

**RENEWED WOMEN'S VOICE AND LEADERSHIP SOUTH AFRICA  
PROJECT NUMBER: P013048**



**GENDER LINKS ANNUAL REPORT – YEAR ONE**

**REPORTING PERIOD: 11 MARCH 2024– 31 MARCH 2025**







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### 1. RWVL PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title	Renewed Women’s Voice and Leadership – South Africa
Project Number	P013048
Name of Implementing Partner(s)	Gender Links
Reporting Period	11 March 2024 – 31 March 2025
Date of the Report	2025
Implementing Partner Contact Information	Nomthandazo Mankazana +27 67 738 4113
Total Project Budget	Six million Canadian dollars ( CAN \$6,000,000)
Project start and end date	11 March 2024 – 31 March 2028

This One-year report is structured around the project’s results framework and draws on Gender Links’ (GLs) experience, success and lessons from WV-01 and the first year of the Renewed Women’s Voice and Leadership - South Africa project. The report focuses mainly on the intermediate and immediate outcomes.

Ultimate outcome	1000. Enhanced enjoyment of human rights by women and girls in all their diversity in South Africa				
 Intermediate outcomes	<b>Pillar 1: Organisational capacity and sustainability</b> 1100. Enhanced organisational sustainability of local WROs and LBTQI+ groups in South Africa to deliver on their gender equality mandates.		<b>Pillar 2: Programming and advocacy</b> 1200. Strengthened programming and advocacy of WRO, LBTQI+ groups and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in South Africa to advance gender equality and empower women and girls.		<b>Pillar 3: Movement Building</b> 1300. Increased effectiveness of sub-national, national, regional, and global women’s rights platforms, networks, and alliances to affect policy, legal and social change.
 Immediate outcomes  	1110. Increased ability of supported WROs, LBTQI+ groups, and WHRDs to leverage financial resources required to deliver on their mandate and strategies.	1120 Increased ability of supported groups to create, monitor and improve organisational processes and systems.	1210 Increased delivery by WRO and LBTQI+ groups of transformative intersectional programming and advocacy.	1220 Increased ability of emerging local WROs and LBTQI+ groups and WHRD to respond to crises and opportunities.	1310 Increased capacity of feminist networks, alliances and movements to collectively advocate for the rights, interests and participation of women and girls, particularly the structurally excluded in South Africa
Outputs  	1111 Technical assistance provided on increasing complementary funding and in-kind support to WROs, LBTQI+ groups, and WHRDs in South Africa.	1121 Training in key areas of organizational strengthening provided to leaders and staff of WROs, LBTQI+ groups, and WHRDs in South Africa	1211 Multiyear core grants supporting gender equality programming provided to WROs, LBTQI+ groups, and WHRDs in South Africa	1221 Opportunity grants for increasing access to a range of gender responsive services provided to emerging WROs, LBTQI+ groups, and WHRDs in South Africa	1311 Feminist networks, alliances and movements formed or strengthened.  1312 Learning and sharing summits and facilitated dialogues convened with WROs, LBTQI+ groups, and WHRDs in South Africa to exchange knowledge, strengthen networks, and document collective experiences.
Root causes	Patriarchal social norms (values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and practices) condone and perpetuate unequal power relations between women and men; undermining women’s economic, social, legal and political rights; denying them voice, choice and control over their bodies; lives and livelihoods. Post COVID these underlying structural causes have been exacerbated in South Africa by the energy crisis; mounting unemployment; violence and crime that disproportionately affect women and girls.				

## 2. RWVL PROJECT REACH

In August 2024, GL put out a grant call for applications. Three hundred and ninety applicants showed interest but only 130 submitted by the closing date. The Grants selection committee (GSC) shortlisted the applications to a final of 26 opportunity grants and 22 Multi-Year Core (MYC) grants representing women's rights organisations (WROs) in South Africa. Of the 48 grantees, seven organisation indicated that their main focus is on LBTQI+ communities (five MYC and two opportunity grantees). The National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) is a MYC grantee that focuses solely on women and girls with disabilities. Two opportunity grantees Monsweni NGO and Limpopo Mental Health Society work also focus on disability. Sisonke National Movement focuses on Sex Workers.

The project is in the first phase of implementing with grantees expected to report in July following on boarding of opportunity grantees in December 2024 and MYC in March 2025. The grantees have already collectively held 26 workshops reaching 1398 participants, 68% women; 32% men. One participant identified as gender non-conforming. These figures may be updated in the semi-annual report that grantees will submit in July 2025. As part of their onboarding, MYC grantees participated in the Learning and Sharing Summit convened by GL in March 2025. The work stream on communications and reach show cased how grantees are creating multiplier effects in their work:

**Communications and Reach Summit winner** 1000 Women Trust launched *Project Orange* to provide urgent, community-based support for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) in high-risk areas like Khayelitsha and Nyanga East, townships in the Western Cape.

The initiative established 24-hour GBV advice offices offering safe spaces, emergency packs, bedding, and child-friendly areas. These are staffed by "GBV Warriors"—117 community members trained as first responders through a WhatsApp-based programme that has reached over 11,900 individuals. To broaden impact, the project distributed 40,000 pamphlets on GBV and bullying and developed a 24/7 Chatbot to enhance digital access to support.

The initiative prioritises immediate, tangible assistance over awareness alone, giving survivors



1000 Women Trust won the award in the communications and reach category for Project Orange. Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini

both safety and tools to escape abuse. One notable outcome is the *#Victim2Warrior* movement, where survivors support one another in their healing journeys. While the model has proven impactful, challenges remain—particularly in sustaining food and transport resources for survivors. The Trust aims to expand its office network and strengthen partnerships to ensure long-term sustainability.

The Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change (CABC), **runner up** in this category presented its forward-thinking communications strategy at the Learning and Sharing Summit 2025 in Johannesburg. Aimed at advancing gender equality, the strategy focuses on expanding digital engagement, strengthening grassroots networks, and making online platforms more accessible to marginalized communities.

To increase visibility, CABC plans to release quarterly research reports, media updates, and host webinars to drive engagement across digital platforms. The organisation is also addressing key participation barriers—such as high data costs and peer stigma—by using in-person trainees as virtual ambassadors and partnering with telecom providers for subsidized data. Campaigns like *HeCareZA* are engaging men and boys in gender

equality discussions, while targeted initiatives are helping youth navigate gendered online harm and connecting survivors to GBV support services.

Challenges such as low digital literacy and cultural resistance are met with adaptive training materials and sustained mentorship. Moving forward, CABC will publish a Technology-Facilitated GBV (TFGBV) report, expand partnerships, and recruit interns to scale programme reach. CABC's approach combines data-driven advocacy, inclusive partnerships, and digital innovation to create safe, engaging spaces that foster meaningful gender equality transformation.



CABS award. Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini

### 3. CHANGES TO CONTEXT, GOVERNANCE, AND RISKS AFFECTING PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

#### A) Contextual Changes

South Africa stands at a critical juncture. As President of the G20, the only African member of this prestigious group is uniquely placed to put the issues of gender equality on the global agenda in a moment of backlash and threats to the fragile gains made. On the other hand, WRO accuse the government of backsliding on the domestic front, creating a tension that could help to propel the agenda forward if strategically used.



Under the banner of "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability," South Africa's G20 Presidency aspires to shape a fairer, more inclusive global order. Canada is a member of the G20 and coincidentally, is current chair of the G7. The two countries are collaborating closely in this moment of global backlash to WR following the election of Donald Trump in the US, and slashing of USAID funds that have sent the health sector, and Sexual and

Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) programmes reeling.

However, South Africa's credibility on the global stage will hinge on whether it can model these very principles within its own borders, particularly in relation to the growing crisis faced by WROs.

South Africa's WROs have historically been key agents in the fight against gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF), Economic Exclusion, HIV and AIDS, LGBTQIA+ rights and patriarchal norms. Yet in 2025, these organizations face an existential threat from severe funding cuts, both domestic and international. According to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), NGOs and shelters across the country are suffering from delayed disbursements and reduced budgets from the Department of Social Development (DSD). The result has been a devastating cycle of staff layoffs, service reductions, and facility closures—especially in rural and peri-urban areas, where access to alternatives is minimal or non-existent.

