and I would do that particular week.

At first I struggled most weeks to complete the tasks. Whenever this happened, my supervisor said that I need to "multi-task". It sounded simple. But it was one thing to understand what it meant and it was another to actually apply it.

However, as time went by, I began to learn from my manager how to actually apply the art of multi-tasking. Saeanna amazed me how she could undertake some of her weekly tasks even while I was sitting with her at the table planning for the week. Considering how smart she worked, I had no choice but to learn this art.

Slowly, I began applying the small tips I learnt from her. I was fortunate that my office was next to hers. I could hear and sometimes even see how she worked. I began dividing my tasks into more urgent and less urgent; quite a challenge because all tasks are urgent at Gender Links!

My first multi-tasking "practical exam" came along in March when I was sent on assignment to Malawi. In just four days, I was supposed to preside over a media literacy graduation, launch the 2011 SADC Gender Protocol Barometer as well as train media students from the Malawi Institute of Journalism and the Malawi Polytechnic.

While I was busy planning how best to multi-task, the procurement officer told me that there was no direct flight to Blantyre. She advised me to fly to Lilongwe and then travel by road to Blantyre. This meant I had five idle hours that would be spent driving from Lilongwe to Blantyre.

After landing at Lilongwe airport, I quickly jumped in the car for Blantyre. Halfway through the journey I began thinking how I will manage my time that evening. I had to give a speech on behalf of Gender Links, take pictures, network where necessary and above all manage the finances. Unfortunately, none of these tasks could be delegated. I needed 12 hours to do all these tasks properly but the event would start at 1800hrs and finish at 2030hrs.



Doing more with less: Daud Kayisi and Tarisai Nyamweda working on a single computer to get the 2012 Gender Justice and Local Government Summit newsletter right. *Photo: Albert Ngosa*

One word echoed in my mind, "multi-task".

We arrived at the graduation venue late. I had no time to freshen up except for putting on some decent clothes. I decided to call Saeanna, my mentor, just to get some inspiration. Her advice was short and simple: "be on top of the situation and do your best. I know you can."

Just like at the office where I would use a weekly planner to guide me on opportunities for multi-tasking, I looked at the evenings' prog-

ramme and applied the same criteria. The multi-tasking approach helped me sail through. By the end of that evening I had managed every situation that needed my attention and had the satisfaction that I gave it my best shot. I had managed a business chat with everyone I needed to; I took the best photos of the event; I gave a short but good speech and made every necessary financial transaction. I had made sure that all these financial transactions were justifiable and that I had obtained receipts or made people sign where necessary. Before "dipping the hand into my pocket" I always asked myself if I would be able to defend that financial transaction before the GL finance department.

That evening I appreciated the importance of multi-tasking. I knew I would apply this art the following day while training students from two training institutions. I only had eight hours to train the students about the virtual resource centre and ask them to write media alerts. However, I managed again. I trained more than 65 students and gave them feedback on the media alerts they had written before paying them.

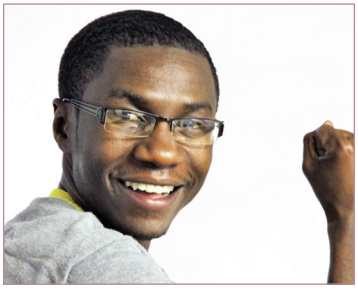
The multi-tasking skill had not disappointed me. I returned to the office a happy person. I accomplished all the tasks successfully and I had all the documents I needed to prove to my supervisor that my Malawi trip was a success.

From that moment on, I have always applied the art of multi-tasking personally and professionally. Surely, work never betrays the worker and multi-tasking is the smart way of surviving in a fast-pace organisation like Gender Links.

The weird team

Albert Ngosa, Audio Visual Officer

> *There is divine beauty in learning, just as there is human beauty in tolerance. To learn means to accept the postulate that life did not begin at my birth. Others have been here before me, and I walk in their footsteps. The books I have read were composed by generations of fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, teachers and disciples. I am the sum total of their experiences, their quests. And so are you.*
>
> ~ Elie Wiesel



Let me start on 18th February 2010. I had just come from the airport straight to the Gender Links office. My luggage was still in the GMDC Board room and I was hoping to be shown to my apartment or a room where I could freshen up after a two-hour flight. A woman walked up to me with a smile and said "Hi!" I introduced myself before she could. So she said "nice to meet you". She begun by handing me a copy of the SADC Protocol Barometer and whilst staring at the publication, I missed her surname and all I got was "I will be your supervisor". Before I knew it, another woman appeared to show me my work station, giving me a pass word combination for a computer.

In that room was another intern, Emsie Erastus, who had reported earlier that day. I whispered, "Are these people okay?" She smiled at me and said, "Welcome to Gender Links". I just turned to face my computer and said "thank you". So I called my mom later that day to say I arrived safely and most importantly that I was working with weird people.

But as the month unfolded I realised I had now become part of this weird team that worked tirelessly to improve the status of women across the region. I was amazed by the amount of energy exuded by every single member of the organisation as they executed their tasks. I was also impressed by their enthusiasm.

I must confess that I had never known an organisation with so many "puzzling" systems in place. In the beginning, I fumbled to learn them. Despite my IT background I could not figure out a simple publication stock sheet. For the first time in my life I called myself an idiot. But I was blessed to have a wonderful team who assisted me in learning the systems.

While in my first year I was learning the basics and coming to grips with what GL expected, my second and third years were about consolidating my skills. In the past four years, I learnt what makes people with potential thrive professionally: focus, organisation and assertiveness. It is also important to be diplomatic and persuasive at the same time.



Duma FM Radio Producer and presenter Georginah Kaboto with GL Audio/Visual Officer Albert Ngosa during the media house COE verifications in Botswana. *Photo: Loveness Jambaya*

I have also learnt about the importance of teamwork. While Gender Links is broken down into different departments, my colleagues' work directly impacts my own so it is essential to have a grasp of all the projects. Here, we are part of an amoeba that shifts and grows as new knowledge and products enter its sphere. All of us are part

of a larger sum, our departments shifting landscapes as we work together, crossing over departmental boundaries, and growing in various directions. This demands a great deal of flexibility.

Speaking of crossing over departmental boundaries, I remember when I jumped from the alliance to the governance team. I started working with people who could not afford to lose a smile on their faces. In-country gender justice and local government work has been a major learning experience for me. It has also greatly contributed to my personal growth.

The COE verification in gender mainstreaming in the media and local government helped me to gain more confidence in myself and also to develop my "people" skills. I soon talked about gender mainstreaming in front of news room editors with confidence; although most of them would ask how old I was!

In the communication department, where I am now, I have mastered new audio visual and IT skills. I get to explore and learn new areas as I manage the organisation's audio/visual content and having IT gurus, like Tinashe Padare, by my side. I must say this is a huge step in my career, and I am totally in love with it.

Programmes - Justice, Media and Governance

A worthy life

Kubi Rama, Chief Operations Officer

> *A little knowledge that acts is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that is idle.* ~ Khalil Gibran



On my daughter's 16th birthday, I wrote her a letter which began by saying: "My darling daughter, my first thoughts as I wake up every morning is to thank God for you and your brother. You are the glue that holds my whole world together. I know I often drive you crazy about curfews, boys and letting you do things. Let me explain. My most important role I believe is to ensure that I guide you so that you have the basis to live a worthy life. What is that? It is a life where you know what you need and you articulate your needs clearly. Most of all it is a life where you contribute to something larger than yourself. I know I frustrate you when I correct your friends when they call girls "chicks". Being part of the struggle for gender equality is my calling. I want you to find yours and contribute in whatever way that is meaningful for you."

This is my last learning journey with GL as I leave the organisation in August (2013). I would like to start by saying thank you to GL for giving me the opportunity to 'live a worthy life'. Not many people are lucky enough to receive a salary for pursuing their dreams! GL gave me that opportunity for 10 years. What an amazing ride.

As I write this, I am feeling every one of the 45 years that I will celebrate in March. I want to start sentences with words such as "remember when there were four!" I joined Colleen, Ayanda, Sheena and Mothibi in January 2004. A bit like it said in the book Red Riding Hood, I am inclined to say, "My! How we have grown!"

I know we have documented GL's phenomenal growth in "Giant footprints". This story is a little different. It is about GL's giant footprints in my life. I joined GL when I was 35, a single mother with a seven-year-old daughter. I am leaving as a 45-year-old woman with a husband, a 16-year-old daughter and a five-year-old son. My life path has mirrored GL's!

I have learnt the power of conviction. Three months after joining GL, Colleen and I had one of our many 'Eureka' moments. We decided to have a Gender and Media Summit and awards ceremony. We had R250 000 and of course to quote Colleen, "Money follows good ideas." It did. We had a spectacular event at the Indaba Hotel. Many of GL's innovations started in the same way.

Hot on the heels of the 2004 Summit, GL launched the cyber dialogues in November 2004. I worked with a wonderful man from Microsoft who agreed to assist with software and technical assistance. The technician who initially was very reserved became a friend. During one of our long night vigils he shared that he had married the love of his life but she was HIV positive and he was not. He desperately wanted children. He was in the process of working through his extremely difficult dilemma. He and his wife are still together. He said that he could not have shared this information at his work place, but the GL context helped him to open up.

I had a similar dilemma. After being divorced for nine years I met my husband. I was so scared to allow anyone to enter our exclusive club of two but I thought about my cyber dialogue partner and I took a chance. I am very glad I did.

Many of my GL experiences have become life lessons for me. Working with the *"I" Story* participants makes me count my blessings every single day. The process always gives me the inspiration and impetus to continue with this work.

We are hard task masters at GL. I am always surprised at people's willingness to work with us regularly. Again I will quote our visionary leader, Colleen Lowe Morna,

“nothing succeeds like success”. People believe in GL because we deliver. It is a double edged sword and has come at great personal cost to the people who work at GL. But for all of us who have been part of this dream - what a legacy to leave.

Over the last 10 years GL has helped me learn about my own strengths and more importantly not take them for granted. We are different, made differently. My husband always quips, “Why did I meet you now? I can't get away with anything!” Thank you GL for helping me to consolidate my agency.

Work-life balance is a challenge; more so at GL because this is not just a job, it is a passion. Have I managed to improve my work-life balance? No. But, that is okay because the work has been phenomenal. I could not have learnt so much and done so much anywhere else. Every year at GL is a bit like dog years, one equals seven. I leave GL with several PhDs in work and life.



Vernon Naidoo and Kubi Rama during the GJLG Summit and Awards, Kopanong Hotel, South Africa. *Photo:Trevor Davies*

GL has taught me two major lessons: the ability to act decisively and to use knowledge to change the world. Debbie Walter, GL's former editor, used to laugh with surprise. She would be in a meeting and then one-week later plans for implementation are in process.

I have benefitted from the people I have met and worked with. Many have become my friends. My learning will never stop and I will always think about the lessons you have all taught me as I move on.

What have I learnt at work today?

Fanuel Hadzizi, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer

> *Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next.*
> ~ Gilda Radner



I have often asked myself "What have I learnt at work today?" This helps me appreciate the amount of knowledge I unconsciously acquire daily and even hourly through formal and informal interactions with colleagues at all levels of Gender Links. For example, I learn when I am problem-solving, working in a team, negotiating, networking, managing my time, writing and talking.

The nature of my work - monitoring & evaluation - demands high concentration and paying attention to details. I need to draw accurate measures of our impact. Our monthly reports are a tool for constant assessment of our progress.

However, doing a job I love means that I am highly motivated. I have learnt that I can only effectively carry out my duties if I build relationships. Then I am able to request reports and explanations from senior and junior colleagues alike without any anxiety. I can also easily ask them to explain their reports or correct errors.

When it comes to M&E our director always says, "Our system is as strong as the weakest link." When a report is not properly done it lessens the value of our overall reports. When reports are submitted late and there is little time to analyze them, the system becomes weaker.

It is never easy when I have to work late at night or during weekends to complete the files. However this has taught me valuable lessons about time management. I can now predict where my challenges will come from and now I able to work around

them. For example, sometimes I arrange to meet individuals in person rather than sending an email because it will elicit a quicker response. I believe these skills have helped me to get more work done in less time.

The M&E portfolio has evolved into a "results for change initiative". This move is an indication that the organisation is no longer only focused on collecting data and recording it but also conducting research based on evidence. I am excited to be a part of this transition. We can now measure the impact of our work across the region. As an organisation, we are creating knowledge with our own M&E tools.

The COE verification process was a real eye opener for me. It was a new experience for me to visit the councils and conduct successful workshops. Meeting distinguished civil servants was humbling. They regarded us highly because we carried the brand of Gender Links. They were keen to impress us which gave our confidence a great boost! We carried out our work with poise. In the field it was real, it was practical and informative. Probably I learnt many more in those few days than I did in many months. I learnt to be flexible, to improve my verbal and written communication, to take notes, to negotiate when we were running late, to work as part of a team, to network and to lead.

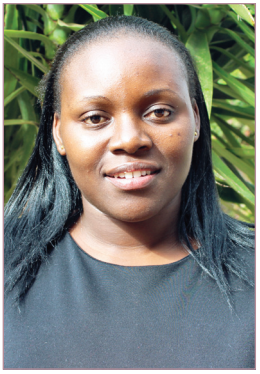


Fanuel Hadzizi and Lethubuhle Baloyi - farm manager of Beitbridge Council farm, Zimbabwe. *Photo: Clever Zulu*

Live and learn… Laugh it off and move on. A new dawn will rise

Mercilene Machisa, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Indicators Manager

> *Kudzidza hakupere*. This is a Shona proverb meaning that learning is lifelong.



Mine is a story of continual learning. With each new dawn, challenges and opportunities rise; challenges that could be overwhelming but could also grow muscle and resilience. In the past year I learnt that, "What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger".

Cascading my GBV indicators project has been a learning curve. Yes we talk of the "Giant footprints" but preceding any phenomenal impact are huge efforts and tests of endurance.

As soon as I had improved in the area of project management, I realised there was a need to learn how to manage partnerships. It is complex because of the different personalities involved. I learnt to focus on the bigger picture and the potential gains. I learnt to listen more effectively, strategize and weigh options. Some of the learning was by experience but some was by absorption. I believe I am a better networker and negotiator now because of what I have observed from my superiors and colleagues.

The past year has also been a year of relationship building for me within Gender Links. I crept out of my conservative cocoon and benefited professionally and personally from mixing more with my colleagues. I learnt to play and savour moments

with the team. I believe enjoying yourself with colleagues makes the working environment more bearable when you face challenges.

Not only did I need to manage relationships, I had to manage myself. I learnt to maintain a positive outlook in adversity as well as in good times. I learnt to accept and take responsibility for things that did not go well without being too hard on myself. I learnt to laugh and pick up myself from the dust. I learnt that success is really for those that do not quit but find it in themselves to move on.

Yes, a new day will still dawn and with it an opportunity to laugh, live and learn.



Mercilene Machisa; GL GBV Indicators Manager explaining the research process at the Zimbabwe GBV Indicators Training workshop held at ZESA Training Centre; Harare.
Photo: Cathbert Maposa

Gender and Media

Yes, we live and learn

Sikhonzile Ndlovu, Media Programme Manager

> *When we say yes to our lives, we build our confidence to set and follow our own course. We are not tied to the direction others prefer we take. And while others might be disappointed with our decision, they will respect the clarity of our commitment to what's important to us.*



Johari's window, yes I mean Johari; I know you are probably thinking this is some major tourist attraction in some forgotten city, but it is the latest addition to my book of quotable quotes! The six years I have been at Gender Links, I have been compiling a long list of wise words. 'Johari' comes from the Gender Links Management and Training course. Thank you GL for this!

My major areas of learning during 2013 have been the leadership and management training course facilitated by Anna and Gary as well as the media and local government Centre of Excellence (COE) verification exercise.

The course taught me new ways of saying "yes", and saying yes to the things that are important to me. The discussions around assertiveness reassured me that it is all right to say "no". Saying "no" means that you are saying "yes" to other priorities in your life; like being a "MacGyver" as the GL human resources manager, Vivien Bakainaga, would say!

I have always taken a keen interest in leadership and being a better manager. In a multi-cultural environment such as in Gender Links, I am presented with challenges every day as you seek to understand different personalities as well as deal with the unknown. Participating in this management course helped me gain perspective by not just looking at other people's perceptions but also giving me the confidence to articulate my thoughts. The course left me inspired and positive about the year ahead. It is in line with my decision to focus on the brighter side of life. There is really no need to rant and rave unless the house is on fire or someone is about to die.