Over 60% of shelters surveyed in Gauteng, Free State, and Eastern Cape reported that they could not meet basic operational needs. Even the Sanitary Dignity Programme, which provides

menstrual hygiene products to girls in underprivileged communities, has experienced budget reductions—undermining both school attendance and dignity for thousands of young women.

One of the government’s flagship interventions, the GBVF Response Fund, launched in 2021 with R162 million, has disbursed only R69 million to date. Community-based organizations, which form the backbone of service delivery, remain chronically under-resourced. Despite the existence of the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSP-GBVF)—backed by a medium-term allocation of R21 billion—funding rarely reaches those on the frontlines.

WRO say that this gap between policy intention and fiscal execution reveals a systemic failure that goes beyond budgeting: it reflects a diminishing political commitment to gender equity at a time when support is most needed. While domestic austerity has played a critical role in this crisis, international shifts have compounded the damage.

The 2025 re-election of Donald Trump has reignited a global rollback of gender equality and human rights frameworks. Key U.S. policies have been reversed, including, the termination of over 90% of USAID’s foreign aid contracts, many of which supported women’s rights and sexual health. These include a \$377 million cut to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which plays a vital role in reproductive health services globally. Suspension of \$250 million in PEPFAR funding to South Africa, has jeopardized jobs for 15,000 healthcare workers, many of whom are involved in HIV prevention and women’s health.

The reinstated Global Gag Rule restricts foreign NGOs from offering abortion-related services or information, even with non-U.S. funds. This previously led to a 40% decline in contraceptive access and a 13% rise in maternal mortality in sub-Saharan Africa. In South Africa, the withdrawal of foreign support is weakening GBV response services, HIV programs, and access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, particularly in high-risk communities.

As G20 lead, South Africa has embraced a transformative theme: “Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability.” This framing is rooted in the original G20 mandate to promote Strong, Sustainable, Balanced, and Inclusive Growth, but it also carries moral urgency in light of the current global crises.

- **Solidarity** emphasizes shared humanity and interdependence, especially in the face of global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and inequality. The logic of solidarity holds that when one group suffers—such as women and girls facing violence and discrimination—all of society is weakened.
- **Equality** calls for the fair treatment of all individuals and nations, regardless of gender, race, geography, or economic status. It demands both equity of opportunity and access to decision-making platforms and principles that must extend to the women of South Africa’s rural provinces and urban informal settlements.
- **Sustainability** insists that development must meet today’s needs without compromising the ability of future generations to thrive. This applies not only to environmental resources but also to the social and institutional frameworks that protect human rights and gender justice.

South Africa’s presidency of the G20 is a moment of immense potential—an opportunity to reshape development narratives and global governance frameworks through the lens of justice, inclusion, and sustainability. However, the domestic disentanglement of women’s rights infrastructure risks undermining this vision and damaging the country’s credibility.

In 2024 the South African general elections marked a historic political shift, resulting in the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU) for the first time since the early post-apartheid era. The elections, held amid growing public discontent over economic stagnation, corruption, and service delivery failures, dealt a significant blow to the ruling African National Congress (ANC), which lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since 1994. Faced with coalition politics as the new norm, South Africa entered 2025 under a GNU composed of a complex alliance of political parties with divergent ideologies and policy priorities.

The formation of the GNU brings both opportunities and threats to the future of women's rights organizations (WROs). On one hand, the collaborative governance model offers a chance to build broader consensus on gender issues. On the other, the ideological fragmentation within the GNU raises concerns about policy coherence, funding continuity, and the prioritization of gender justice on the national agenda.

Several smaller coalition partners have shown lukewarm or even regressive attitudes toward gender equality, reproductive rights, and LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Their influence within key ministries or parliamentary committees could dilute or obstruct the implementation of critical policies, including the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSP-GBVF).

WROs in South Africa were already under immense pressure before the elections, due to budget cuts, delayed disbursements, and international funding withdrawals—particularly from the United States following the 2025 foreign policy reversals under President Trump. The uncertain fiscal environment of a GNU adds to these vulnerabilities.

Despite the challenges, the current political flux also opens space for renewed civic engagement. The GNU may be more susceptible to public pressure, cross-sector partnerships, and coalition-building, given its lack of a single dominant party. Women's rights organizations can use this moment to:

- Push for transparency and accountability in gender-related budgeting.
- Advocate for statutory guarantees that protect funding streams for the NSP-GBVF and related programs.
- Build alliances within the GNU, identifying and supporting political leaders committed to feminist policymaking.

The coalition government has announced plans for a National Dialogue<sup>1</sup> involving political parties, civil society, business, and labour to address national challenges. A broad coalition of civil society organizations, including RWVL grantees, other WRO and social justice movements, have come together to coordinate their engagement in the government-led National Dialogue process. Recognizing both the opportunity and the risks the sector has initiated a collective strategizing effort to:

- Establish a unified and principled approach
- Develop concrete proposals, activities, and milestones that ensure meaningful, broad-based public participation across sectors and communities.
- Enable coordinated joint action and strengthen collaboration
- Define a common framework to guide civil society's involvement in shaping the agenda, selecting participants, and designing inclusive consultation and mobilization strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> SAnews. (2024, June 30). 'Unprecedented' Government of National Unity to roll up its sleeves. <https://www.sanews.gov.za>

## B) Governance and project management changes

During the second reporting period, GL promoted the grants coordinator to the RWVL Programme Manager and the grants finance officer to the Grants and Compliance Manager. In place of an overall head of the Grant Making Unit, GL established the post Grants and Networking coordinator, led by Thenjiwe Ngcobo, former founder of Incema NPO, a WVWL grantee. This team still comprises the Special Advisor; Monitoring and Evaluation Manager as well as Communications officer. The Director of the GL Regional Hub; Chief Financial Officer as well as the People Team Lead provide core support.

The **Project Steering Committee (PSC)**, **Grants Selection Committee (GSC)**, and Global Affairs Canada collectively provide strategic oversight and guidance for the Renewed Women's Voice and Leadership (RWVL) South Africa project. In September 2024, Gender Links (GL) issued an Expression of Interest to identify gender experts to serve on the GSC. The profiles of the selected committee members are available [online](#).

The PSC held its inaugural meeting on 2 November 2024. Attendees included representatives from Global Affairs Canada, Shauna Flanagan and Tsitsi Fungurani. GL Board Member Sarah Mistry, UN Women Representative Agnes Kisembo, Ford Foundation's Nicky Le Roux, GSC members Muzikayifani Mbonani and Lynette Mudekunya, as well as GL staff from the RWVL team.

GAC shared Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy and RWVL from a global perspective. GL presented the committee's Terms of Reference, which outlined its key responsibilities, including strategic oversight, support for project implementation, accountability, and coordination with the GSC, particularly in relation to grant approval processes. GSC members shared reflections on the selection process for new grantees. As part of the learning from WVWL 01 the second phase includes four representatives of the grantees on the PSC by rotation following the inaugural meeting which included ratifying the selection process. During the onboarding Opportunity grantees elected Transhope and New Heritage Foundation and MYC-Women Leadership Social Empowerment and Sasopsbiz Foundation as the first representatives on the PSC. The next meeting of the PSC is scheduled for May 2025.

### **Meetings with Global Affairs Canada**

Briefing sessions have continued every six weeks with the RWVL Team and GAC. The meetings have covered key strategic issues including real time updates on the WVWL –SA project; approval of the Project Implementation Plan and Budget; high level visits and fiduciary matters.

## C) Changes in risk

In the semi-annual report the risks we identified internal project related risks. In this report we elaborate on changes in external risks.