And now for the 'verification tales' -- a phrase borrowed from Tarisai Nyamweda, the media programme officer, who has also been an active player in my learning journey. Although Tarisai has only been with GL for just a year, I have learnt a lot from this ever-smiling, positive and energetic young woman who sometimes spends hours trying to solve the many crises that the media department has had to deal with in 2012. My travelling companion on the verification process was Katherine Robinson, the new GL Editor. Katherine had only been on the job for just a week when we jetted off to Malawi to start the media COE verification in preparation for the first ever SADC Gender Protocol@Work summit.

We left with our files and two cameras, but we had not had time for discussions about how we would execute our duties in Malawi. After a whole day's discussion in Blantyre, one very hot Sunday, we were ready to go. Katherine's positive attitude and sense of commitment to duty left me inspired. Never have I seen a new staff member work with such enthusiasm and energy, literally hitting the ground running. The dedication and attention to details shown by Daud Kayisi, the former GMDC Officer, reminded me that once linked, forever Gender Linked.

When we met our facilitator, Dalitso Nkunika, to discuss the final programme we were shocked to realise that she had set up four appointments for us in one day. We tried to shift some of them, but Dalitso advised against it because media personnel are so busy. Through team work and good communication we achieved what we set out to do. I can safely say it was great to be part of such a team - the winning team.

As I journeyed across Malawi, amidst the 30 something degree heat, I realised how important our work is. We now have media institutions that take gender

mainstreaming seriously. The media houses made the effort to show their work over the past two years. Now as GL gears up for its second DFID PPA report, I am confident that we will show that our organi-sation is growing. Moreover, the visit to the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation was icing on my cake. Talking to the committed management team proved that buy-in from the highest levels is the greatest catalyst for change.

However, it has not been sunshine every day. There have been moments when I have wondered if it is worth it! All the challenges have contributed to my learning and growth as a manager. I have therefore learnt to focus more on the positive, to take adversity in my stride and to rise above all challenges. I have also learnt to spend more time on what I believe is important - things that benefit the organisation and myself as an individual. This is line with my motto to follow my own course in 2013.

SO YES WE LIVE AND LEARN.



Sikhonzile Ndlovu ,Media Programme manager, awarding a media COE certificate to the Human Resources Officer, Julieth Lamosai, Business Times Limited newspaper at the Tanzania SADC Protocol at Work in-country summit. *Photo: Fanuel Hadzizi*

My roller coaster ride

Tarisai Nyamweda, Media Programme Officer

> *Without a little discomfort every day I would not have been able to continue growing. I now believe all the good things in life are outside our comfort zones.*



"You did not fill in the paper right," said the immigration officer. "Tell me where you will be staying because the Polytechnic is a school." I waited for one hour becoming more frustrated and angry. "Call whoever is waiting for you to tell you where you will be staying," insisted the officer at Hosea Kutako Airport. I frantically called Abigail Jacobs Williams and Sarry Xoagus Eises who were waiting for me to arrive at the Polytechnic of Namibia (PON) for the Namibia Local Government Summit.

With a shaky voice I just said to the officer the "PON Hotel School". After typing vigorously on her computer she finally let me pass. May be it was just a bad day for her.

Struggling with a hefty suitcase full of publications as well as monitoring and evaluation forms, I was stopped again to be asked where I was going with this bag full of books. I was not ready for another session of interrogation. I was already late. I felt that this was going to be the worst trip ever. I let all my frustrations out on my Facebook page. This is just how bad some days can get.

I have been at Gender Links for a year now. I can describe my learning journey at GL as a roller coaster ride. So much has happened that is worthy of reflection. Not all days have been good. So many opportunities for growth have come my way and I embraced all of them with an open heart and a willingness to learn.

My travelling around South Africa and in the region has made me realise that I am a link in a strong chain. It has pushed me to pull my weight and not to become the

weakest link. Fear has taken over me on many occasions as I embarked on news writing during the Local Government Summit 2012, training journalists and carrying out the verification exercise in the media houses and local councils.



Tarisai Nyamweda and Ambrose Zwane at a media COE Stage 2 meeting in Swaziland. *Photo: Sikhonzile Ndlovu*

Although I was not confident entering the newsrooms, the confidence that others had in me helped me to stand in front of highly qualified people to push the gender agenda. I have also realised that whatever task is given to me regardless of the size is equally important.

Just the drive to carry out the verification process of the Centres of Excellence in Zimbabwe was an adventure in itself. At the Beitbridge border post between South Africa and Zimbabwe we were asked whether we were carrying any political material because the logo on the car says "… equality and justice." The immigration officer on duty wanted to understand our goals and told us that justice in South Africa was not the same as justice in Zimbabwe. This raised questions in my mind. Were these not universal rights? The car attracted much attention as we drove to the councils

in the south of the country. I found field work to be an enriching experience. It taught me about the diverse communities that Gender Links works in. I learnt about how different people live, their attitudes, their efforts and their plights. The experience made me count my blessings; naming them all one by one. I also now appreciate the hard work carried out by our country office staff and the challenges they face.

The highs and lows that I have encountered during my journey at Gender Links have helped me to grow professionally and personally. Without a little discomfort each day I would not have been able to continue growing. I now believe all the good things in life are outside our comfort zones. This learning journey has been incomparable. I need to continue to enjoy the ride and I hope to make it count every day.



Tarisai Nyamweda intervieweing Jenifa Dube a market stand owner and a beneficiary from the Beitbridge Town Council local economic development project. *Photo: Clever Zulu*

Gender and Governance

Taking a step back in order to take a flight of steps forward
Working hard, playing hard: wheel balancing

Sifiso Dube, Gender Justice and Local Government Manager

> *Learning is a lifelong journey.*

> *Freedom cannot be achieved unless women are emancipated from all forms of oppression* ~ Nelson Mandela

> *No money, no fun* ~ Colleen Lowe Morna



It seems like a life-time but I have only worked five months at Gender Links. I now appreciate a common joke at the office that if one works at Gender Links (GL), then one can work at a military base. I wanted to experience being a foot soldier or an air marshal, so here I am still standing. I am struck by the energy and dedication shown by the staff; from the top person to the last person in the hierarchy.

Gender equality is close to my heart, therefore I am not feeling lost. The cherry on the cake is that GL links the work at grassroots level to the policy-making processes at government level, regional level and even at international level.

As the manager of the Gender Justice and Governance Programme, I coordinate all GL's governance work in 10 countries. The most important role of this portfolio is to coordinate the operations of the country managers stationed in the country

offices of GL in the SADC region. Often, this involves coaching and mentoring country managers. Human resource management skills are essential as well as training and capacity building skills. I have to apply different models to different individuals.



Sifiso Dube during the COE verification exercise in Swaziland. *Photo: Ncane Maziya*

My knowledge of the region has been useful. The use of effective systems such as monitoring and evaluation has been critical in measuring progress. It is also inspiring and motivating to be on the ground with the country managers to experience the navigation skills and networking that they have to apply when carrying out governance work. The governance programme requires a team effort with other programmes such as the Alliance, Justice and Media. I often provide support to the governance programme by reporting and writing proposals to donors. The major mistake I have made is to apply the same methodology in coordinating deliverables for the governance function. I have since learnt that different styles work more effectively.

Another mistake I have made is to work without reflecting on the end goal. This has made me realise that I could repeat similar errors without applying the 360 degree approach in viewing my work and of those I manage.

The guidance of senior management has helped me learn in a strategic way. I attribute a lot of valuable lessons to the GL CEO, Colleen Lowe Morna, who has shown me a holistic approach for carrying out my duties. The support of other programme managers has been valuable as most of them have institutional memory. I have learnt a lot from the country managers who have massive political navigation skills in their bases as well as high dedication to the governance programme. I have learnt to do more multi-tasking at GL and yet maintaining composure in aligning my work to the systems such as the monitoring and evaluation framework. The interface between the governance work and corporate services has enabled me to merge programmes with monetary issues at a glance.

The valuable support of the Country Operations Manager, Mpumelelo Mlilo, has been like a skills transfer exercise. I have learnt a great deal from GL partners such as local authorities, the alliance network and the donor community. The cross-cutting issues that affect GL also affect them and hence there is a common goal of achieving gender equality despite the shrinking resource base.

I had a chance to observe the 2012 summit before I joined GL and I was impressed by the way GL brought together a critical mass to show case best practices on gender mainstreaming. It was also an opportunity to learn from each other. The evidence gathering process was in-depth and the participants were motivated.

I have learnt to use pictorial evidence in my writing to show the impact of my work; this affirms the saying that a picture says a thousand words. I value the principles that GL upholds of respecting each other and making one's voice heard. This has helped me gain confidence in seeking clarity for my work and information from colleagues.

I will use the skills that I have learnt to coordinate the governance programme. I will also use the skills that I have gained so far at GL to be a better writer, a better coach and a better mentor. Taking time to reflect has been imparted to me as a life skill and I will use it for both my personal and work life. I need to build a balanced wheel of life in order to be effective in my work.

I have used my frustrations in my learning curve. I weigh the positives against the negatives and bind these with my personal principle of not letting the sun go down whilst I am still angry.

I can surely be a better manager through providing the necessary guidance to my subordinates. I need to ensure that they follow systems and understand the purpose of the systems. I can be a better person by learning to say NO and not swallowing more that I can chew.

GL's giant footprints could be more effective if they provide a shade for its staff and partners. There is a lot of untapped potential in some country managers and some programme officers - this can be achieved through a skills assessment process. I am still learning and I embrace each daily lesson as a life skill for if I do not learn I cease to live.

Learning is a life-long journey

Ntombensha Mbadlanyana, South Africa Local Government Country Manager

> *And so it is with you - we are in charge of our attitudes.*
>
> *Yesterday cannot come back to hurt me today unless I allow it to happen, I choose to be positive* ~ ED



Yet another learning journey! We need to take stock. The year of 2012 was an interesting year for me on so many levels. I returned to Gender Links (GL) after resigning in 2011. I knew that this time things would be different. However, I was not anticipating half of what I encountered. I was in for a ride indeed, relocating for six months to Limpopo to take on the job as project manager for the Irish Aid gender-based violence (GBV) witchcraft project in Vhembe and Mopani.

Originally when I heard about the Irish Aid project in April 2012 there was mention of a consultant managing the project. When I was informed by our Chief Executive Officer (CEO) that I would be deployed to Limpopo I was beyond shocked. I would have to work with people from diverse backgrounds as well as get used to the Limpopo heat and severe thunderstorms. I remember saying in the CEO's office, with my other colleagues present, that I needed a strong cocktail of Jack Daniels Whiskey & lime to calm my nerves. Everyone burst out laughing. When I got home that day I did have my cocktail; I knew that I was going to be embarking on one hectic journey!

I chose to remain optimistic and always reminded myself that what happened to me yesterday cannot come and hurt me today unless I allow it to.

Relocating to Limpopo was not easy as I did not know what to expect. I had to work closely with the Limpopo Department of Health and in the beginning there were a few issues. It was particularly challenging because I was expected to manage a

complex initiative. I had never been a manager before, just a facilitator. I found it hard to be firm and respectful; to delegate tasks whilst also be responsive.

I have learnt that it is OK to make mistakes as long as I grow from them. There have been many moments where I have been hard on myself. Kubi Rama, who was the senior project manager at the time, would remind me to breathe and take things in my stride. I took her advice to heart.

I grew to love my deployment in Limpopo and my confidence as a manager also started to grow. I discovered my own inner strength. I often under-estimated my own capabilities. Once again, GL has given me an opportunity to grow and enter a different space in my life.

I am looking forward to the year ahead. I know that 2013 will be a year of good opportunities. I will continue to grow and stay positive.



Saeanna Chingamuka and Ntombi Mbadlanyana supporting Zambia during the AFCON Tournament. *Photo: Tinashe Padare*

Walking in strides and taking giant leaps!

Nomthandazo Mankazana, Gender and Governance Programme Officer

> *I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I ended up where I am supposed to be…* ~ Alison Botha, Author



I walked into the office close to tears and filled with anger after King Goodwill Zwelithini, a leader and influential citizen of South Africa, had made a derogatory statement about being gay. I needed a way to vent and express my opinion on the lack of support the gay community has from prominent leaders in the country. I wrote an article titled "African leaders must recognise LBGTI rights".

In the article I stated how African leaders should take the first initiative in recognizing the rights of the (lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgendered) LBGTI community. Then I had my first début on radio with SA FM, a prominent radio station in South Africa which invited me to their talk-show to discuss the article I had written.

Covering the Mosselbay Municipality's "No More Victim Summit" was a life changing experience for me, because not only did I accomplish tasks that I thought I could not do, but I did them well. I took all the teachings of the former governance manager, Abigail Jacobs Williams and put them into practice. This in turn resulted in considerable media coverage for GL and for me too as a young gender activist.

Also, I recently took up the challenge of being the face of Gender Links during the Centres of Excellence Verification process in Lesotho and Namibia. I travelled through the mountains of Lesotho reached their peaks, touched the sky and proceeded to the desert land of Namibia. Contrasting these two countries with South Africa has made me realise that the grass is not always greener on the other side. In order to make it work in life one needs to reassess the situation and change direction when necessary without taking a step back.

As programme officer at GL, I am a link between head office and the country offices. I provide a supporting role to the governance manger as well as the country managers. Throughout the day I communicate and provide assistance to the interns, assistants and programme officers. Between July and September I also worked as the executive assistant.

In September I met my current manager, Sifisosami Dube. I had to orient her around the governance unit and explain the tracking progress of the stages in the COE process. I felt proud of myself and still do as I have proven not only to myself but to the whole governance team that I am indeed in the right place at the right time. GL is in the process of "kneading" me into a good manager.

I have learnt that to be an activist of any sort one needs to be an active member in the cause. Activism is not a 9 to 5 job it is every second, every minute, every hour and every day.



Nomthi Mankanzana during Take Back the Night march. *Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna*

Country Offices

Botswana

Keabonye Ntsabane, Country Manager Botswana

Life could be easy if we could all lead by example.



My work involves planning, researching, profiling the organisation, team-building and motivating my staff. This is a huge task and can be frustrating at times.

I am now in my fourth year at Gender Links but it was only last year that I learnt that as a manager it is important to be knowledgeable about your entire programme. I also learnt that when managing others you should be evidence driven. I appreciate that coaching and good communication skills are the pillars of the organisation; it was my recent work with volunteers and interns that brought this home.

I had believed that the volunteers and interns just needed a little orientation to do the job well because they had strong academic backgrounds. I was proven wrong. After they had moved on to their other jobs, I was shocked that most of their reports were incomplete. I had to change the way I do things; now I make sure that I always sign off on such work.

My work on gender mainstreaming in local government has given me exposure and confidence to address politicians in councils. I learnt that Gender Links needs dynamic people who are role models to others. Challenges are the daily bread. Gender links competes in a world where NGOs are all scrambling for resources. You need to perform at a high standard to keep pace with other NGOs. You need to be proactive and act fast. Sometimes I feel we plan while we are thin on the ground, but actually GL builds the staff capacity which enables us to perform.

Since working with Gender Links I have learnt to be assertive and more confident. I have the GL mission and knowledge about the programmes on top of my head. Last year when I gave the welcome address at the Barometer launch, a participant said, "KB you are amazing; you have just talked without any notes; others were reading their speeches from a paper."

Gender Links has contributed to my learning by ensuring that as an employee we share our experiences and information. It is healthy that as a human being you make mistakes. For example, last year when I had to cancel a dinner that I had not fully communicated about to Gender Links I felt belittled but that is part of the learning journey.

Regarding recommendations, I think Gender Links could do better if it reduced the number of training days. Most training sessions are too long; we forget some of the information especially at my age! But I also am aware too that it is important that when I learn, I do not think of my age and must not think that it is a waste of time.

Roos and Vincent have contributed to my learning as we spend a lot of time in the office together. Lastly behind my success at Gender Links are Chief of Operations Kubi Rama and the Chief Executive Officer, Colleen Lowe Morna. When we met in the 90's, I was shy and not confident. I did not think that I could hold such a post and be a "star" on gender-related issues. But I have received an award from Gender Links for being an innovative staff member and last year I received another award for my role as a gender activist from the Women in Business from America following a recommendation from the Head of SADC gender Unit, Magdeline Madibela.