Risk	Risk rating	Mitigation Strategy
<b>EXTERNAL</b>		
Political fragmentation in the Government of National Unity (GNU) poses a risk that gender equality issues may be deprioritized or inconsistently supported across the coalition eroding commitment to gender-responsive policies and disrupt coordination across key ministries affecting WROs.	High	GL will build strategic alliances with other WROs and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in order to ensure that gender equality remains on the national agenda and continue to monitor ministerial appointments and policy direction to assess and influence developments in real time.
Domestic budget cuts and delayed disbursements presents a significant risk to the continuity of public funding for gender-focused programs.	High	GL will continue to diversify funding sources on opportunities to increase funding for WROs by equipping them in their governance and fundraising efforts.
Weak implementation of the NSP-GBVF leading to funding not reaching WROs tasked with frontline service delivery.	High	GL will continue to source funds for the Grant Making Unit so that organizations on the ground are able to deliver services to communities.
USAID cuts have a direct impact on SRHR services, HIV prevention programs, and GBV initiatives in South Africa.	High	GL will continue to mobilize support from alternative donors, including Canada, the European Union, and private philanthropic foundations.
International donors may redirect their attention and resources to other regions, or scale back funding for gender-specific work in South Africa.	Medium	GL will encourage grantees to continue to be innovative and adaptable in their program design are being highlighted as strengths to appeal to donor priorities.
<b>INTERNAL</b>		
GL sustainability affected by funding cuts		GL has so far only been indirectly affected by funding cuts as we did not receive any funds from USAID. We have a robust funding diversification and sustainability strategy that serve us well in these times.

## 4. RWVL PROGRAM OUTCOMES

### Pillar 1: Organizational Capacity and Sustainability (Organisational development)

#### **Intermediate outcome 1100: Enhanced sustainability of local WROs and LBTQI+ groups to deliver their gender equality mandates**



The RWVL-SA baseline report presents a comprehensive and detailed overview of the capacity, positioning, and initial engagement of supported women’s rights organisations (WROs), LBTQI+ groups, and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) across South Africa. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators aligned with the programme’s logframe, the report establishes clear reference points for tracking progress in gender equality, feminist leadership, and institutional development.

The findings underscore both the diversity and vitality of the feminist movement in South Africa, as well as the structural gaps that require focused and sustained intervention. Priority areas identified include organisational sustainability, access to funding, development of internal systems, advocacy effectiveness, and participation in key strategic networks.

Additionally, the report emphasises the critical role of storytelling, peer learning, and collective advocacy in driving transformative change.

#### **Immediate outcome 1110. Increased ability of supported WROs, LBTQI+ groups, and WHRDs to leverage financial resources required to deliver on their mandate and strategies.**

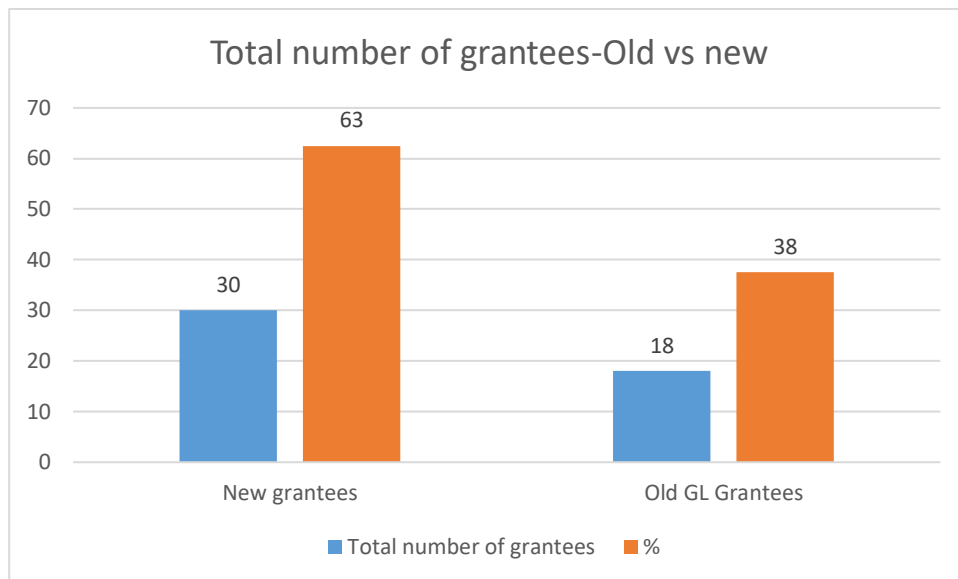
The first year of the programme focused on the call for applications and disbursing grants. We are therefore only able to report on GAC funds. In future we will be able to report on the extent to which grantees leverage off these funds to raise additional resources.

	<b>Opportunity</b>	<b>MYC</b>	<b>Total</b>
No who showed interest	132	128	390
No who submitted	71	59	130
No who went through to Due Diligence	26	24	50
No granted	26	22	48

As illustrated in the table, of the 390 WRO that showed interest in applying, 130 submitted by the closing date and 48 received grants. Key facts include:

- All grantees had to pass an eligibility test, that included being women led; focusing on gender equality; women’s rights and or LBTQ; and being willing to address any governance shortfall identified (Board; policies; two bank signatories).
- The opportunity grantees went straight to full application. MYC grantees followed a two stage process (concept then full application). WVL-SA received 59 MY Core concept notes and 71 Opportunity applications.

- RWVL-SA assessed all 130 full applications; 26 Opportunity and 24 MYC went through to Due Diligence.
- All Opportunity and 22 MYC passed Due Diligence and went on to contracting.



The table above shows that of the 48 total grantees, 30 (62%) are new and 18 grantees (38%) second time grantees. This distribution indicates a strong emphasis on expanding the programme's reach, with a clear majority (nearly two-thirds) of the grantees being newly onboarded. This shows that Gender Links is prioritising diversification and bringing new organisations into the fold, potentially to broaden geographic and or thematic impact, or to strengthen emerging voices in the movement. Crucially this time around RWVL has grantees in all nine South African provinces.

**1120 Increased ability of supported groups to create, monitor and improve organisational processes and systems.**

“WVL helped us move from survival to sustainability— now we’re a model for holistic GBV response.” — *Busisiwe Gabela, Incema*

In November 2024, Gender Links undertook a comprehensive due diligence process for its grantees to ensure transparency, accountability, and alignment with organizational goals. This process involved verifying legal documentation, assessing financial management systems, and evaluating the capacity and track record of potential grantees. The due diligence aimed to mitigate risks and establish a strong foundation for partnership. Following the successful completion of this process, Gender Links proceeded with the onboarding of opportunity grantees in December 2024. MYC grantees were on boarded in March 2025.

*RWVL Manager Nomthandazo Mankazana conducting due diligence at uThando Restoration Centre in KwaZulu-Natal. Photo: Gender Links*



The GL team conducted due diligence across South Africa. The table below summarizes the findings of the due diligence.

Marker	Baseline	Target	Variance
# of organisations registered	48	48	0
# of organisations with a Board or Trustees	48	48	0
# of organisations with HR policies	48	48	0
# of organisations with an organisational Bank Account	47	48	-1
# of organisations registered for tax	46	48	-2
# of organisations with more than one signatory on organisational bank account	45	48	-3
# of organisations with a Safeguarding policy (PSEAH)	43	48	-5
# of organisations with a Finance Policy	42	48	-6
# of organisations with a strategy for funding diversification	22	48	-26
# of organisations with Finance Policy which includes procurement policy	22	48	-26
# of organisations with a separate procurement policy	22	48	-26
# of organisations with an anti- corruption policy	22	48	-26
# of organisations that have been audited	22	48	-26
# of organisations with an M&E policy manual	15	48	-33
# of organisations registered for VAT	12	48	-36
# of organisations with an annual work plan	0	48	-48
# of organisations with a results tracking and reporting system	0	48	-48
# of organisations with a Communications Strategy	0	48	-48
% women on board	TBC		

The table shows

- All 48 organisations are formally registered, with nearly all maintaining boards or trustees.
- All 48 organisations have an HR policy in place.
- Almost all organisations (47) have a bank account, and most (45) require more than one signatory.
- Only 12 are registered for VAT, and fewer than half have formal finance or procurement policies.
- 22 organisations have adopted an anti-corruption policy, while only
- 15 have a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) policy manual.
- None of the grantees had an annual work plan or a system to track results

Ten organisations have grant conditions in their contract agreements and time frames to ensure that statutory requirements and building blocks for better institutional practise are met. These will be continuously monitored during the project through the reports.

MYC Grant recipient **Kuhluka Movement**, formally requested a temporary hold on the disbursement of funds. The organisation is currently undergoing internal restructuring aimed at enhancing its governance structures, operational systems, and overall strategic alignment. This pause reflects Kuhluka Movement's commitment to responsible grant management and organisational readiness. Gender Links acknowledges and supports this decision, recognising

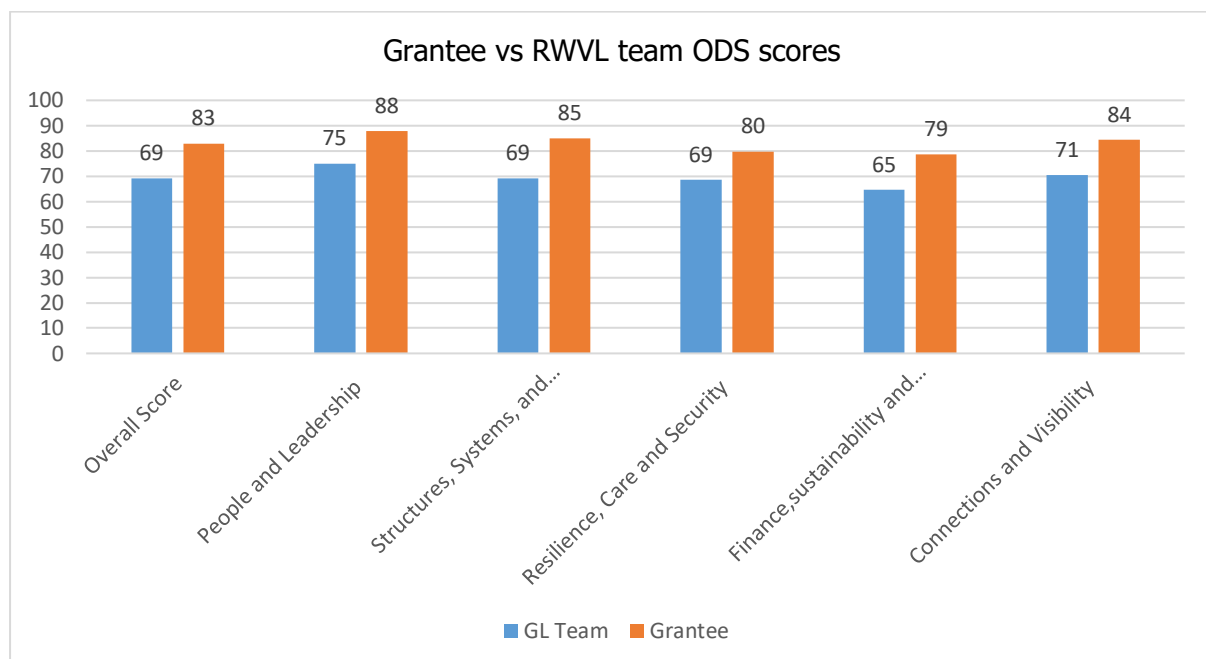
it as a proactive step toward ensuring long-term sustainability and effective implementation of the funded programme. Gender Links will maintain ongoing communication with Kuhluka Movement and will proceed with the disbursement once the restructuring process is complete and the organisation confirms its readiness to implement programme activities in line with RWVL objectives. The organisation has been given a deadline of 30 June to communicate their decision on whether to continue with the grant or not.

The **Organisational Development Scorecard (ODS)** is a self-assessment and external assessment tool used to evaluate the institutional capacity, readiness and growth of grantee organisations. The ODS is used to identify strengths and capacity gaps in key areas such as governance, financial management, programming, and advocacy. To support reflective practice and organisational learning in line with feminist principles. To serve as a baseline for capacity development, with annual assessments tracking growth and change over the programme cycle.

Key features of the ODS include:

- Co-assessment by both the grantee and Gender Links, promoting dialogue and consensus-building. This process of triangulation and dialogue is aligned with feminist research principles that prioritise co-creation and shared ownership of knowledge.
- Grounded in evidence—organisations must submit documentation to support their scores.
- Encourages ongoing improvement, not punitive evaluation.
- Used to inform technical support, capacity-building plans, and tailored interventions.

During the initial round of data collection, significant discrepancies were identified between the self-reported scores of grantees and the assessments conducted by Gender Links. In most instances, grantees rated themselves considerably higher than the scores assigned by RWVL staff.



This difference appears to stem from several factors:

- Many organisations may have misunderstood the purpose of the ODS tool, interpreting it as part of a competitive selection process rather than a developmental mechanism. This

misunderstanding likely contributed to inflated scores due to concerns about how responses would be perceived.

- Some grantees may not have fully grasped the scoring framework or lacked clarity regarding the types of evidence required to substantiate specific scores.
- Limited engagement prior to the contracting phase reduced opportunities for Gender Links to provide adequate guidance on the reflective and capacity-building nature of the ODS process.

The data reveals that Multi-Year Core grantees consistently score higher across all areas, likely due to their organisational maturity. Opportunity grantees exhibit more significant capacity gaps, especially in financial sustainability, systems and processes, and care and security.

During May/June of 2025 RWVL staff will conduct capacity and field visits to grantees to agree on the scoring of the ODS. Gender Links will engage each grantee in one-on-one sessions to review both sets of scores, facilitate dialogue, and reach consensus on a jointly validated ODS baseline. This collaborative review process is intended not only to enhance the validity and reliability of the assessment, but also to embed the ODS as a tool for ongoing organisational reflection, learning, and capacity strengthening. The Learning and Sharing Summit in March 2025 provided rich examples of the benefits of solid institutional pillars.



**Incema**, the Organisational Growth winner, is a second round WVL grantee based in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu Natal Province. Incema provides psycho-social support to sexually reactive children (SRCs) and survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).

Initially, Incema faced significant challenges due to weak operational systems. However, the organization experienced a transformative period of growth through the Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL) program, which helped build its capacity to address GBV more effectively and break the cycles of violence in the community.

Incema implemented critical policy development, establishing over ten key policies on human resources, finance, and safeguarding, standardizing operations and ensuring compliance. The organization significantly expanded its capacity by increasing staff from 4 to 24 members, enabling it to provide court- and school-based

support to 182 SRCs and 1,196 GBV survivors from 2020 to 2024. Additionally, Incema improved its financial sustainability, securing over R2 million in funding through better grant management and donor reporting, compared to just R154,000 before the WVL program.

Incema's focus on child protection included partnering with the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) to train interns and introduce trauma-informed care in schools. The organization also launched income-generating projects such as staff wellness programs and private practice initiatives, contributing to its long-term viability and community resilience.

The organization also plans to scale by opening sub-offices in magistrate courts and schools, focusing on children with disabilities.



The **Thabang Community Development Centre (CDC)**, located in the Northern Cape, won the runner up prize for its promising efforts. Started as a small information hub but evolved into a comprehensive multi-service non-profit organization addressing HIV, GBV, and poverty. The organization's transformation was made possible through institutional strengthening supported by the Renewed Women's Voice and Leadership (RWVL) program, which enhanced its capacity to address community needs in a more sustainable and impactful manner.

Thabang CDC upgraded its governance systems by implementing XERO financial systems, conducting quarterly board trainings, and using compliance checklists to improve accountability. The organization also launched social enterprises, including sewing and beadwork projects, which provided employment opportunities for vulnerable women while generating income for program sustainability. In addition, regular community dialogues and referral systems strengthened partnerships with local NGOs and government agencies, enabling more coordinated and effective support for the community.



*Thabang's project activities include sewing classes. Photo: Thabang CDC*

The organization has supported 500+ GBV survivors annually through court referrals and shelter services. Thabang CDC also prioritized digital security, training staff on cybersecurity to ensure safe handling of sensitive data related to GBV cases. Thabang CDC faces resource gaps, particularly in accessing remote rural areas, and advocates for additional vehicles to improve outreach. The organization has also expanded its services to include LGBTQI+ individuals and sex workers, offering tailored programs that ensure inclusivity and support for these marginalized communities.

## Pillar 2: Programming and Advocacy

***Intermediate Outcome 1200: Strengthened programming and advocacy of women's rights organizations, LBTQI+ groups and women human rights defenders to advance gender equality and empower women and girls.***

As GL will only receive its first grantee reports in July, we can only report at this stage on the onboarding of grantees.