Keabonye Ntsabane, Botswana Country manager, demonstrating the gender mainstreaming manual at the GL stall during the BALA Conference.

Photo: Vincent Galathwe

Be the change we want to see!

Roos van Dorp, Programme Officer Botswana & SADC Liaison Office

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



As a senior programme officer in the Botswana and the SADC Liaison Office, I give support to the implementation of Gender Links' programmes. I have participated in gender mainstreaming in the media and local government COE programmes, and have carried out research for the SADC Protocol Barometer and the GBV indicators. I also do financial administration and, like in any small office, attend to other day-to-day matters that arise. This wide range of duties makes my work at GL always interesting and challenging. It has taught me to multi-task but remain focussed at the same time.

This year we continued working with 7 media houses and 25 local councils. As our in-country activities expand and intensify, we learned the importance of documenting our progress and the impact that the activities are having. In the current climate the work is only as good as the evidence we can produce. It has been a great learning journey at GL this year as we were further trained on monitoring and evaluation. We have successfully collected evidence on how people's lives have changed due to our endeavours.

To collect this evidence, we embarked on several verification visits to partner organisations and individuals who we have been working with over the years. It turned out to be an insightful and enjoyable exercise, as it gave us more time to spend with the people who implement the gender action plans on a daily basis. We learnt more about their daily struggles and accomplishments. I met the most inspiring people in the most remote places. In Maun, a town on the edge of Botswana's Okavango Delta, we met Tlamelo Makgetho, who runs a sewing workshop that is producing school uniforms, bags and other clothing. She is confined to a wheelchair,

has three children but no husband or partner to help her. Thanks to assistance from the local council, the sewing workshop generates income and she is able to provide for her three children. Like so many women she is persevering despite all the challenges life has given her. In my opinion she should be on the cover of every newspaper and magazine. It also made it so clear to me is at local level is where lives can be changed and this is why we should continue pushing for issues of gender and women's empowerment to be set higher on the agenda.

Although the impact of our work is most visible at local level, this year I also learnt more about the struggle for gender equality across levels of society and institutional systems. We produced the third annual national SADC Protocol Barometer report and continued dissemination of the findings of the GBV Indicators research.

My greatest learning moments at Gender Links this year were when our CEO, Colleen Lowe Morna, shared her insights on gender and feminist theories and implementation during a training session for staff. She takes me back to school and shines new light on societal systems and practices that are hindering women to achieve their full potential in life. I learnt that I need to be the change we want to see and it is only from there we can inspire change in others.



Verification visit to a sewery in Maun supported by the council for Tlamelo Makgetho, mother of three and living with a disability. *Photo: Lucia Mukamure*

We learn to change attitudes and behaviour

Vincent Onthusitse Galatlhwe, Programme Assistant Botswana

> *Be the change you wish to see around* ~ Ghandi



During the past four years that I have worked with Gender Links I managed to change and influence not only my behaviour but I also had an impact on the behaviour and attitudes of my community.

I managed to open the eyes and ears of the community around me about the consequences of GBV in the family, society and also in the world. Gender Links (GL) made me learn more about work, relationships with others and about life in general.

Firstly I worked with GL as a volunteer but now I am a programme assistant. It has given me the opportunity to engage in all issues that the office deals with.

As people, we make mistakes. One of my mistakes was to submit an assignment late. This taught me to utilise time well and always be punctual. I learnt the importance of planning: how to make schedules; how to divide my time for each task; how to carry the tasks out so I can meet deadlines and at the same time fulfil the objectives.

Being a programme assistant has contributed so much to my learning because now I am engaged in many more activities than before. My main mentors are the CEO, Colleen Lowe Morna, Kebonye Ntsabane (Sister KB), as she likes to call herself, and my lovely sister, Roos, who taught me that work does not stop after working hours. Sometimes we work during public holidays. As for Colleen, I wonder if she ever sleeps. She can send an email talking about work at around 2 am! I realise that GBV is a concern that needs to be stopped in any way and at any time.

Working with GL has helped me to be more flexible. It has improved my IT skills. I have learnt how to organise media clippings, the photo library and data as well as

how to upload M&E materials on line. I have also learnt about video shooting. I am proud to share with you that I won the GL award for best photographer of the year.

By always ensuring that I do my tasks on time and perform my best, I will have a positive impact on the growth of GL and the awareness of GBV in society. I am thankful and grateful to the warm, caring and loving GL family. I wish GL success in the future in its struggle to end GBV.

YES WE CAN!



Botswana Program Assistant, Vincent Galatlhwe, filming during the workshop with the Botswana Christian Council.
Photo: Roos van Dorp

The greatest challenges can be overcome by joining hands together as a team!

Malepota Mafeka, Lesotho Country Manager

> *This time around we would sit every day in the morning to plan for the day. Since then I saw myself growing as a manager and learning also the importance of delegating, because a manager who delegates his/her duties to other staff members allows growth of such staff and builds confidence amongst them as well.*



During the first few months of my arrival at the Gender Links office, I had to prepare for the regional summit.

I remember when I was told that Lesotho would not be holding an in-country summit I got excited, hoping that I will have less work. Contrary to my expectations, there was too much work to do.

Just before the regional summit in Johannesburg, Mary Ntolo, my programme assistant, and I were running around trying to organise all the participants. We managed to get them all accredited.

However, during the summit presentations, as we were preparing our participants for the different category presentations, I discovered that some presenters had been given the wrong presentations. I got so frustrated and felt like a loser, but deep down there was a very strong beat that kept saying to me 'you have to make it' and indeed I started looking for help. I found sister Kubi Rama with whom I confided. She calmed me down saying, “Not to worry sister, everything will be solved.” Finally everything was OK and it ended with a happy moment where for the first time there was a winner from Lesotho. It was indeed a moment of joy; hard work had paid off.

Just as we were about return to our countries and I was hoping to take a sigh of relief, it was announced at a GL meeting that the first training of trainers (TOT) would be held in Lesotho. I felt like disappearing into thin air and never reappearing again. I also learnt that I had to raise funds for the activity although some ground work had been laid by my predecessor with the GIZ. I asked myself many questions: How we are going to do the work and make it a success? Finally, I told myself that this would be a good opportunity to show case my experiences and expand my knowledge about the COE process. I would allow myself to learn from my colleagues. I saw this challenge once again as an opportunity for opening the doors for a new beginning and a breakthrough to become a champion in my work.

Although the TOT took place during winter in Lesotho when it was extremely cold, the turnout was good and included GL country managers. During this activity I learnt to be SMART. I learnt to plan on time and to be efficient and effective. Again I learnt to face challenges with calmness. This time, each morning we sat down together to plan for the day.

I have witnessed myself grow in my job. My communication skills have improved, including my IT skills, and I have learnt to get on with different personalities. As a manager, I have learnt the importance of delegating. A manager who delegates duties to other staff members allows their growth and builds their confidence. As I shared responsibilities with Mary Ntolo, the sessions began to run smoothly until the very last day of the workshop. During the workshop everybody was hands on and it was amazing how even the participants were even leading some sessions.

The launch of the Lesotho Local Government report took place on the last day of the workshop. The event was so well attended, even by government officials, despite the fact that it happened during the inauguration of the new government in Lesotho.

Finally, I see things differently and continue to learn from my mistakes and how not to repeat them.



Country Manager Malepota Mafeka addressing participants during COE stage 3 - Makhoarane Council Lesotho.
Photo: Ntholo Lekau

I can do it!

Ntolo Lekau, Programme Assistant, Lesotho GL office

> *Knowing is not enough, we must apply. Willing is not enough, we must do.* ~ Johann von Goethe



I could not believe it when my name was called out at the Gender Links staff awards for monitoring and evaluation. It was a dream that had come true. I had never felt that appreciated before. It felt awesome and it made me love what I am doing even more. I appreciated that I had come a long way since joining GL as an intern at the Lesotho office.

Now I work closely with local councillors in Lesotho's 10 districts. I have to help participants to understand the importance of all our M&E forms so that they fill them in honestly and with love. Our forms differ depending on the different stages of the process and sometimes we have to administer many forms. It has been a huge challenge as most of our councillors are illiterate. I have to make sure that whenever necessary I help a councillor to fill in the forms. I explain that the forms are important because they reflect what they have learnt as individuals and as council.

Sometimes, it is difficult for me to give so much individual attention. I remember a counsellor complaining to me saying, "Madame Ntolo you haven't helped me and I am still waiting for you." I laughed so much because I realized how much Gender Links work is appreciated. It motivates me to work with a smile on my face and assist everyone who needs my help. These experiences have taught me that people are different and I must accommodate them all. Most importantly I have learnt that these experiences have made me who I am today. I spend most of my time at workshops with councillors, many of them are the age of my parents and some even the age of my grandparents.

I must also remember my country manager who has mentored me through this journey, not only as a manager but she has also been like a parent. I have learnt to

be patient and take control of difficult situations. For example, recently we had to collect 400 forms from each council that we were working with. It was such a difficult task because I knew that poor people in the rural areas may not understand the benefit of spending time with us to fill out the forms. However, I worked hard with my manager to come up with a good strategy to get the forms. The people we worked with were so helpful and most of the forms were collected.

Then, during the 16 days of activism we were asked to collect 20 *"I" Stories* from each council. This was even more of a challenge than the forms. We had to get the stories first in Sesotho and then translate them. We also had to allow time for people to decide whether they even wanted to give us their stories. I sometimes had to be like a counsellor after they shared their stories, but I managed it. People believed in me. I just provided a listening ear and they would thank me endlessly. I have a new skill that I did not know I had - counselling. Thanks to Gender Links, I now feel that if somebody can do something, I can also do it!



Ntolo Lekau submitting M&E forms to M&E officer Fanuel Hadzizi. *Photo: Laurentia Golley*

Negotiating with funders: Yes We Can!

Ialfine Papisy, Country Manager Madagascar

Our aspirations are our possibilities ~ Dr Samuel Johnson



As the country manager, I have to send reports about every activity implemented by Gender Links (GL). Deadlines were really stressful for me. When the phone rang and I could see the caller was GL South Africa, I felt anxious. But now I have learnt to get my priorities right and to plan more effectively.

However, I would like to point out that sometimes our reports are already completed when we receive the templates. Then we have to write or amend the reports again. But I am not easily discouraged. And with the support of my team, we make things happen. The importance of this strong team spirit was one of the things I have learnt from GL!

Looking back over 2012, I should highlight two events that offered me an opportunity to learn. The first one concerns fundraising. I received an email from our CEO, Colleen Lowe Morna, because she learnt from someone in New York that Gender Links Madagascar had been granted $US 70,000. She was wondering why I had not informed her myself. However I had not received any feedback from UNDP since applying for the funds in 2011.

But the most important lesson was still to come. Originally the funds were granted to finance workshops to build the capacities of women candidates for the forthcoming elections. Colleen asked me to renegotiate with the donor to use the funds for the councils targetted in the Centre of Excellence initiative. I was skeptical. But nevertheless I shared the project with UNDP and finally they accepted. We now have 51 councils in the COE project. This taught me that we can negotiate even with major

donors like UNDP. We should not always have preconceived ideas that people or institutions are inflexible. I learnt from this event that everything can be negotiated.

The highlight of the year was the opening of the Gender Links Madagascar Office at Ankorondrano. Our head office is now located at "Immeuble le Premium, ex village des jeux, Ankorondrano, Antananarivo 101" and this has brought about big changes for me . I had to get used to my new working hours, getting up early and going out to work. Gone is the time when my 'office home' or 'home office' was just a flight of stairs away! Now I have to cope with traffic jams, particularly on Monday mornings! But it was time for us to have a separate office; private life and business activities sometimes cannot be mixed!

Life's little or big lessons may have varied faces; you just learn to decipher the different facets of our job. Working with Gender Links can go beyond our expectations if we are open-minded and positive!



Facilitating the stage 1-2 of the COE process in Atsimo Andrefana. *Photo: Zotonatenaina Razanadratefa*

Experience enables you to avoid mistakes

Claudia Rakotonirina, Programme Officer, Madagascar office

> *All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better.* ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson



It is now more than two years since I started work with Gender Links (GL). The year of 2012 was a difficult year but also an inspiring one.

As a programme officer at the GL Madagascar office, I am in charge of the smooth running of all administrative and programme issues at the office. My tasks are varied but complementary, including overall planning, reporting as internal and external communication.
After the first national summit in 2012, the GL Madagascar office became well known in the country, having had a huge impact across all the country's 22 regions. Since the summit we have worked hard to keep GL's high profile in the country.

For me, one of the biggest challenges has been the Centre of Excellence (COE) media programme. At university, I had studied how the media industry worked and the huge impact it has on people. I learnt about the theories of communications but I had not learnt about gender inequality in the media.

Madagascar has hundreds of media houses. In Antananarivo, GL works with six media houses who accepted to be part of the COE programme. However, their main goals were still profits, profits and profits, which were sometimes translated into gender insensitive information and gender stereotypes.

Facilitating the COE process has required strong communication skills and a good relationship with our media partners. Even to invite media practitioners to a workshop was difficult because of their busy schedules and also because gender issues are still

not a priority for them. We had to be strategic with journalists and to adapt our schedule to theirs. For example, if we did not send invitations early, they would not come to meetings. I learnt that I needed to plan our media activities well in advance.

We had huge challenges during the 16 days of activism. Five councils hosted events, which meant five sites for journalists. Although journalists were motivated to go to the field, convincing their directors or editors to let them write stories was difficult. They needed to be persuaded that the event was indeed newsworthy. After this event, I learnt how the media houses function and how to communicate better with media practitioners.

I have also gained time management skills, so I can meet deadlines. Each month, we have several deadlines to meet such as the payment of employee taxes, pension funds, and office rent. I have learnt that if you are well organized, you have the time to concentrate more on important matters. Also we work better without stress.

The year 2012 has also taught me the basics of finance. Maintaining the petty cash helped me to know how to do reconciliations and finance management. And I have learnt to draft budgets. I hope to learn more this year and the year after. Learning never ends and experience enables you to avoid mistakes.



Corine, Misa, Claudia Rakotonirina and Zorah at the National Summit. *Photo: Zotonatenaina Razanadratefa*

Thanks to IT

Zotonantenaina Razanadratefa, Programme Assistant Madagascar

> *Learning never ends.*



My professional life began at Gender Links Madagascar office. During three years, I have learnt many things and met many people.

I have learnt how to classify files as hard copies or as electronic documents. Before, when I was asked for a document, I took a long time to search. I would even open all my documents. This affected my productivity which would be a real problem especially now that we work with 51 councils. I have also developed intellectually in politics, economics, and especially in social affairs. Before, following the news had not been important for me.

My IT skills have improved and thanks to Gender Links, I have a 3G which enables me to consult my emails at home or during weekends. Now I do not have to go to the office or to the cyber café to send urgent documents.

Last year, I learnt an important lesson about time management. I missed my flight home after the field assistants training in Johannesburg. Since then, when I have to go somewhere by plane, I arrive three hours before takeoff!

Lastly, I am learning financial skills. We developed a financial partnership with the UNFPA and the UNDP. Each organization has its own conditions and instructions on financial deliverables and I had to adapt my reports accordingly. At first, it was

stressful because I had to do and re-do again my reports according to their requirements. I have now learnt the financial reconciliation models for these two organisations.



Rakotomalala Irma, Razanadratefa Zotonantenaina and Amina during the COE Stage 3 process in Morondrava. *Photo: Ialfine Papisy*

Learning is a lifelong journey

Loga Virahsawmy, Director, Gender Links Francophone Office

Never too old, never too late, never too sick to start reinventing oneself. ~ Loga Virahsawmy

Not trying means accepting defeat. ~ Loga Virahsawmy

«Le sentiment d'avoir bien fait ou mission accomplie »
(Sense of achievement)



The year 2012 has been memorable for both its challenges and achievements.

The year started really well with the Prime Minister of Mauritius accepting to meet with me. I did not regret spending a fortune on a linen outfit and on a new pair of shoes for the meeting. The Prime Minister even commented that I was looking smart! Besides meeting with me, the Prime Minister had also informed his cabinet about the gender-based violence (GBV) indicators research.

Two of the ministers attending the launch of the findings of the GBV indicators research made their "mea culpa" in front of the audience. The Minister of Labour told how he is ashamed at the number of GBV cases in the country. He related how he had hit a man in public because of a case of GBV. He had to explain to the police that the man had been violent to his wife. The Minister of Health also commented that he had not realised that there could have been gender discrimination in his family. He said, "I am sure my father would not have sold his sugar cane fields if he

only had daughters. But since he sold his land to send his sons for further studies, he had to do the same for his daughters."

Another highlight was the 16-days of activism during which we set up cyber dialogues and organised phone-ins. Over 150,000 people listened to us. We gave voices to the voiceless!

I had the greatest Christmas present ever. Women's representation in the local councils increased from 6% to 31%. I physically jumped. I made my husband, children and grandchildren so worried that I jumped so high at my age!

Being the Director of the Francophone Office has brought many challenges. I now work not only in Mauritius but also in Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The work is difficult but seeing the results leaves a sense of pride.

The COE local government workshops were also a major achievement. We even managed to get a council on board which previously did not want to work with Gender Links. It has not only formed part of the COE councils but has also signed the action plan and has a budget for gender issues. Indeed, this COE is our torch bearer because they are now implementing their action plan and fund our workshops.

In addition we managed to convince all the big media enterprises of Mauritius to sign an MOU with Gender Links and we have facilitated trainings with their journalists. The media had been a difficult turf so success in this area is one of our best achievements. Organising the visit of the CEO, Colleen Lowe Morna, in Mauritius in October was another significant event.

Last year saw the opening of Gender Links libraries in Mauritius. It started with a Gender Links library in Grand Port/Savanne, one of the localities in Mauritius. Now all libraries in the localities have a section reserved for Gender Links.

Not only have we delivered on all projects to everyone's satisfaction, we also obtained our first funding. It may sound like peanuts compared to what Gender Links is used to but for us this has been a sense of satisfaction. Workshops have been conducted without Gender Links spending a cent. All media workshops are funded by the media enterprises. This is Value for Money (VFM).

Although not consciously, I am sure I have made mistakes. My greatest one, may be, is trying to do everything too fast and not accepting mediocrity. As a result I lost my programme assistant who just took her bag and left the office. And sometimes I have lost my patience with officials. There have been lots of promises that are not always fulfilled. For example a minister agreed to sign an MOU with us while her staff advised her not to. My mistake was that I should have gone through the proper channels.

There are GL activities that I really enjoy; for example the trainings for women in politics; I could do this all my life. However, the GBV indicators project has been a big challenge. Maybe if I was closer to the head office I would not have felt the difficulties so much or the loneliness working on such a major project. Writing the report was a tough experience. I worked around the clock, and had to keep telephoning stakeholders, pressing them for information. I am grateful to GBV Indicators Manager Mercy Machisa who responded to my queries and wrote a large chunk of the report.



The Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation interviewing Loga Virahsawmy, Director of Gender Links, Francophone Office, during the launch of The War @ Home in November 2012. *Photo: Mena Gopaul*

All members of staff, young and old, the experienced and the inexperienced have contributed to my learning at GL. Having to coach the young members of staff like Ghirish and Mena has been a learning experience. Receiving guidance and advice from GL CEO Colleen Lowe Morna has been a real blessing. Colleen has asked me to do work that I never in my wildest dream thought I would be able to do.

The 2012 16-day campaign has been a learning curve; learning new IT skills as well as working with radio and conducting research. I still cannot believe that I have done it.

My experience in the DRC in April/May taught me a few lessons. My budget for the trip had not been properly thought through and was far too little. Not having enough money in a country like the DRC was challenging. After shedding a few tears I sorted myself out and counted my blessings for finding a solution with my counterparts. If we do not teach others, if we do not share what we know, if we do not communicate, we are the loser. Shall I say *"Umoja"*? If we all have the spirit of love and togetherness, then Gender Links is the best place to work.

Not only do I try to understand human nature better, I feel I get on better with people. I am more confident in myself. I accept challenges. And at least now I value myself. This is something new as I was always praising others without praising myself.

GL can perform better by putting firm systems in place to encourage staff to always reply to emails. Managers must plan better so that we receive all documents before we start a project. They must be able to explain their projects and after any important meeting, minutes must be shared with all those involved.

Lastly I would like to change my wheel of life and have more time for recreation and for my family. This will improve my work-life balance.

Thrown into the deep end!
This is how I recall my learning journey so far

Menashi Uma Gopaul, Programme Officer Mauritius

> *Eventually, if there isn't deep integrity and fundamental character strength, the challenges of life will cause true motives to surface and human relationship failure will replace short-term success.*
>
> ~ Stephen Covey



I always wanted to be involved in development projects at grassroots level because I am people-centred. However, when I was offered the job as the GL programme officer, I was apprehensive because of the amount of work expected from me. With the support from a wise friend and my family, I accepted the job.

My first day of work was at head office, Johannesburg, in the conference room where a major upcoming summit was being discussed. During the whole meeting I was constantly wondering what the "Centres of Excellence" were, just to tell you how clueless I was!

Being a scholar in social sciences who studied in South Africa and conducted research on gender-based violence, local economic development as well as HIV/AIDS, you would have thought I knew quite a bit but I soon realised I only knew the tip of the iceberg. I had thought there were not many social problems in Mauritius. But the research on GBV indicators taught me differently. The media monitoring session was a revelation to me too. I had not realised how women were so unrepresented in the media and also how important it is to have women's perspectives in reports. I now read newspapers and watch the news on television with a totally different eye.

I am impressed how ministers and other high profile people profusely praise the work of GL; Loga Virahsawmy is "creating a positive change in the country," said the

Minister of Social Integration. Loga's work has contributed significantly to the amendment of the Local Government Act which stipulates that women should represent at least one-third of its municipal and district councillors; this is a ground-breaking step in the governance sector. The Minister of Local Government acknowledged that GL had played a major role in bringing this about.

Working with Loga is an experience on its own. Admittedly, the first few encounters were somewhat intimidating. However, I soon realised she is not scary but simply a highly committed person and an intransigent perfectionist when it comes to work. She is a role model. When I would have given up a long time ago, she sticks to the work because she believes in it. I am amazed at her ease with the work and how she builds the confidence of her staff. However, women working for women can sometimes be pretty intense; Ghirish, our programme assistant, brings a breath of fresh air in the office. He is practical, sharp, always willing to help and most importantly keeps calm, finding solutions whenever Loga and I are at a loss.

Last year, we had the pleasure of having GL's CEO, Colleen Lowe Morna, for a week in Mauritius. Her visit brought a sense of structure to the office. It was an experience to have the woman behind all this good work with us. In addition, the interactions I have had with my GL colleagues from different parts of the SADC region have been enriching. I appreciate all the diversity particularly the different languages, the food and the local jokes. I also see how alike we all are at a certain level. I feel truly blessed to have such an experience at a young age.

The multidisciplinary aspects of GL can be overwhelming. You sometimes ask yourself how a person can focus on so many different tasks at so many levels. But when I look back, I have accomplished things which few people of my age have done. I have spoken live on the radio (without being prepared!), I had meetings with mayors to score them on the performance of their council (at times we were even arguing on the marks!).

I have met ministers and found myself jokingly reprimanding them on how they should be more gender sensitive in their ministries and to my great surprise, they fully agreed with me! Also, I meet people who have experienced GBV, who have been psychologically maimed by their relatives, have been physically abused and raped. I have met people who are HIV positive but they have managed to move on

with their life. It deeply humbles me when I see what the real world is made of. Being exposed to this has made me worrying less and also to count my blessings.

Being thrown into the deep end seems to have set the tone for this job. After two months of joining GL, Ghirish and I found ourselves in charge of the office for three weeks. It was exciting. Our task was to facilitate four SADC Protocol and Women in Politics workshops. We had to organise everything including the venue, catering, contacting the councillors and planning the programme. I was literally learning on the job.

After facilitating each workshop, I was struck by how the women would profusely thank me for sharing so much knowledge with them. I realised that so many of them unwittingly experienced gender-based violence and had been uninformed about their rights. I realised GL was infusing them with a new lease of life. This informal education should also help them to educate their family. I was proud to be part of this process, however small my contribution may be.



COE Stage 5 Action Plan Workshop, Pamplemousses, Riviere du Rempart. *Photo: Ghirish Abhoosee*

Never Give Up!

Ghirish Singh Abdhoosee, Programme Assistant

> *Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying where there seemed to be no hope at all.* ~ Dale Carnegie



I only joined Gender Links in May 2012 but I adapted quickly to my job because the mission of the organisation matches my values and principles.

At first it was a challenge to take on my responsibilities. However, with support from Loga Virahsawmy, the director of our office, and Menakshi Gopaul, the programme officer, it did not take me long to get a good grasp of what was being asked of me.

My main duties include administration, collecting and uploading monitoring & evaluation forms; updating the Gender Links gallery and contact database, managing the equipment, doing the clippings and writing articles for the newsletter. I am also responsible for organising workshops, printing materials, preparing all the workshop equipment as well as taking photographs during the workshops. I always keep an updated record of Gender Links in the news.

Initially, working with such a charismatic and inspiring person as Loga made me nervous. I feared that I might not match up to the job. However, her rich experience as well as her vast knowledge helped me. Loga likes sharing her views. Our office in Mauritius can be compared to a tree. The staff represents branches all growing together in different directions but anchored by solidsimilar roots that bind us together through thick and through thin. The warmth that reigns in the office is felt by everyone. I feel it is an honour to work at Gender Links.

I have tried to make best use of my qualities and also to improve my skills. Public speaking and role play have helped me gain confidence as well as improve my communications skills. Working under pressure to meet deadlines has also helped me grow. The team promotes self-development and motivates each other to upgrade our knowledge and develop competencies. Moreover, I have been given many opportunities to meet people of different cultures, backgrounds and social groups during the course of my work.



Ghirish Singh Abdhoosee explaining how to connect to the cyber dialogue at the Municipal Council of Curepipe during the COE Stage 7-Strategic Communications and Stage 8-IT for advocacy. *Photo: Mena Gopaul*

During the short time that I have worked for Gender Links, I have had the chance of visiting new places in my own country. Gender Links is an organisation that recognises the value of its personnel and empowers them to excel in their tasks and to grow

not just in the job, but also personally and spiritually. I have been exposed to politics which I used not to find interesting. I became more aware of gender inequalities that are present in our political arena.

During the 16-day campaign I had my first live broadcasting experience with Loga at the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation. I had the opportunity to explain about the cyber dialogues.

My colleague, Menakshi Gopaul, and I got the opportunity to facilitate workshops as Loga was on leave. I was happy to have been able to shoulder this responsibility successfully.

The more I share, the more I learn

Eduardo Namburete, Executive Director of the Lusophone Office

> *I care passionately about education and I feel blessed to follow a career which allows me to do what I love.*



The year 2012 was a true learning journey for me, particularly after having crossed over a life speed bump in the previous year. I slowed down and did some M&E of my life and resumed work with the utmost confidence to achieve my goals.

Teaching, which for me is like sharing, comes top. I believe teaching is my purpose, particularly teaching journalism, an area that I have been involved in for the past 26 years. But even with the degrees I hold in this field, I realised that there were a few things that I need to explore further - the connection between gender and media and its relevance to democracy, freedom of expression and the right to life.

I was hesitant about trying to sell the idea of centres of excellence in gender mainstreaming to the newsrooms. I was not convinced that the media managers and editors would find this initiative relevant to their work. I talked about the SADC Protocol. To my surprise, they all accepted to be part of the process, either because it was politically correct or because they were already sensitised on the subject. The private media were already examining the financial gains of such an engagement.

However, one managing editor vehemently argued, "With all due respect, Mr. Namburete, for us, selling newspapers is all that matters, and as for now we are okay with men making the cover pages and commenting on most of the issues". He added, "Women don't sell newspapers". I knew then that our conversation would

not go as I had expected. However, as intellectual confrontation has been my battleground for years, I was not afraid of putting my ideas out there.

As I challenged the manager, I thought of James Madison whose words have been a great source of encouragement to me: "keep going, knowledge will forever govern ignorance". I knew the managing editor needed more information on how the media centres of excellence work. I informed him that apart from advocating for gender equality, the initiative also involved building professional skills among staff in the media house. I realized that the manager lacked knowledge about the links between gender and media and freedom of expression; the basic values that all media should observe. I quickly shifted my approach from rights to professionalism and we were able to make headways.



Eduardo Namburete and Ruben Covane. *Photo: Trevor Davies*

I learnt during that meeting that journalists sometimes take defensive positions when they feel that are being converted into gender activists. Gender mainstreaming

in the media should not be only a matter of achieving targets, but a concerted effort to help the media achieve high professional standards.

To make my point I asked: "Do you believe that women and men have different ways of seeing the same thing? And that their interests and feelings about things differ?" The answer was a straight "yes". I followed up with "How do you bring views, interests and feelings of both men and women to your readers, viewers and listeners"? And he promptly said "talking to women and men." "This is what I want to work with you on, to bring the perspectives of women and men to your audience and ultimately raise the professional standards and profile of your media house," I said.

One of the major lessons I have learnt is that one can substitute gender equality with other words and still achieve the same objective. From that moment, I looked for opportunities to engage with the media beyond the university. I felt I had contributed to the gender equality debate and this was extremely rewarding, both personally and professionally.

As I moved from one stage to another, especially with the involvement of larger groups in the media houses, I became increasingly aware that it is my participation in this process, beyond the university classroom that I relished, and that gave me room to make significant contributions. This takes me back to the beginning, to the idea of sharing and learning. I am excited about the opportunities to share my experiences of establishing centres of excellences in gender mainstreaming in the media. I wanted to return to the newsrooms and to have time to engage with gender and media debates.

Living and learning

Mevasse Sibia, Mozambique Country Manager

> *Any fool can know. The point is to understand.* ~ Albert Einstein



I have had so many memorable experiences this year that it is hard for me to pick the most memorable.

One of the highlights was the training in photography for all country managers by Daud Kayisi, the GMDC officer. I learnt many things including how to caption the photos. Mpumelelo Mlilo helped me to understand the cash book system. I began to enjoy it although I must confess I am not a number person.

My main tasks have been to manage the local government Centre of Excellence (COE) programme with the councils as partners. And the most significant delivery this year was the activities realized during the 16 days of activism. It was a new experience for me and challenging. I "helped" Mandlakazi council produce pamphlets for the "take the night back" march. However, I soon realised they were the ones teaching me how to make the pamphlets!

I made mistakes, but I will only mention two. Firstly, I asked someone to do a task taking it for granted that the person understood what I wanted. I should have followed up. The other mistake I made was that I assumed that because I had success in one council it would be just as easy in another. I learnt not to assume that tasks will be easy; I have to be prepared for everything. I also have a diary to note all the priorities and pending issues and when to follow up on them.

I appreciate the training by Gender Links, group discussions with other country managers and when we get together at the Gender Links headquarters. All the people I engage with contribute to my learning. For example, Ruben Covane helps me with IT problems; Eduardo Namburete guides me on political and sensitive issues; council officials, councillors and the mayors give me a better understanding of their

work; other country managers help me with information and I receive so much guidance from HQ.

Gender Links has greatly improved my skills in IT, management, finance and communication. I have learnt to prioritize and to be more organised.

Being more efficient also helps me balance work and my private life. If I manage my time better, then I do not have to take work home to meet deadlines. I have grown professionally at Gender Links.

Gender Links needs to continue trainings and finding ways to work smart. Whenever it is possible, the organisation also needs to keep workers motivated by providing resources to improve their work.



16 Days of Activism, Mevasse Sibia, in concentration chegada. *Photo: Ruben Covane*

The school of hard knocks

Rúben Covane, Mozambique Intern

> *Youth is the time to study the wisdom; the old age is the time to practice it.*
>
> Source ~ Daydreaming of a Lonely Walker
>
> Author ~ Rousseau, Jean Jacques



When I was a child, I grew up listening to talk about gender equality. I thought it was only about women's fight to be equal to men. I did not understand the essence of the cause. Today, I can say that I do and that I am part of this struggle.

My work at Gender Links requires me to be in constant contact with people whose cultures and way of life is different from mine. These relationships have taught me new things. I can also share my knowledge with them and by doing so, I learn even more.