The onboarding of opportunity grantees took place 11- 12 November 2024, and that for MYC grantees on 4-5 March. This onboarding was a pivotal orientation for newly contracted grantees, aimed at fostering shared understanding of grant expectations, compliance frameworks, and organisational development. Held over two days, the programme equipped partners with tools, knowledge, and systems essential for successful



*Opportunity grantees from Callas Foundation and TabooBreakers both Western Cape grantees working on their Results Frameworks during the RWVL Opportunity grantees onboarding.*

Key outcomes of the onboarding sessions included:

- Grantees completing their ODS baseline for ongoing capacity tracking.
- Improved understanding of compliance, reporting, and documentation protocols.
- Strengthened knowledge in fundraising and strategic donor engagement.
- Established peer relationships and open communication channels with Gender Links.

### Finance onboarding

GL conducted the finance onboarding for the MYC grantees on 2-3 April in Johannesburg. The expenditure for this workshop took place during the reporting period. During the session, participants were oriented on essential organisational policies, legal agreements, and financial reporting requirements, ensuring clarity on grant conditions and accountability standards. The session also introduced systems for budget tracking, reimbursements, and financial oversight, equipping grantees with practical tools to manage their funds efficiently and transparently. Emphasis was placed on maintaining accurate documentation and adopting structured processes to support effective financial governance.

### Western Cape Site visits



*Letania Davids from Callas Foundation showcasing the organisations branding when going to support victims in court. Photo: Nomthandazo Mankazana*

Gender Links conducted a series of field visits in the Western Cape, (5- 6 February 2025), as part of its ongoing grantee engagement and programme monitoring efforts under the Renewed Women’s Voice and Leadership (WVL) Fund. These visits provided valuable insights into the work, priorities, and on-the-ground challenges faced by local women’s rights organisations. The grantees visited included: New Heritage Foundation, Gender Rights In Tech, Project 90 by 2030, 1000 Women Trust, Callas Foundation.

The field visits comprised of the Gender Links special advisor, Colleen Lowe Morna and Nomthandazo Mankazana, the RWVL Grants Manager as well as Andisiwe Gcali, International Development Officer at the High Commission of Canada in South Africa.

The team engaged with the organisation’s leadership and programme staff to understand the progress of their community-focused work, particularly in relation to advocacy and support services; identify opportunities for learning and

amplification; exchanges on integrated service delivery models and potential for broader advocacy and policy engagement; strategies for amplifying women and girl’s voices in national policy dialogues.

**1210 Increased delivery by WRO and LGBTIQ+ groups of transformative intersectional programming and advocacy.**

Women’s rights organizations, LBTQI+ groups, and women human rights defenders play a vital role in advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls. These organizations are often at the forefront of challenging systemic discrimination, advocating for inclusive policies, and providing essential services to marginalized communities.

Their grassroots connections and lived experiences enable them to respond effectively to local needs while influencing broader social and legal reforms. Strengthening their programming and advocacy capacities not only amplifies their impact but also ensures that gender justice efforts are inclusive, intersectional, and sustainable.

By supporting these groups, we invest in a more equitable society where all individuals, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, can live with dignity, freedom, and equal opportunity. Of the 48 grantees that have been selected seven organisations indicated that they work directly with LBTQI+ communities (5 MYC and 2 Opportunity grantees). The organisations are spread across six provinces of South Africa.

*LBTQI+ is a key priority area in the RWVL project.  
Photo: Cape Town Pride Festival*

Name of organisation	Grant type	LBTQI+	Province
Thusanang Trauma Centre	Multi-year Core Grant	LBTQI+	North West
Thabang Community Development Centre	Multi-year Core Grant	LBTQI+	Northern Cape
Project 90 by 2030	Multi-year Core Grant	LBTQI+	Western Cape
Triangle Project	Multi-year Core Grant	LBTQI+	Western Cape
Forum for the Empowerment of Women	Multi-year Core Grant	LBTQI+	Gauteng
Capricorn Ignited LGBTI	Opportunity Grant	LBTQI+	Limpopo
TransHope	Opportunity Grant	LBTQI+	KwaZulu-Natal

**1220 Increased ability of emerging local WROs and LGBTIQ+ groups and WHRD to respond to crises and opportunities.**

This outcome highlights the critical importance of equipping local feminist actors with the resources, flexibility, and capacity needed to respond swiftly to emerging crises and time-sensitive advocacy opportunities. Whether addressing gender-based violence, reacting to political or legal developments, responding to humanitarian needs, or seizing catalytic policy moments, local women’s rights organisations (WROs), LBTQI+ groups, and Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) must be able to act with agility and impact. RWVL-



SA is designed to support this responsiveness through flexible opportunity grants, targeted technical assistance, and streamlined support mechanisms tailored to the needs of grassroots feminist movements. During their onboarding, Opportunity grantees expressed frustration over receiving CAD 25,000 over three years. Following consultations with GAC, GL agreed that the grantees could proposed their contract terms, but disbursements would be linked to delivery.

One Year contracts	Two Year contracts	Three Year contracts
<b>Old grantees</b>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coastal Resources Centre</li> <li>2. Agenda Feminist Media</li> <li>3. Youth Action Health</li> <li>4. The Great People of South Africa</li> <li>5. The Organisation for Young Women's Dignity (TOFYWD)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mt Foundation</li> <li>2. New Heritage Foundation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. TransHope</li> <li>2. Resoketswe Lebjane Foundation</li> </ol>
<b>New grantees</b>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nyara Youth Development</li> <li>2. Tosunga Banninga</li> <li>3. Taboobreaker Association</li> <li>4. The Rainbow Circle Organization</li> <li>5. Callas Foundation</li> <li>6. Curios Future Movement</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Limpopo Mental Health Society</li> <li>2. Nakambe Centre for Child and Family Care</li> <li>3. Social Welfare in Tech</li> <li>4. Ambassadors 4 Change</li> <li>5. Uthando Restoration Centre</li> <li>6. Capricorn Ignited LGBTIQ</li> <li>7. Usizo Community Development Projects</li> <li>8. Prince of Peace Victim Empowerment and Motivational Centre</li> <li>9. Bethlehem Child and Family Welfare Society</li> <li>10. Moswen Ngo</li> <li>11. Sizolwethu Child and Youth Care</li> </ol>	

The table presents an overview of grantees by duration of contracts and by their status as either returning ("old") or newly on boarded ("new") grantees. The table above shows that:

- A majority of the new grantees (11 out of 17) were awarded two-year contracts following discussions with each organisation.
- Returning grantees were distributed across all contract durations, with the highest number receiving one-year contracts.
- Two old grantees were awarded three-year contracts, likely demonstrating their confidence in Gender Links' support role and capacity to the grantees.
- The mix of contract lengths shows a balance between managing risk and fostering impact. One-year contracts may serve as pilot or transitional funding, while longer contracts provide opportunities for deeper engagement and sustainable outcomes.
- The high number of two-year contracts, particularly among new grantees, suggests the need for active monitoring and periodic evaluation. This will enable Gender Links to assess performance and determine future funding or scaling decisions during the implementation period.

### Pillar 3: Movement Strengthening.

***Intermediate Outcome 1300 Increased effectiveness of sub-national, national, regional and global women’s rights platforms, networks and alliances to affect policy, legal and social change.***

Following lessons learnt from WV-01 GL incorporated a component of movement building for the MYC grantees as part of their outcome three. GL noted that MYC grantees built stronger networks than the networking grantees this prompted GL to include a movement building component for all grantees. By formalising movement building within their planning and reporting processes, grantees are better positioned to demonstrate collaboration and networking efforts.

A key turning for movement building was at the Learning and Sharing Summit, which served as a fertile ground for grantees to deepen collaboration, identify overlapping priorities, and leverage each other’s strengths. Grantees collectively committed to pooling resources, skills, and expertise to launch joint advocacy campaigns. These collaborative efforts are not incidental. They are strategically designed with the explicit intent of influencing policy at various local, provincial, national, and regional levels.



In Year One, strategic networking and movement-building activities under RWVL have matured significantly. These initiatives reflect Gender Links' commitment to feminist solidarity, policy influence, and sustainability through peer-led collaboration. This period marked a transition from foundational planning to active joint programming and results-driven campaigns.