It is not always easy to come up with different ideas in communities where the people have specific ideas about their ways of living. I need to make them realize that there is a need for change and that change can be beneficial to society.

Fortunately, in communities there is usually an influential person who we can work with. I find this rewarding that usually after a few visits our activities are accepted and results are successful. I often see positive results by our third visit. This motivates us to continue.

To communicate, share ideas and knowledge seems easy, but it is not. Communication is delicate and susceptible to failure, particularly when you bring a new issue for people without being sensitive to the fact that it is not common knowledge; for example cross-gender issues.

I learnt to be careful with the words, the expressions, and especially with the examples. I realized this in a workshop where I had to use the SADC protocol on gender and development. I found some difficulty in explaining certain issues and as well as giving appropriate examples. I can always count on the support of all my colleagues. I particularly count on the support from other programme assistants.

My supervisor, Mevasse Sibia, fights for me to progress professionally and has also become a friend. Mevasse always shows me the best way of doing tasks and gives me opportunities to try them out.



Ruben Covane, Shamiso Chigorimbo and Ntolo Lekau during the GJLG Summit, Kopanong Hotel, South Africa. *Photo: Trevor Davies*

Will power, team-work and respect for others are just some of the values that I have acquired while working in Gender Links. I also learnt to relate to people from different cultures, particularly with people who have different ideas than mine. I discovered that I can overcome certain mental barriers. One of the best ways of overcoming barriers is to share knowledge. I now fight tirelessly to achieve my targets and believe it is possible.

I speak for myself

Sarry Xoagus-Eises, Namibia Country Manager

> *Before starting any journey, clean the road to make sure you arrive safely. Some roads are too life threatening and dangerous to travel. Do not waver were others have, know your destination.*



Some journeys are planned, others happen at short notice and many happen unexpectedly. Mine is not an ordinary journey from Windhoek to Johannesburg. It is journey of capacity building, of acquiring more knowledge and that of challenging certain gender roles. A journey is taken to arrive at a designated destination. I use this journey as a learning curve. This is to achieve my set goals. It is on record that we all strive for a safe journey.

It was January 15 2013, Tuesday early morning in South Africa. We had arrived safely. We had all "dressed to kill" that morning. We had our breakfast and went for the workshop. Something out of the ordinary happened that day. The "shoe swapped" as they call it. The picture speaks for itself. There were black and blue shoes with different heals, shapes and lengths. I only realised this when I went to the bank at Eastgate Mall. On my return I pretended all was well. But later some of the colleagues noticed the shoes! For me, it was a serious matter. It represented stress, lack of concentration and many other issues related to my work environment.



Shoe swapped. *Photo: Sarry Xoagus-Eises*

One of my new years' resolutions is to ensure "performance" is key to my deliverables. There have been some small challenges I have not met, although I am closing that gap. As the country manager I am ultimately responsible for the realisation of deliverables of the Namibia country programme. I have to implement, supervise and monitor progress and report to HQ on achieve-ments, lessons learnt and challenges. Essentially, I have to make contacts with politicians and senior level management at the COE and ensure that the high reputation of GL and that councils buy-in.

Positions at GL go with huge responsibilities and accountability. These are measurable tools that speak in volumes. Failure in the duty assigned is not negotiable. When I was promoted to the position of country manager, I knew my responsibilities were going to be huge. But when I was promoted, I was involved in a tragic car accident. I thought my dreams were shattered. I am not 100 per cent healed, but I am keeping my head above water. I soon returned on my exciting journey - a journey of wanting to achieve wonders.

Mistakes are learning curves. It gives us time and space to rectify the wrongs. Mistakes are bound to happen but how they happen needs to be carefully addressed. I made mistakes but I have always had plan B in place.

The year of 2012 was challenging. Cascading the Centres of Excellence (COE) in Local Authorities, Training of Trainers, 16 days of Activism, planning and campaigning and the national summit were all deliverables under my jurisdiction. There were easy tasks particularly because I had not prepared my mind for all the financial donor reports.

Peer learning has been an asset along my journey. Their constructive criticism has contributed to my personal growth. I remember when Sifiso Dube called me on a Friday afternoon and informed me that I have to write the NEPAD report. As a foot soldier I took the command, although I was at the time facilitating a 16-day planning workshop. I immediately stopped the facilitation and gave the participants group work for 20 minutes. I needed time to brainstorm ideas for the NEPAD report. I was at first hesitant about writing this report. But I took up the challenge and produced it.

To be IT literate is key. Being connected to all social networks is empowering and one of the most important skills I have gained during my time at GL. Learning is not a short cut process; it is a journey to arrive safely at your destination. Nobody is too old to study.

The recent human resource training we had in South Africa at GL HQ has opened my eyes. I can now plan better, delegate, impart knowledge and create enough space and time to concentrate on my personal life.

How has working with GL changed my life? I have learnt that reporting has to be timely. Engagement with others, especially with line manager, helps to speed up work. I need to upgrade my financial skills so that I can improve my supervision of the finances and reporting. GL should also allow more free speech for its staff regardless of their rank. Let us make GL the home we all cherished. Let us make GL one of the greatest NGOs locally, regionally and globally. Let us make GL visible in its totality, be it with the donor community, government, UN Agen-cies or at large with all those who want to be
associated with GL.

I rest my case here!



Sarry Xoagus-Eises during the TOT workshop, Victoria Hotel, Lesotho. *Photo: Laurentia Golley*

A Discovery of the hidden and unknown talent at my work place

Laurentia Golley, Country Programme Assistant

> *A young and ambitious girl full of life facing many challenges and obstacles along the road to fame is yet to be discovered.*



When I began working as the programme assistant at Gender Links, I found the position challenging. I was told that I would be responsible for administration and finances and also deal with M&E of the country programme. I had to find a balance between eagerness to keep the job and coping with an area that I never thought I could master without having the necessary background.

Compiling budgets and disbursement of funds have always been my headache. However, I have jumped over that hurdle without even realising that my colleagues were saying that I am too strict for their liking. M&E is another challenge. Every minute the country manager is over my shoulder, "Pietsie have you done this, have you done that?" I think to myself, "Go away from me." I want to reply, "I am busy madam!" (laugh).

My most important deliverables are to show financial discipline and to remain within budget limits. I also need to meet deadlines. In M&E, I have to take stock of deliverables and report to HQ in electronic format. I sometimes dispatch supporting documents by courier.

I strongly believe that the job is challenging because I occupy a position that should be dealt with by two people. I make many mistakes with finances because I have to apply my mind and time to two different areas at the same time. At times, after reconciling the finances, I discover that I have misplaced money which I then have to make up out of my own pocket. However, this has not deterred me from fulfilling my duties.

I have no financial background; neither in mathematics nor accountancy to master this field. With the support of the country manager and HQ, I have always met the deadlines and reporting requirement.

I discovered my hidden talent during the verification process of the score cards of the Centres of Excellence (COE). All the towns scored themselves and I was responsible for verifying their scores. During this process, I not only learnt about the mandate of the local councils but I also interacted with the councillors and people at management level. This contributed to my better understanding of the country programme and I will apply this new knowledge in my day-to-day work.



Ntolo Lakau, Mena Gopaul, Laurentia Golley and Thando Dlamini during a website training workshop in Johannesburg.
Photo: Zotonantenaina Razanadratefa

The mentoring by colleagues in the country office and in HQ have helped me execute my responsibilities with enthusiasm. The on- the-job learning and in-service training have been useful too. My life has changed since I started working for GL. I am more mature, I am more informed about gender issues and the local government.

It would be beneficial if GL could support me with formal training in the areas of my work. I would also be more effective if GL could separate the responsibilities of finance and administration from M&E.

A true learning journey for me

Ncane Maziya, Swaziland Country Manager

> *…Nothing in life is more exciting and rewarding than the sudden flash of insight that leaves you a changed person, not only changed, but for the better…*



The year 2012 was a true learning journey for me. My journey began with the training of trainers (TOT) in Lesotho and then from there I was facilitating trainings almost throughout the year.

We had three Training of Trainers workshops in prepa-ration for the 50/50 campaign. The first one was held in June. It was my first time to travel to the Kingdom and I thought I would come back speaking Sesotho! However, I only managed to catch *dumela, lekayi, kitengi, mme* and *ntathe*. I the Basotho people are proud of their language.

I also facilitated the training module on care work. At first I felt overwhelmed by the prospect, but the participants were smart. Their role play was powerful and entertaining. The participants laughed as they enjoyed the role play, but they also understood the message coming out of the drama. I had not been unaware that the CEO had been listening to the training session, but I later found out she was happy with it.

There was much going in Swaziland during 2012. The country has its first local government elections. We supported 50/50 women and men in politics and decision making positions campaign. This was another learning journey for me. I appreciated the support that I received from HQ staff especially in training the Gender Focal Persons, journalists and Women in Politics. I had interviews with SABC and journalists

from the national media, which also added value to my learning journey. During my busy schedules I even managed to go for driving lessons early in the morning before work and now I have a valid driver's license.

As the country manager under the "Gender Justice and Local Government" project, I report to the head of the "Governance and Justice" manager.

Through my journey I have made mistakes but they have been part of a learning curve for me. Sharing my experiences and taking advice from others, including my colleagues, helps me grow and has equipped me with new knowledge.

I have gained skills in facilitating, training and public speaking as well as knowledge about M&E. I have become more patient and understanding as well. My new skills helped me to feel confident when I had to give a presentation in the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Housing Urban and Development during the induction of the new councillors. I will continue to share, help and support my colleagues with my skills and knowledge.

As country manager, I succeeded in registering Swaziland Gender Links and also drafted an MOU with government, which is an important foundation on which to build a good relationship. I still face the challenge of fundraising for the organisation at country level. I am sure this MOU will help. I pray that I also build partnerships with the corporate business sector in country.



Ncane Maziya, Country Manager, signing of Statement of commitment with Lavumisa Town Board, Lavumisa, Swaziland.
Photo: Thandokhule Dlamini

I still learn every day

Thandokule Dlamini, Swaziland Intern

> *Blame my background but I was sceptical... 11 people of different nations, backgrounds and characters all in one room.*



I was born and bred in the town of Manzini in Swaziland. My credentials include a diploma in law from the University of Swaziland (2005/2006). I have worked for various human rights organisations, and have now found a new home at Gender Links.

I started working for Gender Links almost one year ago, but it feels like a lifetime. When I reflect, I can't believe all the work that I have done in just one year. I have grown so much at GL and I am grateful for every opportunity and challenge.

I have learnt so much including how to take photographs (I thought I knew how to take photos before I met Trevor), to upload the photos and even how to take care of a webpage.

After the 2011 summit we stayed in Johannesburg for training. I had never interacted much with people from other nations. Blame my background but I was sceptical at first. I would be with 11 people of different nations, backgrounds and characters all in one room. I wasn't sure what to expect! But we all had one thing in common to combat the scourge that has engulfed our society - GBV. I learnt that if you have a common purpose you can work with anyone.

I still learn every day. Before I never thought climate change could have a gender aspect, but I have come to realise everything that happens in our daily lives has a gender aspect to it.

I have learnt a lot with regard to how people can change if they are given the right information. I have heard people admit that they have changed their attitudes after working with GL.

I have thought why wait to change people's attitudes instead of directing them from the very beginning. It is this thought that has gave in me the zeal to put the gender eye in people at an early age. Therefore in our newly formed chess association I have encouraged youth of both sexes to come along so we can consciously nurture these young players to be the gender activists of tomorrow.

If time and funds permit, my vision is to increase our scope to the juvenile prison school at *Mdutjane* where we can push the gender agenda through sports. Thanks to GL, I now breathe gender in my gender sensitive life.



GL Swaziland Intern Thandokuhle Dlamini explaining GL publications to Amelia Bossa Massango of the Matola city council and her collegue at the GL stall; Mbabane Family Day; Prince of Wales; Swaziland. *Photo: Ncane Maziya*

Zero in on your target and GO FOR IT

Faides TembaTemba Nsofu, Zambia Country Manager

> *Quality and excellence produces success. How you do anything, is how you will do everything. Always give your best.*
> ~ Jewel Diamond Taylor



The summit has always kept us on our toes. When you are done and all is well you look forward to your normal duties and routine; they are more predictable.This time around we had a surprise, the 2012 road trip to Lesotho.

The Lesotho trip was a learning journey. It brought insights into how things can be done differently but still producing the desired results, creating a bigger impact and ownership.

During the years I worked as a field officer, I had to be on the road all the time to reach my targets. It was frustrating and costly to travel 700km for just a half-day meeting. When I became country manager, I had the opportunity to do things differently.

However, the year had been a challenging year because the country office had many activities to be undertaken by just two people. The work really stretched me and I felt I could not take it anymore. I looked at the programme in Lesotho with so many bilateral meetings planned, as well all the reports that I still had to finalise back in the office. In the past, I remembered that I had even underestimated the amount of work a trip entails. But this journey turned out to be my best experience.

The GBV indicator project was one of my worst nightmares because I did not know how many supervisors I had during that period. The pressure of work was unbearable,

but it truly helped me to reflect on how best this could be done without compromising the quality of work and meeting deadlines. I took advantage of the Lesotho experience and the power of positive thinking. I managed to work effectively with the partners and colleagues. It helped me to build our capacity so that together we could make progress. I had to zero in on my specific targets. I gave my best shot regardless of the situation. However, I still need to learn to balance my work and private life.

The learning continues. I welcome the chance to reflect on what is working and how we can improve. Networking has proven to be a good tool in this learning journey and my next chapter will explore the dynamics of partnerships that work. I have learnt it is worth sharing and nurturing. I look forward to learning more and sharing my learning experiences.



Zambia Country manager Faides Nsofu gives a motivational talk during the take back the Night campaign. *Photo: Albert Ngosa*

Born Again: Eyes of a gender activist

Cynthia Kalizinje, Zambia Intern

Many people believe that they don't have what it takes to make a difference to the world; the truth is every one of us is put in this world to contribute and make a difference to the world in our unique way.



Gender Links helped me to feel confident in everything that I do. I thought I was not a good photo-journalist, but I was wrong. When I saw that most of my pictures were published in the SADC Gender Protocol 2012 Barometer I was surprised. My photo was even used on the cover page of the Zambia SADC Gender barometer.

I joined GL as an Intern in 2012 when Albert Ngosa and Faides Nsofu were busy preparing for the Gender Justice and Local Government country summit. I had to adapt to the environment and get busy too.

I then travelled with the CEO, Colleen Lowe Morna, to Zambia to assist with the COE verification process in three councils, Kabwe, Kapiri and Chibombo. She taught me how to administer the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) forms, which became my main task. Administering M&E is challenging. I had to translate the questions and give instructions which sometimes involved drawing diagrams just to make the people understand what I was talking about. The majority of them could not read and many had difficulty writing. Sometimes I had to hold their hands as they wrote.

I have a lot of memorable moments at GL. I remember when I was on my way to SKY FM radio station to deliver the summit invitations I got stuck for almost 30 minutes in the elevator. For a moment, I thought I was going to die on duty. I remember Saeanna Chingamuka phoned asking how I was finding GL, I just smiled and said all is fine.

I had another scary experience; I was involved in a motorbike accident on my return journey after assisting with administering M&E in Katete, Tundu and Sammuel villages.

As an intern, my most important deliverable included administering the monitoring and evaluation forms, uploading photos on the GL website, filling documents and taking photos.

I have acquired skills, knowledge and values by working with GL. The organisation has given me an opportunity to participate in a media workshop training in Johannesburg were Trevor Davies taught us to take good photos, photo editing and how to upload them on the photo gallery.

We had IT training with Tinashe Padare and Daud Kayisi who taught us how to upload case studies and clippings on to the virtual resource centre (VRC).

GL has transformed my life. I am now a gender activist. I am born again! I spend most of my time researching about gender, and that is the reason why I have enrolled for a distance learning BA degree course in development studies.

When I was administering the M & E forms, I realized that the majority of people in rural areas are unaware about gender equality. They live by traditional norms which say a man is the head of the household. I give credit to GL for making me travel in rural areas to disseminate information on gender. It gave me the chance to also learn their way of life. The importance of this experience makes me think that GL staff needs to visit the rural areas more often. It will also give them a better understanding about the work on gender equality. Also I think more pamphlets and books need to be translated into the mother tongue language of the communities where we work.

Change is possible if we join hands. I will always walk with my head up because I know I understand the 28 targets of the SADC Protocol on gender. I was delighted that I could attend the regional 2012 Gender Justice and Local Government Summit in Johannesburg.

Lastly I wish to thank GL for giving me an opportunity to do part of my internship in Johannesburg. I shall live to remember this opportunity all the days of my life. Without GL I was still going to live by a myth that politicians are the only ones who make news. I also thank Faides Nsofu for helping me adapt to the GL environment and teaching me how to work.

Patience pays

Priscilla Maposa - Zimbabwe Country Manager

> *God doesn't give you the people you want, but those you need: to help you, to hurt you, to leave you, to love you and to make you the person you were meant to be.*



Allow me to introduce my journey by saying" patience pays". It has been four years since I joined Gender Links as the Gender Justice and Local Government facilitator. I am now the country manager for the Zimbabwe office. I started by operating from my house by myself.

My journey has been challenging as well as interesting. Every challenge that I have faced has turned out to be a blessing because I have watched myself grow from strength to strength.

As a country manager, my duties include managing the governance and GBV indicators programmes, resource mobilisation, managing partnerships, managing Human Resources issues as well as raising the GL profile in Zimbabwe.

We registered the GL Zimbabwe office in March 2012, and then I had to mobilise resources from local funding partners. This involved developing proposals as well as attending donor meetings with support from HQ. Our efforts have not been wasted. We have started receiving funds locally and no longer rely on regional funds.

We now have an office and being a" briefcase organisation", as one of our funding partners once called us, is now a thing of the past. We officially opened our offices, secured a vehicle and have four staff members. I learnt that good work will always

be rewarded and that the waiting was worth it. We count our blessings in the Zimbabwe office.

Talking about programme work, 2012 has been hectic and I never imagined I would be able to manage the ever increasing workload. In addition to managing the governance programme, I found myself having to manage the GBV indicators research survey from this end whilst Mercy Machisa, the GBV Indicators research manager, was managing from HQ. We had about 94 researchers out in the field for about one month. We worked in partnership with Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development. All this required a lot of coordination, time management skills and team spirit. I must confess, this was not easy, the stress was too much. Although I lost some weight, my management skills were enhanced. I learnt that it is good to take up challenges.

The governance programme has also grown. We are now working with 17 centres of excellence (COE) councils. Each day has been a new experience. Our budget lines are usually tight so I found myself being an excellent negotiator. Despite the fact that councils also have tight budgets, some councils even managed to co-fund our workshops.

I learnt to delegate duties in 2012. As a small office that is expected to deliver more, I found myself having to share the workload with other staff members. Team work is the way to go. Thank you to Sifiso, Mercy, Tapiwa, Kevin, Cuthbert and Shaudzirayi for all of your support. I also had a lot to learn regarding HR issues as the office grows.



Priscilla Maposa facilitating a workshop in Chiredzi. *Photo: Tapiwa Zvaraya*

Part of my responsibilities as country manager is also to manage partnerships. This is not an easy task but I we have managed to form some strong partnerships. I would like to thank all our partners for the support without which we could not have managed to be where we are today.

Last but not least, in 2012 I learnt to be true to myself. When I felt I needed to voice my concerns, I have done so. I learnt that whilst I need other people to listen to me, I should also have a listening ear and that way we maintain healthy relations. Thanks to GL for giving me the opportunity to express my feelings.

One step at a time

Tapiwa Zvaraya, Zimbabwe Programme Officer

"The only difference between success and failure is pure desire."



After facilitating a centre of Excellence (COE) session, I wanted to see my evaluation score. It was the first time I had facilitated a COE session on my own and I wanted to know how I had performed.

I must admit I had been a nervous wreck before I began facilitating the workshop. However as I grew in confidence it was as if I had been doing it for ages. It was the reason why I was eager to see how I had been scored on the evaluation sheets.

This was the first of many more facilitations. I had grown from being the boy who would simply look and listen in awe as my manager facilitated workshops with ease to actually facilitating by myself. What a moment to savour! I thank my immediate boss and friend, Priscilla Maposa, for giving me that opportunity.

I am the Gender Links Zimbabwe's Programme Officer. My responsibilities are to monitor and evaluate data both qualitatively and quantitatively for the COE workshops. This includes administering the Gender & Media Diversity forms (attitudes, quizzes, and scorecards). I upload the data electronically onto the intricate systems developed by the organisation. It is my responsibility to make sure that "the team looks good". I help my manager to undertake her duties, which has contributed to my growth. Actually "we make each other look good". The duties that my boss has delegated have made me a better hands-on person.

My work at GL has been both been inspiring and at times muddled in mistakes. I will be the first to acknowledge that I have made mistakes, some of which I think have made me a much better person because you will always remember never to do it

again. I do not want to be a "learnt nothing person." We all make mistakes. It is what we do next that determines whether we sink or swim. I am glad I can still swim.

I have noted that reading extensively helps with my work at GL; there are so many interesting documents at GL that have contributed to my growth. I also owe my growth to my boss, mentor, friend and dear sister Priscilla. She has been there for me always. I have come to appreciate that everything she does is for my benefit. I am blessed to have her as a mentor. Some friends from other country offices have also been of great help sharing ideas particularly Ntolo. Although I may not tell you, I know you have helped me to grow.

In the past year, I have acquired new skills while I have sharpened my other skills. As I have already highlighted, I have acquired the facilitation "gene", if I may call it that. Months of seeing my mentor facilitating and perfecting her skills, have made me into a budding facilitator. I have also improved my report writing skills.



GL Zimbabwe Prog Officer Tapiwa Zvaraya explains the GBV Indicators survey to a journalist during the Zimbabwe GBV fare.
Photo: Priscilla Maposa

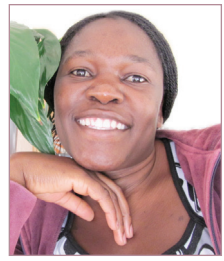
One of the most important lessons I have gained from GL is that you should always value friendship and relationships. There is nothing like having a friend to rely on. The IT skills wow. Now we are cloud computing. Who would have known? The ability to use that advanced technology gives me the competitive edge over most people. Thanks to GL.

As I go into uncharted territory I wish to use these skills not only to enhance myself as a being but to touch the many lives out there. In the workplace I hope that I can use it so that the overall objectives of the organisation are met. Working with GL has brought me from being a behind the scenes person, a very shy person, to someone who is more outspoken. I want to take ownership of what I can do. I challenge myself to do tasks that I think I cannot do because I know that "Yes I Can" and together "We can".

Changing customers is not easy

Loveness Pfumbi, Zimbabwe Office Administrator

> *Each time I hear about writing the learning journey I always feel like starting from how I joined Gender Links.*



I have grown into the person that I am today because of Gender Links. I was at the head office for almost five years and those years have been such a productive journey for me. Things were sometimes tough, but what I love about this organisation is as long as you are willing to learn you can go as far as you can. I am so proud to say this organisation has moulded me into a better person.

Each time I hear about writing the learning journey I always feel like starting from how I joined Gender Links, but this time I just want to concentrate on my growth. The whole of 2012 was a good year for me. I have learnt a lot in my job. I have grown into the person who can manage herself. I can plan what I want to do and I know how to prioritise my work. I have learnt how to deal with stressful situations both personal and professional.

Although at head office I was the receptionist, I also helped the programme staff as well as the corporate services. I have learnt a little bit about M&E and finance. I have been given duties like attending to the creditors, following up on service providers, payment requisitions as well as the balancing the cash book and petty cash. The first time the finance officer asked me to assist with the finances, I just I asked myself if could do it, but once she explained it just stuck in my mind.

I have learnt about M&E as well as how to save pictures on the website. I have learnt about the scorecards, and how to enter new GMDC contacts on the database. And I have helped some programmes staff with the typing, editing and proofing of their stories.

In January 2013 I took up my job as the office administrator for the Zimbabwe office. I have just started a journey which I believe needs much energy as well as patience. Changing customers is not as easy as I thought it would be.



Loveness Pfumbi ensuring the front office runs smoothly. *Photo: Daud Kayisi*

Corporate Services

Experience is the best teacher

Caroline Takawira, Senior Accountant

> *... plan my work better for myself and my team members to avoid working in crisis mode.*



My first contact with Gender Links was when I applied for a job on the internet. I had already forgotten about it when I received a call from Vivien Bakainaga, the human resources manager, asking if I could attend an interview. My first question to her was what was on offer and when she was not able to tell me I was reluctant but with a bit of persuasion from her I finally agreed.

On the day of the interview, as I sat at the reception area for 30 minutes, I almost decided to leave as the panel was running so late. When at the the end of the oral interview, the panel gave me homework I almost screamed as it was a cold Friday and I had planned to spend my night on my couch watching television.

I work in the corporate services department and I am responsible for the finance section. My main deliverables include management of the organisation's finances, staff, procurement and being the Board Secretary.

I have made some mistakes but they say experience is the best teacher. A greater part of my work depends on the input of others and sometimes due to the busy nature of my job I end up not having enough time to check my subordinates' work, only to realise later that their tasks were not completed. My other mistake is not giving myself enough time to check my own work before submitting.

My team members and colleagues from programmes have contributed greatly to my learning at GL. My family members and my husband have always helped me too. Through working with GL I have been exposed to new areas such as procurement and human resources.

I have improved my skills, most notably my multi-tasking skills, ability to work under pressure and to appreciate the value of working as a team.

GL can do better by supporting its employees in their studies, providing educational loans as well as study leave. GL should also provide an environment where people are able to work flexible hours. I will try to plan my work better for myself and my team members to avoid working in crisis mode.



Caroline Takawira braving the snow in Johannesburg. *Photo: Sandra Ayo*

Learning is a journey

Vivien Bakainaga, HR and Assets Manager

> *The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities.* ~ Stephen Covey



Learning is a journey that we all go through in life. An important part of my journey last year was when GL participated in a time-use study. The way we managed our time was illustrated with graphs. It made me aware of how I prioritise my work, the tasks that take me time to do and time wasters.

Another positive part of last year's journey was the recruitment of four new staff members. Each one of them said they had learnt a lot in a short space of time. For example, the receptionist, who I supervise directly, said that although she had only been with GL for one month, she was already impressed with her new skills. She told her former colleagues at her previous job where she had worked for three years all about GL's work ethics and its professionalism. It is always good to see someone new joining the organisation so full of excitement about working in a busy environment where results are achieved.

In my work as the human resource manager, I interact with everyone at GL both on professional and personal levels. I am learning to be a good listener. It gives me a sense of satisfaction when a person comes in my office discouraged and leaves the office in a better space. This is another way GL cares for its human capital, by creating an environment for staff to feel safe to off load.

A highlight of the year was having my first radio interview in August during women's month about a piece I had written on a phenomenal woman - who happened to be our CEO, Colleen Lowe Morna. I felt daunting about the radio interview, but I was encouraged by other staff.

Writing is one of CEO's passions. She makes sure we all write something, much as we dislike it, thus this GL learning journey booklet. I am in charge of compiling it and it is an uphill struggle getting staff to submit their pieces. Yet everyone is so excited and has a sense of achievement when the Learning Journey booklet is published and they see their work and their names in print. It is indeed a learning journey; we are all potential writers - Yes we can!

During the year I had the privilege to work with an HR consultant, Anna Harris, who trained GL managers on human resources. She has a wealth of experience and I learnt a lot when I worked with her developing the training materials. The coaching session during the training was informative. I learnt about the importance of choosing words carefully and how to allowing the "coachee" to contribute to finding a solution to a problem. It was another way to understand my role and to becoming a better manager. I also learnt to look at how I perceive myself as a manager and how support staff perceives me.



Vivien Bakainaga. *Photo: Tinashe Padare*

The departure of the head of GL corporate services created a big gap but at the same time opened space for growth. I have had to report directly to the CEO, which is challenging but good for me in terms of my growth. She is meticulous so when you present to her, it has to be 'perfect'. I am learning to pay attention to detail.

As the HR manager, I am the custodian of the policies and regulations of GL - making sure that staff adheres to policies and regulations. It can be a challenge because staff can sometimes choose to remember some policies whenever it suits them and choose not to remember others.

Wellness is part of my responsibility and this year we went to Usindiso abused women shelter with our donors. It was another way for GL staff to give back to the community. We put smiles on the faces of women and children. It was a humbling experience for all those who represented GL.

I have to learn to be more assertive and enforce the rules. There have been incidents of staff resigning as a result of the policies not been observed and it has caused much angst. To avoid this I now make sure we have informal discussions on policies and regulations during lunch breaks and I encourage staff to ask whenever in doubt. I have realized that by distributing the copies of policies and regulations to each staff and having them on the GL shared drive does not necessary mean that they read them. I still receive phone calls from staff on how many leave days they are entitled to and about working hours. These calls used to irritate me but I have learnt to be patient and answer by referring them to the relevant clause in the GL policies and regulations.

GL is a dynamic organisation. You expect changes and movement; it creates room for learning and growing. People have come and gone but GL is still moving on, taking its giant foot steps further into Southern Africa and Africa. It has been a privilege to work for an organisation like GL, which has grown since I started in 2009 from 20 staff to 58 in March 2013.

Interaction of the 4 Es

Mpumelelo Mlilo, Country Operations Manager

> *Dollar from a donor has one life and in its lifetime it has to bring good value for money.*



I had thought that my job in GL finance section was to ensure the funds from donors are used for the proposed operations without looking out how the value of the dollar can be maximized. This is a concept that was introduced to Gender Links last year and whilst I had a limited understanding of it, it became clearer during the internal staff training workshop that was organized by the Chief Executive Officer. This was an eye opener for me and was the most invaluable lesson that I had during my first year with the organisation.

The interaction of the 4 Es - Economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity - as well as the related terminologies that go with evidence principles, innovation, impact assessment and beneficiary analysis are now part of every financial decision that I make in my work. It has made me also have a better understanding of the programme activities and the country operations. I now have meaningful engagement with the country managers. Before, I used to just focus on weighing up whether an item is cheap without looking at the interaction of the economic decision with the other 'Es'.

I also participated in the time-use study. When I discovered how I used my time, I realised that I needed to work smarter as opposed to working harder. I realized the importance of investing in systems and time management techniques that assist us to work smarter.

The time use study results were given to us at the same time as the management training. This was important as it coincided with an impressive coaching lesson. I

learnt the importance of delegation and about a useful coaching model which I now use. It has brought me good results. I have become effective in using my time and ensuring that staff are coached and guided in pursuit of departmental goals.



Finance Manager Mpumelelo Mlilo during a team building workshop. *Photo: Albert Ngosa*

Evolving into my true natural self

Shamiso F V Chigorimbo, Procurement and Logistics Officer

> *Live passionately, forgive always, laugh a lot and walk in the fullness of all that you can possibly be.*



During my first month at Gender Links everybody was busy working on their "Learning Journeys". It was baptism by fire. Having just arrived, I was nervous about writing a "learning journey" and I just got more nervous after looking at the editorial requirements.

My most important deliverables are to ensure that all travel and accommodation bookings are made on time as well as to ensure value for money on the money spent on the different activities and procurement. I also have to oversee the regular maintenance of the Gender Links cars and office property. In addition I maintain the consultant and service providers databases.

I have made mistakes, but I have learnt a lot from them. In some instances, I have not confirmed bookings and staff members have arrived at their hotel only to be told "there was no room in the Inn". I try not to take myself too seriously and I laugh at myself at times. For I am only human; and "to err is human". However, to prevent such mistakes, I now work with a check list which guides me in my day-to-day work.

Gender Links has a great system of templates and as well as the log frame which have allowed me to monitor and see my own growth. People always say one never stops learning and indeed the advance IT and document preserving systems at Gender Links has allowed me to grow from strength to strength. Over the past month we have been introduced to an interesting 365 cloud system.

I had a truly encouraging manager, Bridget Marango, who had such confidence in my capabilities and potential for progress. She made me strive to achieve more and

do her proud. There is a warm fuzzy feeling one gets after completing a task and the person to whom it must be handed is well pleased with your work. Working like that made my learning less pressurised. I look forward to new adventures and challenges in 2013.