At the heart of this strategy was the establishment of thematic advocacy groups, formed during the joint Voice and Choice Learning and Sharing Summit held in March 2025. The formation process was participatory. Grantees opted into groups based on alignment with their strategic focus

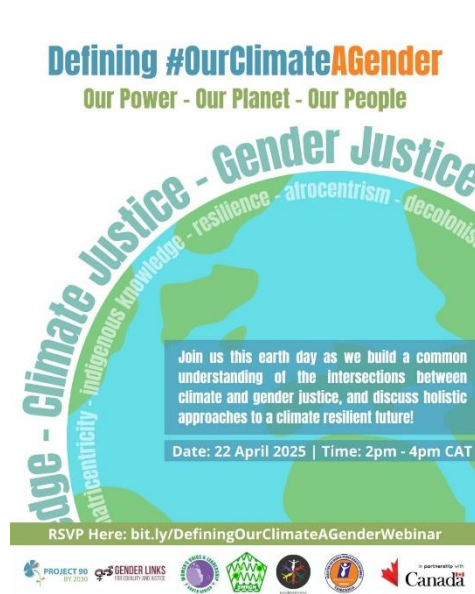
and community needs. This bottom-up approach will ensure relevance, ownership, and long-term engagement. These groups were designed around seven thematic areas.

These themes inform the structure of the Learning and Support Hubs designed to function as three-tiered platforms providing:

- **Learning:** Regular thematic webinars, technical exchange sessions, and knowledge-sharing initiatives that strengthen capacity.
- **Peer support and mentorship:** Grantees support one another through peer mentorship, site visits, joint debriefs, and informal technical backstopping.
- **Resource and expertise exchange:** Through shared toolkits, communications materials, campaign strategies, and joint use of platforms.

This model of integrating learning, support, and shared advocacy work is a catalytic force in the strengthening of WROs. RWVL grantees are not passive recipients of networking or support mechanisms; rather, they have emerged as active drivers of their own advocacy agendas.

A year-long calendar of joint programs and campaigns has been developed as a direct output of this convening, demonstrating the maturity, ownership, and sustainability of the grantees' engagement. These programs are currently underway and being implemented in accordance with the timeline and objectives.



### Climate Justice Campaign

The Climate Justice Advocacy Group independently mobilised resources and implemented a powerful joint campaign. Each participating organisation contributed in-kind or direct support, illustrating how shared commitment can overcome financial constraints. The campaign included a powerful panel discussion linking climate change with GBV impacts – especially on women and girls. The session was expertly moderated, with a highly professional facilitator who ensured alignment with feminist principles while ensuring participation across the board. This webinar was conducted over two hours, with 78 participants. It is of interest to note gender diversity of the attendees, it had 52 females, 13 males, 2 non-binary and 4 who preferred not to categorise themselves by gender.

The GBV advocacy group is in the process of hosting a national wide dialogue under the theme “Justice Delayed is Justice Denied.”

### Justice Delayed Is Justice Denied – GBV Reform Panel

Initiated in March, resulted from the summit as a strategic response to systemic delays and gaps in justice for GBV survivors. This led to the formation of an expert panel including survivors, civil society experts, legal scholars, researchers and activists to lead the campaign. The first briefing meeting held was to scope policy bottlenecks in GBV-related legal frameworks and survivor support, the webinar is scheduled to take place on 28 May 2025.

The outcome of the webinar is (1) influencing South African national policy reforms in survivor-centred judicial procedures including the court support services and (2) to produce and hand over a policy brief to the President of South Africa.

### Alignment with G20

Thematic priorities under the Networking and Movement-Building Strategy align strongly with the global agenda, particularly the key focus areas of the upcoming G20 Summit. Core themes such as financial inclusion, economic empowerment, gender-based violence, health equity, land rights, climate justice, care economy, digital access, and disability inclusion are not only central to the work of RWVL grantees, they are also emerging as global imperatives. This alignment endorses that the advocacy and movement-building efforts are facilitated in Southern Africa contribute meaningfully to global conversations and solutions. Despite grantees not having submitted formal project implementation reports yet, significant movement-building and pre-policy engagement activities have taken place. These include:

### Advocacy themes and related policies

Policy Change	Target	Implementation Plan	Progress
<i>Gender Based Violence: Establishing Court Support Services (Incema)</i>			
Inclusion of victim support in the courts system  Strengthening court support services for GBV survivors at the national and regional levels. DOJ Victim Support Procedures  NPA Court Procedures for GBV Survivors	Department of Justice and Constitutional Development National Prosecuting Authority Civil society organizations specializing in GBV survivor support	Advocate for the placement of dedicated support staff in courts to assist GBV survivors. Engage DOJ and NPA to formalize survivor-friendly procedures. Develop partnerships with legal aid services and psychosocial support organizations. Monitor and evaluate the impact of court support services.	In progress – Expert panel formed, sitting scheduled May 2025 In progress – engagement with DOJ and NPA through GBV panel. Piloted by Incema
<i>Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) - Menstrual Health Inclusion &amp; Youth-Friendly Clinics (New Heritage)</i>			
Inclusion of Menstrual Health Education in school curricula. Department of Education Life Orientation Curriculum Revival of youth-friendly services in public health clinics. Youth-Friendly Health Services Strategy	Department of Basic Education Provincial Education Departments School governing bodies Youth advocacy groups Department of health	1. Submit proposals for curriculum integration to the Department of Education. 2. Engage provincial education departments and school boards. 3. Conduct pilot programs and assess their impact. 4. Approach clinics to allocate specific hours for youth-friendly SRHR services.	In progress – proposals submitted, pilots being scoped by New Heritage In progress – stakeholder engagement and advocacy dialogues held
<i>Communications And Technology (GRIT)</i>			
Strengthening Digital Advocacy Policies: Evidence collected digitally to be admissible in courts Improve digital rights policies to protect activists and promote gender-sensitive online content. Digital Evidence Guidelines Digital Safety and Harassment Law	Department of Communications and Digital Technologies Civil society and digital rights advocacy groups Social media platforms and tech companies DOJ NPA Police force	1. Introduce apps & train beneficiaries 2. Engage social media companies for policy reforms. 3. Develop training programs on digital safety for activists. 4. Advocate for amendments to digital safety laws.	In progress – stakeholder mapping and app piloting by GRIT In progress – Training programs underway
<i>Land Rights - Promoting Gender-Inclusive Land Reforms</i>			
Equal access to land ownership for women and marginalized communities <i>SA Land Rights legislation</i>	Department of Agriculture, Land Reform,	1. Advocate for gender-responsive land policies.	In progress – engagement with traditional leaders initiated

Policy Change	Target	Implementation Plan	Progress
	Rural Development Traditional leadership structures Women's land rights organizations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage traditional leaders to promote women's land ownership.</li> <li>Work with legal institutions to ensure policy enforcement.</li> </ol>	
<i>Economic Empowerment - Strengthening Women's Financial Inclusion SASOPSBIZ Foundation</i>			
Improving access to financial resources and entrepreneurship opportunities for women. Policy on Gendered Access to Finance	Department of Small Business Development Financial institutions and microfinance organizations Women's business networks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for policy changes to increase women's access to funding.</li> <li>Partner with financial institutions to create gender-sensitive financial products.</li> <li>Training programs for women entrepreneurs.</li> </ol>	In progress – policy paper in development
<i>Climate Justice - Integrating Gender in Climate Policies Project 90 by 2030</i>			
Inclusion of gender perspectives in climate adaptation and mitigation policies. <i>National Climate Change Response Strategy. International climate justice frameworks. National Climate Change Response Strategy</i>	Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment Climate advocacy organizations Local communities and indigenous groups Institutions of Higher Learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for gender-responsive climate policies.</li> <li>Develop case studies on women-led climate resilience efforts.</li> <li>Engage policymakers and climate justice networks.</li> </ol>	In progress – roundtable held; submission being prepared
<i>Diversity - Promoting Inclusive Policies Sisonke Movement</i>			
Strengthening anti-discrimination policies for LGBTQIA+, persons with disabilities and Sex workers National Anti-Discrimination Policy	Department of Justice and Constitutional Development Human rights organizations Civil Society organisations Disability and LGBTQIA+ advocacy groups	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>policy reviews on inclusion.</li> <li>Advocate for stronger enforcement mechanisms.</li> <li>Develop inclusive workplace policies and training programs.</li> </ol>	In progress – advocacy tools and baseline research initiated

***1310 Increased capacity of feminist networks, alliances and movements to collectively advocate for the rights, interests and participation of women and girls, particularly the structurally excluded in South Africa***

RWVL-SA works with various stakeholders and partners as well as the grantees to influence policy affecting women's rights. During this period RWVL grantees linked up with WROs in the Voice and Choice Southern Africa Fund (VCSAF) for a joint learning and sharing summit held on 5 – 6 March 2025.