Working in a team has taught me a lot about myself and other people. No one exists in a vacuum. We all exist to assist each other become better people. The HR manager, Vivien Bakainaga, has taught me to be patient, to stop, breathe and then act. Yoliswa Mkaza has taught me to work with a great attitude and huge smile on my face; the hours go by quicker and you enjoy your works more. Fuzakazi Mqungwana has brought out the fighter in me for both good and bad reasons. My current manager, Caroline Takawira, is a constant pillar of strength and wisdom. I truly am blessed to be surrounded by a great team. Mpumelelo Mlilo, although I wait to this day for the promised road runner chicken, is a great team leader and always reliable when we face Cloud server complications. I thank Mkaza, Bakainaga, Takawira and Mqungwana for the making me apart of the team.

I have learnt different skills, including effective communication, as well as planning and task writing. Regarding my gain in knowledge, I have learnt to write monthly monitoring and evaluation reports, although tedious, they are a tremendous reflection tool and also guide me in effective VFM spending. As for my values, I have learnt the importance of being a proud black woman with no identity or insecurity complexes. My attitude is to be willing to learn always; to be ready to apologise when I do wrong and always to do my best at my work to make the next person's life easier.

With the help of all the Summit deployment team, my main achievement was organising the logistics of the Summit, with great attention to details. I was able to depend on a team of people who had the same end goal as me. Nomthandazo Mankazana has taught me how to have both fun and work hard.

I have learnt how to take on a new task and not be intimidated by anything. For example, I admire Tinashe Padare, the IT guy; I am sure that when we present him with an IT challenge he does not always knows at first how to solve it. But he always remains positive as he searches for solutions. I have improved my IT skills and I now know how to upload photos in the online photo gallery, thanks to Tinashe.

Mpumelelo Mlilo has also helped me to improve my research skills. I thank Tinashe and Mpumelelo for their constant IT support.

Working at GL has changed my life in so many ways. GL taught me love and commitment to people. GL taught me to remain sweet and expectant of great things in life. When I had an accident in which I lost my three-month old baby, Strawberry Ruby Red- Ford Fiesta, it felt like my world had crushed. Yes she was a "car", a pretty red car that got me from one place to another with no complications in her life span. It felt like I could not go on. The shame of it all made me want to walk away from life and try something new. But the encouraging emails, calls and get well cards were heart felt and helped me see the bigger picture. Life goes on. I learnt that Colleen Lowe Morna is not only my CEO, but she is also a mother whom has great faith in all of us. Her get well card was so simple and yet the words so alive and rejuvenating, it gave me a reason to put my head up every day and walk. Thank you, Colleen.



Abigail Jacobs-Williams, Nomthi Mankazanaand Shamiso Chigorimbo receiving recognition at the awards evening.
Photo: Albert Ngosa

Start every day off with a smile and get it over with

Yoliswa Mkaza, Finance Officer

> *Indlela ibuzwa kwabaphambili was usually said by my mother and aunt" meaning that the way forward is known by those who have travelled the way. A person without a sense of humour is like a wagon without springs. It's jolted by every pebble on the road.*
>
> ~ Henry Ward Beecher



This has been a very great year for Zolah. It was filled with joy, tears and by the Carly Rae Jepsen songs (Call me maybe). This year I learnt a lot of things. I got my driver's licence (Don't worry Shamiso Chigorimbo I will be taking myself home if I knock off work late VFM power) and yes I also managed to carry a big stone, buying a house, thanks to the LORD. I have managed to grow personally; spiritually, thanks to Fuza and Shamiso, the true Christians. Amanda has taught me that you need a spare wheel in life.

I have lost a mother in finance but I am still standing. I have learnt that at GL it is a training ground for bigger things to come. I have learnt that I am a growing flower so this year is just a journey for me to learn more about finances, strategy and how to analyse my work. If I can complete what I started last year this year is going to be amazing.

Last year, GL became like a home. I am so comfortable with my work and I have built relationships with the staff. I also changed roles and currently I am the regional finance officer. Working in the country officer has opened my eyes to the different tax systems as well as exchange rate issues. I have had the best mentors in GL. They have made me see a future in the finance world.

As with all new things, there have been challenges. There have also been downfalls, but it does not matter if you pick yourself up, learn and move on. I have done that

a lot of times. I have learnt about the profit making business from the cottages. I wish to add value to it with time and also to set up some indicators of profit and loss and stock-taking mechanisms; as Mpumelelo always say, "Put your mind to it". The work never betrays the worker. I have learnt how to approach different people and also those in different ranks.

I have danced all the tunes to the Gender Links music. I have had fun, laughter and have worked hard. I am now a dedicated child of the organisation.

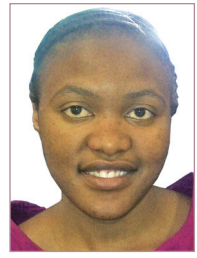


At the GL year end function. *Photo: Albert Ngosa*

A strong woman never gives up

Fuzakazi Mqungwana, Finance Officer

> *It is not the intelligent woman, the ignorant woman, nor the white woman, the black, the brown, and the red, it is not even the cause of woman, man tis woman's strongest vindication for speaking that the world needs to hear her voice.* ~ Anna Julia Cooper

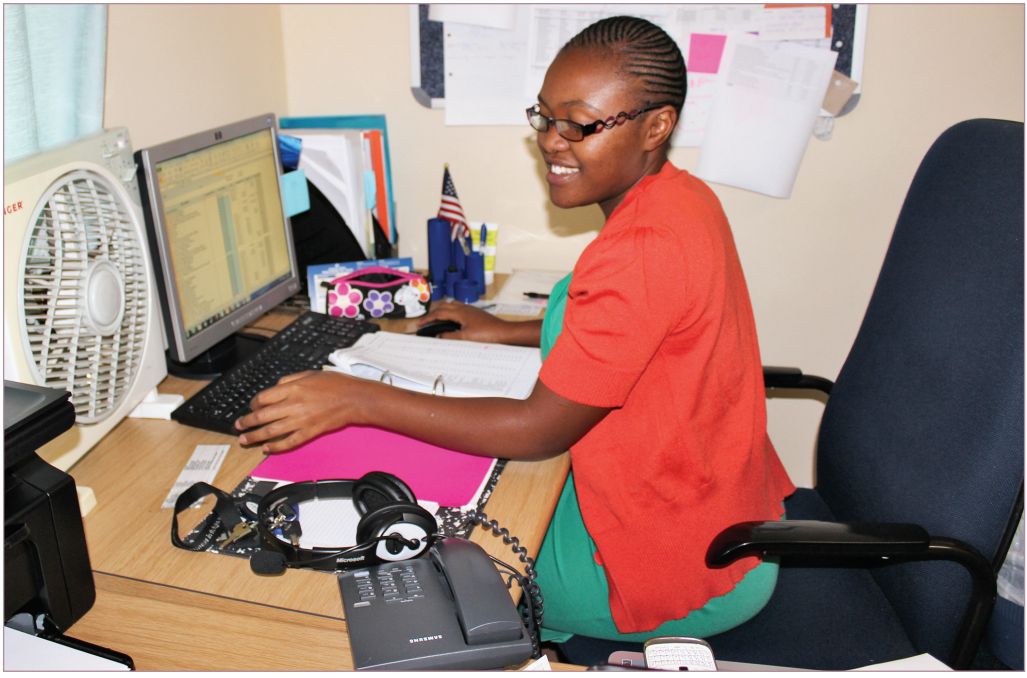


I start a sentence and then erase it. I am so nervous I have never written anything to be read by people before; only at school when I wrote essays. I really envy people who can write and edit. All I know is counting.

OK, let me begin my journey with GL. I actually am surprised to be on it. After my interview for the GL internship, I was told I was not successful. I remember being so disappointed and forwarding the rejection email from Vivien Bakainaga, the HR manager, to a friend. I kept thinking, "What is it that I had missed?" "What is it that they were looking for?" I had been determined to get the post. So I wrote to the HR manager, something I don't usually do, but this time it was different because I really wanted that position. Vivien responded to me explaining why I didn't get it. But I was not content. I knew I had to move on but I was really heart broken.

However, I am writing this learning journey after six months at Gender links. It was six months after the interview that I received a call from Vivien asking me if I was still interested in working for them. I quickly said "yes". We arranged a date to meet and so I became Gender linked till today and even tomorrow I will still be Gender linked. So my real journey started on the 27th of July 2012. I found GL to be warm and friendly. I never felt for a day that I didn't add value to the company. Because GL makes me feel so useful and needed, coming to the office each morning makes it so much easier. Every day with Gender links is a challenge but also exciting because you are never underestimated. You get to explore and learn at the same time.

During these few months with GL I have grown so much. The people at Gender Links are so down to earth and everyone prioritises their jobs. Everyone is so focused and determined to deliver, no matter their position. For me, Gender Links is the first company where we have our CEO coming to dinner with us. She is very busy but she also has time for us which is one of the many things I admire about her.



Fuzakazi Mqungwana at work. *Photo: Albert Ngosa*

When I joined GL I worked in finance focusing on different countries in the region. I must say it wasn't an easy task. It was demanding. Having to reconcile the finances of nine countries when you were not involved in their planning activities was really something! By God's grace we would submit our reports with the help of my manager and also mentor, Mpumelelo Mlilo, from whom I learnt a lot. He has taught me how to be independent but he is always supportive when I need help. He taught me how to love my job and how to make things easier. I have now moved to the Headquarters where I am involved in processing payments, capturing accounts in the ledger book, reconciling the bank accounts, petty cash and much more.

Yes I have made mistakes, I must say many of them, but we learn from our mistakes. I'm not a person who likes making mistakes because I feel I could have avoided them. I feel so discouraged. But Mlilo said never beat yourself for making a mistake instead just try and avoid it next time. So now I jot down my tasks because some of the mistakes are caused by my forgetting. I also have a daily plan.

I must remember my colleague, Yoliswa Mkaza, who has also contributed a lot in my "to do list". She understands teamwork and if it wasn't for her I would still be struggling with my work. I appreciate Caroline Takawira's calm spirit. She has taught me that when you panic you create a bigger mess. At GL you acquire new skills and knowledge every day. I am really honoured to be part of GL. It has taught me so much including communication and socialising skills as well as how to be independent.

Courage and enlightenment

Tinashe Padare, Information Technology (IT) Officer

> *Try to stay open 24/7... it would be disappointing if someone brought a new idea, but you were closed.~* Russell Simmons



As an IT officer in a department that caters for the whole regional organisation, I face many challenges each day most of which fall directly into unannounced Q1/Q2 crises related matters. This was worrying at first because I could never plan my day to focus on my direct deliverables. Like in cricket I am dubbed "the all-rounder" a person who can bat and bowel when required to.

It is easier to dream of working towards a goal than achieving it but Gender Links continues to be a place where visions and dreams come true.

Over the past year I have grown and learnt life's valuable lessons which no one can tell or teach you. These are lessons that need to be experienced. I have learnt how to manage myself as well as other staff members, guests, work flows and our day-to-day consultants. I have even learnt how to prioritise workloads in the dreaded Q1 quadrants. I have been groomed to work towards the bigger picture; the end goal, which is to ensure staff have smooth operational systems.

Technology is growing at such a rapid rate; keeping up-to-date systems is near impossible with new gadgets, gizmos and versions being release every fortnight. Software developers are working hours on end testing and redesigning new applications that will make our day-to-day business communications easier and more flexible.

Gender Links' main hub is around communication. Without effective communication channels in place efficiency suffers especially as the organisation has staff placed in over nine regional countries, besides our international partners and consultants.

GL invested greatly in one of the latest methods of effective communication, which is Cloud Computing; the migration of emails into a cloud space that allows 98.8% "up time" throughout the year. The migration happened in early January of 2013 when all country managers were around. My emotions towards the migration were different to what most would expect. You would have expected me to be nervous of this movement where about 64 staff members in total would need to be migrated in under one week. I was actually extremely excited about it. I saw this as a new learning curve; my IT career at GL was taking me into fresh fields.

The migration of staff members went smoothly with almost zero complaints. Albert Ngosa was my greatest support during this stressful week. He halved my workload by doing everything correctly at the first attempt. We worked long hours together and kept each other awake with our silly jokes. Bandi from PCB would also communicate with us to make sure all was running smoothly.

I have found out that hard work always pay off. I have benefited from this exercise, gaining experience and new knowledge. The organisation has also benefitted, gaining more flexibility and different channels through which to communicate. I look forward to a prosperous 2013.



Tinashe Padare looks on to assist with M and E photo filing. *Photo: Albert Ngosa*

From gardener to driver

Clever Zulu, Driver/Gardener

> *The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.*



My name is Clever Zulu, otherwise known as Creva by my mentor, Bridget Marango. This is because I often use an 'r 'for an 'l'.

Although gardening was my first job at Gender Links it is now more like a part-time activity, because I am also the office driver. Wow! From being a part time gardener to a full- time driver, what a change!

The driving involves picking up and dropping off Gender Links staff to and from workshops. I'm also in charge of the shuttle service for our beautiful guest house and conference venue; "the Cottages".

My job is challenging. Every trip is described as "very urgent". Misfortunes never come singularly. As the saying goes, to find a truck that has lost a load of bricks, vegetables, oranges you must name them.

The traffic jams are such a problem that sometimes I wish my car had flying gear so I could to go over the other cars! I remember once when I was stuck in a traffic jam my phone was ringing with that annoying ringtone. I was told to hurry up because the office that I was going to was about to close. Luckily, the cars started to flow. To make up for lost time, I pushed down on the pedal. But for every action, there is a consequence. The so-called 'Uncles and Aunts' (traffic cops) were hiding behind the bushes and they hit me with a fine of R500.00 for going 61km/hr. in a 60km zone. Two weeks later, I was summoned by my sisters in the Gender Links' finance department to inform me that part of my salary is going to pay for the fine.

When I first joined Gender Links, my very best friends were lawnmowers, shovels and the blooms. Vivien Bakainaga appreciated my work and would invite me to the kitchen for a cup of tea or coffee. I started to mingle well with the rest of the Gender Links team and would also help them carry equipment and material they needed for their work. I started feeling at home and eventually I became a real member of the Gender Links family.

Gender Links has taught me so much; it has actually changed my life. I have learnt better communication skills, for example. I never used to listen when someone was talking. I used to interrupt; the results never used to be beneficial.

I also began to learn about the organisation and its mandate. At first, I thought that when I dropped the person at the venue, my job was done until they finished their business, and then I just had to take them back. But the GL COO, Kubi Rama, encouraged me to participate in the seminars that the staff attended. The first time I took her advice, I felt like a cat amongst pigeons. When I was asked after the meeting how I felt, I lied saying it was good. Kubi knew I was pretending and gave me encouragement and invited me to attend another seminar. I felt more at ease in the second one and was so touched by the stories. I heard and saw photos about women who had been accused of witchcraft.I saw photos of houses that had been burnt down. I became more informed about the number of young girls who get pregnant in schools around Limpopo.

I also received an extra task of putting the car log book on excel. I complained saying I felt it was enough to record the mileage and trips in the book. My real concern was how to do excel. Tinashe Padare came to the rescue. He showed me step-by-step how to do it. I would go back to him asking one thing more than three times. He never became irritated although I could see that he was busy. I am now confident using excel.

I have learnt a lot from my manager, Shamiso Chigorimbo, too. She has picked up mistakes and showed me how the work should have been done. Shamiso has also developed new ways of doing things and asks my opinion about them.

An important part of my learning journey was a trip to Whispering Pines. When I first heard about the retreat, I thought about good food and a relaxed environment away

from the office. But it was much more than that. The first day went by so quickly. Our CEO Colleen Lowe Morna joined us the following day. It was a day when I really learnt about what Gender Links is all about in a way that I could explain it fully to the many people who would ask me when they saw the GL logo on the car I was driving.

I also learnt an important lesson from a mistake. After dropping GL guests early in the morning I decided to go church using the company car. I recorded the mileage and purpose of the trip and thought no more about it. However, after I submitted my report on the car usage, I was questioned about using the company car for my personal business. I then realised that I had made a mistake.

I feel that Gender Links is doing so many great things but if I am pushed to say how GL could do even better I feel if it could promote staff wellness training and offer more courses. For example I could learn reception skills so that if the receptionist is sick, I could do the job. I also feel more staff should hold valid driving licenses; I always have so many conflicting demands from the staff wanting me to drive them.



Clever Zulu marching for justice in the 16 Days of Activism march. *Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna*

Be a more empowered woman

Josephine Chigamakobvu, Office Assistant

> *I value my job and I would love to make the best out of this learning opportunity.*



I started working for Gender Links in February 2011. I want to thank GL staff for their unwavering support. The staff did not judge me rather they were so supportive to me and this made me to feel part of the family.