### **Learning and Sharing Summit**



*High Commissioner of Canada to South Africa delivered the Key Note address at the summit awards gala dinner.  
Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini*

In a pioneering initiative, Gender Links co-hosted a joint Learning and Sharing Summit, bringing together grantees from the Renewed Women's Voice and Leadership Fund (WVL – Multi-Year Core) and the Voice and Choice Southern Africa Fund (VCSAF) funded through the Amplify Change Partnership. This regional summit was designed to strengthen collaboration, promote peer learning, and highlight progress among organisations working to advance gender equality and social justice across Southern Africa.

The summit convened 55 grantees—23 from the Renewed WVL Fund and 32 from the VCSAF—under the unifying theme "Linking and Learning." The event provided a vibrant platform for exchanging best practices, engaging in meaningful dialogue, and building stronger regional networks among women's rights organisations (WROs) in South Africa and across the broader SADC region.

The objectives of the summit included:

- Giving a platform to the newly on boarded RWVL-SA grantees an opportunity to present their planned activities.
- Facilitating cross-learning and collaboration among partners to strengthen advocacy efforts.
- Promote knowledge exchange on movement building, networking, and gender advocacy.
- Providing a platform for VCSAF grantees to showcase the impact of their work and share best practices.

Grantees submitted applications in the following categories- Stories of Change – documenting transformative outcomes led by individuals or communities; Drivers of Change – highlighting innovative approaches that have resulted in measurable impact. Organisational Growth – recognising progress in internal governance, strategy, and operational effectiveness. Movement Building – celebrating initiatives that mobilise collective action for advocacy. Communications and Reach – showcasing creative use of media to advance gender equality narratives.



Shauna Flanagan interacting with grantees during the cocktail and networking session before the Gala dinner. Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini

During summit Day 1, a team of judges adjudicated the applications resulting with six winners and five runner-ups selected in each category except for the Driver of change category where only a winner was selected. The full list of winners and runner-ups can be found on this [link -Awards 2025 – Women's Voice and Leadership SA](#)

### **Driver of change winner**



Zintle Khobeni, Founder of The Great People of South Africa walked away with the Driver of change award. Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini

The Great People of South Africa (TGPSA) is empowering GBV survivors in Cape Metro through peer-led legal training and advocacy. Building on a previous WVL-funded initiative, the project trains survivors as paralegals, enhancing legal literacy and boosting reporting rates. Community dialogues and media campaigns featuring survivor stories have helped shift public perceptions and reduce stigma. Survivor leadership is central—Zintle, a trained advocate, now leads support groups and embodies the project’s ethos of breaking silence. Since implementation, reporting rates rose from 25% to 60%, and media engagement reached 200,000 people.

TGPSA also influenced policy, calling for transparency in survivor selection processes to reduce political interference. Despite ongoing mistrust in formal systems, the organisation responded by establishing community-based reporting

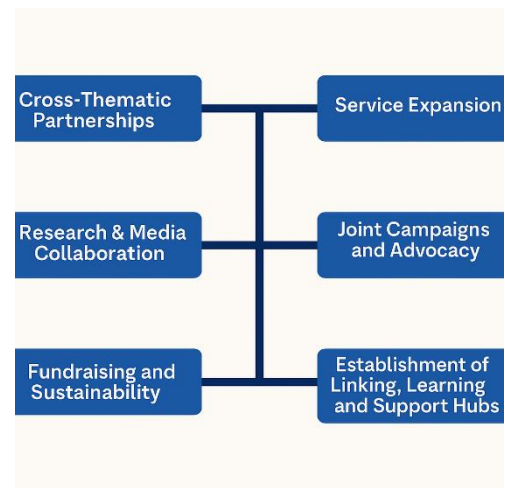
channels. Future plans include scaling legal training and expanding into rural areas, pending additional funding.

### **Linking, Learning and support hubs**

A core objective of Day two of the summit was to facilitate meaningful connections among grantees, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange across thematic areas.

Through these networking and partnership-building activities, the summit reinforced the commitment to supporting grassroots organizations and movement-building efforts for women’s empowerment and social justice.

The Hubs are designed to serve as structured thematic spaces where grantees from the Renewed Women’s



Voice and Leadership Fund (RWVL), the Voice and Choice Southern Africa Fund (VCSA), and WOSSO Fellows can engage meaningfully on shared priorities. The hubs are discussed in depth under pillar 3: Movement building.

**Movement building summit runner up**

The National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) launched *Enabled Womxn Arise* to address the exclusion of disabled women from mainstream GBV and gender equality movements. The project fostered collaboration between disability-focused organisations and feminist CBOs to co-create inclusive advocacy initiatives. Key activities included Disability Equity Training (DET), GBV workshops, and translating materials into accessible formats. Social media campaigns and hybrid learning events amplified disabled women’s voices. The initiative culminated in the formation of a *Disability-Responsive GBV Network*, ensuring inclusive policy influence and service access. A workshop in Johannesburg directly inspired the integration of sign language into GBV helplines. Barriers such as data costs and stigma were addressed through community partnerships and disability-responsive budgeting. Looking ahead, NCPD plans to expand its peer educator networks and leverage global platforms, such as the G20, to influence broader change.



**Launch of the Voice and Choice Barometer**



A key highlight of the summit was the launch of



the 15th edition of the SADC Gender Protocol Barometer and the sixth to focus specifically on Sexual and Reproductive Health and

Rights (SRHR), as well as the official launch of the Voice and Choice Fund founded the Safe Abortion Alliance of Southern Africa at the Learning and Sharing summit in November 2023.

The Voice and Choice Barometer is a critical resource tracking progress on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) across the 16 SADC countries. It provides an in-depth analysis of 100 indicators covering menstrual health, family planning, adolescent SRHR, safe abortion, HIV and AIDS, gender-based violence, and more. It highlights both progress and persistent gaps, emphasizing the need for continued action to advance SRHR policies and practices in alignment with the SADC SRHR Strategy 2019-2030. Case studies from RWVL-SA grantees will be incorporated in the next edition of the Barometer.

## **GBV Response Fund**

The GBV Response Fund, a national funding initiative aimed at resourcing efforts to combat gender-based violence and femicide, aligns closely with the RWVL project’s mission to empower and sustain WROs. A partnership with the Fund presents an opportunity for RWVL grantees to access additional financial resources, capacity-building opportunities, and a broader platform for national-level advocacy.

Such a collaboration would allow RWVL to leverage the Fund’s extensive networks and influence to amplify the voices of its grantees, especially those working in rural or underfunded regions. In turn, the GBV Response Fund could benefit from RWVL’s grassroots knowledge, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and experience in grant administration. The synergy between both entities could promote more coordinated funding mechanisms and reduce duplication of efforts in the sector.

Joint initiatives could include co-hosted capacity-building workshops, shared monitoring tools for GBV interventions, and collaborative policy dialogues with government and civil society. Moreover, integrating RWVL grantees into the GBV Response Fund’s programming would not only strengthen national GBV strategies but also ensure that funding flows to community-based organizations with proven impact.

## **Consular Workshop**

On March 24, 2025, Gender Links, represented by Grants and Networking Coordinator Thenjiwe Ngcobo, took part in a Consular Workshop hosted by the Canadian Embassy in Pretoria. The event convened representatives from ten embassies—Canada, the United States, Switzerland, New Zealand, Australia, Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom, Norway, and Italy. Among the participants were Gender Links' RWVL grantees, including Tosunga Banninga, Usizo Community Development Projects, and Sizolwethu Child and Youth Care from Johannesburg.