My engagement with GL has equipped me with so many skills. I can confidently say that my communication skills have improved. I am able to use a computer. I can open and send an email, scan, photocopy as well as assist at the reception. I am looking forward to taking a computer course in the near future. My English has improved greatly. I can now follow the discussions in meetings, jotting down notes as well as making some meaningful contributions.

Since this was my first job, I did not know where to start. However I learnt new things day by day. I remember having challenges in placing orders for staff groceries. I could not do it without assistance but nowadays I can do it alone. My typing speed is slow but I hope to improve with time.

When I realise that I am not able to do something, I am not shy to ask for assistance. My colleagues are patient and are always willing to help. I value my job and I would love to make the best out of this learning opportunity.

I want to thank GL family for their love and support. I am not afraid to make mistakes because I know every day is an opportunity to learn. I appreciate that the GL family has accepted me as I am. They treat every employee as equals and always encourage

me to learn so that I can grow. I am so happy to be part of this organisation and I believe that one day I will be a more empowered woman and will make an impact on other people's lives.



Josephine Chigamakobvu preparing meals at the office. *Photo: Albert Ngosa*

GL Services

There's a silver lining to every cloud that sails about the heavens if we could only see it.

The only way is UP!

Mukayi Makaya, GL Services Manager



As I reflect on 2012, I ask myself 'What did I learn throughout 2012? What really stood out for me that I would like to nurture in 2013?'

As the GL Services Manager, I manage Gender Links' income generation portfolio. This includes Advisory Services, GL productions, and the GL Cottages. The job is pressurised and ultimately its success is measured in monetary terms.

The year 2012 was a mixed bag, with highs and lows. Generally, the advisory services portfolio performed better than GL Cottages; and marketing of GL productions remained a challenge throughout the year.

The GL Cottage struggled to achieve our monthly target occupancy of 46%, five out of the 12 months. We posted losses and also lost staff. One good outcome of the human resources problems was the recruitment of the GL Cottages Manager, Amanda Mase, who started the beginning of September.

I remember the GL Cottages monthly management meetings. The team interrogated the income statements, which were not looking good. Tempers would flare during these meetings. It was repeatedly stressed in the meetings that GL Cottages was a profit-making entity and they would never be subsidised by Gender Links. The Cottages has to sustain its costs and make a profit - there were no two ways about it, GL Cottages just needed to make money!

Despite the problems, I have learnt that failure is not an option and that to every challenge, there is a solution, if not several. The experiences throughout taught me to be analytical and to ask probing questions. For example why did we find ourselves in these situations? What do we need to do to come out of this? I became more solution-oriented and my thinking skills were sharpened. Throughout 2012, the team and I were constantly thinking of creative ways of generating income. We hosted a Valentine's Day, the Gender Links Annual Awards, the Gender Links year end party as well as other non-GL events. I learnt to be a positive person. It is so easy to get discouraged and then just give up. As a team, we had to constantly encourage each other, remain focused and work hard.



Mukayi Makaya overlooking Johannesburg. *Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna*

The diversity of my work in Advisory Services always presents learning opportunities for me. My work included the costing implementation of the SADC Gender Protocol. This involved working with gender and finance ministries in Seychelles, Swaziland and Zambia to align national gender policies with the SADC Gender Protocol targets. Then we had to work with line ministries and allocate resources for implementing the National Gender Action Plans. GL carried out the training, building capacities of government officials. I also benefited tremendously from these workshops. I now understand different national budget processes, budget allocations, and the varied techniques for trying to secure additional resources. I am now knowledgeable on how to analyse and interpret budget documents. This learning was empowering. It built my confidence. I was able to lead and facilitate sector budget discussions.

My research skills were also strengthened as I had the opportunity to help with a research project for the Commonwealth on women in decision-making positions. This was a new area of work for me. I had to carry out extensive research as well as analyse and interpret the data to demonstrate the women's impact. The research involved interviewing high profile women in the South African government structures.

Originally I had found both the work the line ministries and the research daunting. I tried so hard to get out of them, but my supervisor, Colleen Lowe Morna, built my confidence and made me believe that I could do it and I did it! She was encouraging and supportive, always providing the needed guidance.

At a personal level, I have learnt that two is better than one. I have witnessed the amazing work that team work produces; allowing every member space to do their bit, and trusting that they will do it, and do it well.

Now I know, without any doubt that ***failure is not an option, and the only way to go is UP!***

To laugh always

Amanda Mase, GL Cottages Manager

> *The road to success is not straight. There is a curb called Failure, a loop called Confusion; speed bumps called Friends; red lights called Enemies and caution lights called Family. You will have flats called Jobs. But, if you have a spare called Determination; an engine called Perseverance; insurance called Faith, and a driver called Jesus, you will make it to a place called Success!*



I am Amanda Mase. I joined Gender Links (GL) Cottages in September 2012 and what a journey; it has been one of many firsts.

I remember on my first day I met with Mukayi Makaya who explained the way in which GL Cottages operates. I remember feeling overwhelmed but also determined.

Managing GL Cottages has been my biggest professional challenge to date. I have the task of making sure that GL Cottages is a profit-making venture using various marketing strategies.

In the five months that I have been at the Cottages, I have made many mistakes. I remember my first attempt at M&E reports, poor Mukayi, I am sure you looked at them and your first thoughts were "like really!" Without her constant support, I do not think I would have been able to navigate the many aspects of my job.

I appreciate the patience of Nancy Padare, the GL Cottages House Manager, or the GL Cottages Nights Bridge expert as she is also known. She has taught me over and over again how the booking system works.

GL has its own culture. Vivien Bakainaga and the Corporate Service have also been my support system. Mukayi had told me during my early days at GL Cottages that everyone at GL works as a team. We rely on each other's expert advice.

I remember my first management meeting. I was so nervous. Mukayi kept saying, "relax it will be fine". Sometimes I get nervous, but the constant learning that I am exposed to as well as sharing ideas with these great minds have opened my eyes to a different way of looking at situations. It is a blessing I could never explain in words. I had to say good bye to a valued member of staff who decided it was time for him to spread his wings. This was hard because I had just assumed this position and already I was faced with human resources issues. Thankfully the GL family came through for the Cottages as they always do. Clever Mugemezulu, the GL Driver and friend, found the Cottages an excellent gardener.

As the Cottages will also be saying goodbye to Sally, a veteran in her own right, we wipe our tears with hope as we welcome the person stepping into her shoes.

Being the loud and friendly person that I am, I have managed to find treasured friendships with Nomthi, who said "Hi" when I was at GL for my second round of interviews, where I got to meet the CEO, Colleen Lowe Morna, for the first time.

Nomthi and Ntombi your smiles and chattiness, is probably one of the reason why we still get on today. I do not think there is a soul that I have not charmed at GL.



Amanda Mase serving delegates. *Photo: Tinashe Padare*

Thank you for tolerating my loud and bubbly self and for making this big girl feel very welcomed. I now look forward to the challenges of 2013.

In the words of Gerald Mkulama, the GL Cottages gardener, "*bring it on*".

Think fast and be smart all the time

Nancy Padare, GL Cottages House Manager

> *Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them.*



It is all most two years since I moved from Gender Links (GL) head offices to work at GL Cottages. Working at the guest house requires you to think fast and be smart all the time.

My son asked once asked me why I bath at 5 a.m. I told him that it is already in my blood but also the guest can call any time after 5a.m. They may want an iron, hair-dryer or someone may call to tell me that there is no hot water in the shower. Can you see now why I am up at that time? It is to be ahead before anyone calls.

I have learnt a lot about the hospitality industry during the past two years. I have learnt to respect my work, obey the rules and forgive. Trust me, when we have a group people, it is not easy!

Let me give you the example of a particular guest charged herself R300 a plate for dinner. I tried to tell her that our dinner is R150 a plate but she told me that her company would pay for everything while she is staying at the Cottages. However, she later returned to ask for her money back saying that we had overcharged her for dinner. I tried to explain that she charged herself that money.

She started to tell me so many stories and wanted her money back. As I know the rules, I asked her if she had intended to steal the money from her company. You know what she said to me? She said that I am very rude and that I was lucky that I was old; if I was her age she was going to fight me. However, she stopped arguing with me when I told her that I was going to call her company and explain everything. I said that I could send a new invoice. She then admitted that she had done it on purpose so that she could use the money to buy items to take back home. She stayed for six days but that six days felt like one month.

My favourite task is to check the rooms to make sure everything is in order. I think I know all the corners of the whole two properties. I know the garden and the steps on the properties. I hike to the top of the hill every day making me feel 10 years younger than my age.

Last year, there were a lot of challenges. When I returned from leave in June, I was told to fill in the front desk, taking care of petty cash. Everything went well until my manager announced that she was leaving the GL Cottages to return to the head office. At first I thought it was a joke. I had been looking forward to working together with Mukayi Makaya Magarangoma to try to market the place and to raise the money that is needed each month.

Another challenge came in December when more rooms were built on the premises which I had to oversee. It is not funny to be on the back of the builders all the time. If you ask questions about their work, they will answer you so fast, convincing you that what they are doing is good. I am worried that they are not going to finish in time.

Sally, Sally my dear friend I am not going to hide from you. You can leave the GL Cottages, but for me, we are going to be together for ever.



Sally Makhudu and Nancy Padare - best of friends. *Photo: Tinashe Padare*

In 2013 I am looking forward to exploring new things and to the customers, especially groups which need accommodation and conference facilities. Lastly I want to thank Gender Links for supporting the GL Cottages. Without you, we would have closed our doors. Now with your support our doors are still open.

I hope God will help me to stay in the GL Cottages family so that I can learn more

Felistus Ncube, House Keeper, GL Cottages

> *I love the way that the staff at the GL Cottages work together; we are united like a family.*



I have always believed that when the doors of Gender Links Cottages opened a door to me, they opened up my life too. I have been working here for two years. During this time and with the support of the GL team, I am confident in carrying out all my duties and comfortable in my working environment.

I have come to enjoy my work, which requires me to occasionally help in the kitchen, but mainly to keep the guest rooms clean, tidy and fresh. I make sure customers are happy and continue to come back so that the business can grow. The success of GL cottages is important so we can keep our jobs and to help other people realise their rights through the work Gender Links does.

As I am now on my second year, I have learnt from my mistakes. I can do my job with ease because I know exactly how each room should be kept and what is needed in all the rooms. I have also realised exactly what my job includes and excludes.

I met a guest once who expected me to clean up a pie that he had spilt on the floor, which I was happy to do. But he also expected me to pack his clothes and belongings. At the time I did it without question, but later I learnt that I was going beyond my call of duty.

Working at the cottages has taught me many lessons. I am continually learning and experiencing new things. My manager, Nancy Padare, also takes the time to share

her knowledge about working in the reception. I often help her answer the phone when she is busy with something else. This makes me happy because I am improving my skills and I have the opportunity to learn. Nancy says I am good at taking messages and that I always show respect to everyone. This year I hope to develop my computer skills.

One important lesson that I have learnt is the value of working together as a team. I love the way that the staff at the GL Cottages work together; we are united like a family. Even if there is a lot of work in the laundry or there are too many rooms to clean, someone is always there to help.

When my husband passed away last year, my colleagues at the Cottages helped me get through this time, by supporting me, allowing me time at home and always phoning to find out how I was. I wish GL Cottages blessings and the best of success.



Felistus Ncube preparing a room for guests. *Photo: Albert Ngosa*

My first time in the hospitality Industry

Naume Zinengeya, House Keeper, GL Cottages

> *If you tell the truth you don't have to remember anything.*



I was at church one Sunday when I told some members of the congregation that for a long time I had been desperately looking for a job. One of the women asked me if I knew how to do cleaning. I told her that I had had six years working as a cleaner in Botswana.

The following week the woman called me to help in the GL Cottages' kitchen. She was happy with my perfor-mance; in April and in May the GL Cottages called to say they wanted me to hire me.



Naume Zinengeya changing bed linen. *Photo: Albert Ngosa*

I have learnt many things during those nine months. I learnt to clean and set up the rooms so that they look nice for the guests. In the laundry, I now know how to use the press iron for ironing the linen.

It is my first time to work in the hospitality Industry. I love the work as a house keeper. You have to be prepared to welcome visitors with a smiling face, showing them love and respect.

What a dramatic change!

Gerald Mkulama, Gardener, GL Cottages

> *You only live once but if you do it right, once is enough.*



From a constable with a gun to a gardener and painter - what a dramatic change! In life we all have dreams but at the end of the day we also need to put food on the table.

Honestly, at first I did not like working with the soil but eventually I started falling in love with the work. It frees me from stress. I also realise that what I do is not just gardening but making beauty and conserving nature.



Gerald Mkulama ensures the GL Cottages is kept in tip-top shape. *Photo: Albert Ngosa*

Thanks to my dear friend Clever Zulu for introducing me to the next level of my life experience and of course to Gender Links management for giving me this opportunity. I have been only 31 days in this organisation, but I feel it in my inner veins that I will learn a lot. I have learnt a lot already.

To be precise, I must confess, it has been a while since I held a pen in my fingers and put my brains into constructive thinking. Thanks to Gender Links and the Cottages staff, I have even gained some familiarity with computers. After a few training sessions I have some knowledge about how to use a computer.

I appreciate working with people of different races who all aim for the same goal. Having worked only in a male environment, it is incredible to be linked to both genders.

Respect and hard work

Joe Sikheto Mathebula, Security, GL Cottages

> *When I look where I am today, I am so proud to be a member of Gender Links.*



On February 28, 1989, I decided to join a security company called Cleaning and Security Services. My intention was to get time to study. Because of financial problems I never continued with my studies.

Instead Gender Links has taught me a lot. I remember the day that my manager, Mukayi Makaya, called me to her office. She asked me to help in the office answering calls and helping guests that book and arrive late. I did not say "no" because she asked me so nicely and I was learning to do office work.



Joe Mathebula multi-tasking at The GL Cottages. *Photo: Albert Ngosa*

Gender Links has taught me a lot of things, respect and hard work. When I look where I am today, I am so proud to be a member of Gender Links.

Communication is a key part of the hospitality industry

Solly Chukele Baloyi, Gardener/Security, GL Cottages

> *A person is a person through people.* ~ unknown



My name is Solly Chukele Baloyi; I am the GL Cottages maintenance person, gardener and security guard. Over the past year I have been fortunate to have benefitted from the most amazing life skills.

When you work in the hospitality industry you have to be a people's person and communication is a key part of what we do at the Cottages. I remember my first month I was so overwhelmed by these various people that came to the Cottages - all the different nationalities and their different backgrounds. All this was new to me and suddenly I had to express myself in English, a language that is not my mother tongue and one I hardly use.



Chukele Baloyi begins his shift as security guard for the night.
Photo: Tinashe Padare

Through my work I have gained confidence. Apart from my normal duties, I can now answer phones and help guests with problems they might

have. Over the weekends it is my duty to help keep the Cottages safe. It is a job I take very seriously. I am humbled by the trust that has been shown by GL Cottages management in my ability to help safeguard this beautiful oasis.

I look forward to this year and hope to improve my work with the guests and colleagues.

Nakhesa (Thank you)

Count your blessings

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

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

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

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

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

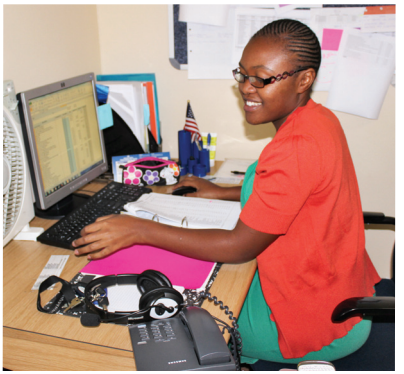
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God hath done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

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

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







"If we do not teach others, if we do not share what we know, if we do not communicate, we are the loser."
- Loga Virahsawmy, Director, Gender Links Francophone Office

"Without a little discomfort every day I would not have been able to continue growing. I now believe all the good things in life are outside our comfort zones."
- Tarisai Nyamweda, Media Programme Officer

"Keep going, knowledge will forever govern ignorance."
- Eduardo Namburete, Executive Director of Mozambique Luso-phone Office, quoting James Madison