Drawing on her extensive experience in facilitating access to services for rape survivors, the grants and networking coordinator contributed to critical discussions on the gaps within South Africa’s gender-based violence (GBV) response system. Her engagement focused on the vulnerabilities faced by children—who are frequently assaulted by individuals they know—and the legal complexities surrounding consent, as defined in the Sexual Offences Amendment Act 32 of 2007.



Thenjiwe Ngcobo, Gender Links; Jess Foord from the Jess Foord Foundation; Ntombosindiso Makhoba from Sizolwethu Child and Youth Care; Sbusiso Mthethwa: Jess Ford foundation, Rachel Tewelde from the British High Commission at the Consular workshop in Pretoria.

One of the key issues highlighted was the delay in reporting sexual violence cases, which severely compromises evidence collection and access to justice. Following a presentation by the Jess Ford Foundation, Ngcobo underscored the necessity of immediate medical, legal, and psychosocial interventions to ensure that survivors receive comprehensive and timely support. The workshop also addressed the importance of accessible, survivor-centred services throughout the justice process, particularly before, during, and after court proceedings.

A notable outcome of the workshop was the recognition of the need for stronger networks between diplomatic missions and local organizations. Gender Links was acknowledged for its significant role in linking grassroots

initiatives with policy-making spaces, advocating for more coordinated and integrated support systems for survivors.

The workshop further emphasized the importance of embassy staff understanding South Africa’s legal and procedural frameworks in managing GBV cases. A proposal was made to organize a follow-up consular training session to better equip embassy representatives in providing effective support to survivors under their protection.

Norma Mbhele, the founder of Tosunga Banninga, an opportunity grantee, shared her personal experience as a rape survivor navigating the justice system—highlighting both moments of justice and instances where she encountered systemic barriers. Her story reinforced the need for stronger legal frameworks, enhanced advocacy, and survivor-centred care.



## 6. PROJECT IMPACT STORIES

The **Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW)**, a black lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) feminist organisation based in Johannesburg, has undergone profound organisational growth through its engagement with the Women’s Voice and Leadership – South Africa (RWVL) programme. As a community-rooted organisation dedicated to advocating for the rights and dignity of black LBQ women, FEW has always held a powerful vision. However, prior to its participation in the RWVL initiative, the organisation faced structural and operational limitations that affected its ability to scale, comply with donor expectations, and sustain its impact.

At the beginning of its journey with RWVL, FEW’s operational systems were in a formative state. While the vision and mission of the organisation were strong, it lacked several foundational policies, had limited capacity in financial management, and needed clearer

*Nomsa Manzini presenting FEW’s organisational development case study during the RWVL summit.  
Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini*

governance structures. Over the course of its engagement with RWVL, FEW made substantial strides in institutionalising its work. The organisation now operates with a strong financial unit comprising a Finance Manager, Finance Administrator, and Grants Manager, overseen by a Logistics Coordinator. Together, they ensure rigorous grant compliance, operational efficiency, and responsible financial management.



FEW also formalised its governance structures by establishing a five-member board that provides strategic oversight and strengthens accountability. The organisation is now registered with the South African Revenue Service (SARS), has a compliant bank account, and has developed a financial policies manual—critical steps in ensuring fiduciary credibility and donor readiness.

One of the key advancements has been the establishment of an Operations Unit in 2024. This unit was created to address prior challenges in programme coordination, donor communication, and reporting. The unit now plays a central role in ensuring smooth implementation, effective communication with donors, and timely submission of narrative and financial reports. FEW also began enhancing its monitoring

and evaluation (M&E) capacity. Initially reliant on in-house knowledge, the organisation is now in the process of hiring a dedicated M&E consultant. This move is expected to strengthen data-driven decision-making and better capture the impact of its work.

Safeguarding practices have also improved significantly. FEW has implemented policies such as the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH) and Anti-Bribery policies, and is in the process of finalising its Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Historically reliant on programme-specific funding, FEW recognised the need to diversify its income sources. With guidance from RWVL, the organisation developed a two-year fundraising strategy. Plans are underway to implement income-generating activities, including delivering diversity and inclusion training to corporate entities—particularly targeting industries in mining and rural provinces. The organisational growth experienced by FEW has not only been internally transformative but has also yielded tangible external results. In a letter of appreciation, the Grants Manager, Nomsa Manzini wrote to GL the following:

*"I want to sincerely thank you for the Gender Links grant and the structured systems and procedures that came with it. This experience has truly broadened our perspective on leadership and governance structures at FEW. The due diligence meeting you guided us through has been invaluable, and we have adopted it as a best practice for engaging with our donors.*

*"We are also pleased to share some exciting news with you—thanks to the insights and learnings from this process, we have successfully secured R4.5 million in funding from The Other Foundation, allowing us to implement a similar program within the SADC region and Soweto Pride in SA. Your teachings have been instrumental in this journey, and I am grateful for the session held during the onboarding (Panel on Key Gender Links Policies that form part of your contract). This will significantly help us in structuring ourselves in a way that aligns with donor requirements and supports our long-term growth plan."*

This testimonial is a clear affirmation of the catalytic impact of RWVL support—not only did it improve internal governance, but it also positioned FEW to unlock new funding and expand its regional footprint.

The sustainability of FEW's progress is anchored in its continued commitment to capacity building, governance, and strategic planning. The organisation has made clear efforts to invest in leadership development, strengthen internal systems, and foster donor relationships. It has also improved stakeholder communication through quarterly check-ins, social media, and plans for a monthly newsletter.

Through RWVL, FEW has transformed from a grassroots organisation with structural challenges into a resilient, strategically aligned, and donor-ready feminist institution. This journey is a testament to the power of feminist funding and mentorship. By aligning capacity-building efforts with core feminist principles, Gender Links and the RWVL programme have empowered FEW to scale its impact, amplify the voices of black LBQ women, and lead transformative change across South Africa and the region.

### [Project Impact Story: Masimanyabe Women's Rights International](#)

Masimanyane Women's Rights International (MWRI), a feminist organization based in South Africa, is transforming how intersectional advocacy, survivor-centered programming, and multi-stakeholder collaboration can combat gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF).

Through grassroots programs and global policy dialogues, MWRI is pioneering a scalable approach to systemic change that empowers communities and strengthens movements for gender equality.

Key strategies for Movement Strengthening include:

- Holistic Survivor Support & Data-Driven Advocacy  
MWRI's Thuthuzela Care Centres have supported 5,714 GBV survivors (2021-2024) by providing integrated health, legal, and psychosocial services. This data-driven approach has enabled MWRI to advocate for



*Frida from Masimanye making a powerful contribution on GBV during Day 1 panel discussion at the linking and learning summit. Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini*

- stronger GBV response protocols, particularly in the Eastern Cape courts, influencing policy reforms based on survivor feedback and service delivery data.
- Innovative Community Mobilization  
The "Ball in Hand for Girls" soccer program has engaged 144 girls across eight communities, challenging gender norms while teaching GBV prevention. MWRI also trained 2,373 youth in sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), fostering intergenerational leadership and advocacy through youth clubs and leadership boot camps, reaching over 5,350 participants.
- Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration  
MWRI's Women's Ikhwelo Network (WIN), a coalition of 116 women's organizations, ensures grassroots voices influence local governance. On a global scale, MWRI partnered with Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) to train 100 women across 13 African countries, leveraging WhatsApp groups for continued support and knowledge sharing.
- Inclusive Governance & Resource Equity  
WIN's participatory decision-making process ensures marginalized groups are included in program design. MWRI also provides capacity building to leaders in governance, budgeting, and resource management, focusing on rural organizations with limited access to funding.

MWRI's efforts have significantly influenced policy, resulting in co-created GBVF policy briefs with universities that enhanced local government accountability. Cultural shifts have occurred through parent-child dialogues, with 3,424 participants joining discussions that reduce the stigma surrounding GBV reporting. Hybrid campaigns, such as social media marches and webinars, have expanded the movement's reach, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and key lessons are now part of MWRI's knowledge management system.

Despite challenges like digital divides in rural areas, MWRI adapted by offering WhatsApp-based mentoring and low-data platforms to ensure connectivity. Sustainability is strengthened through diverse funding sources, including international partnerships and social enterprise models.

To build on this success, MWRI plans to scale rural programs by expanding soccer and SRHR initiatives to 15 more communities through the WIN network. They also aim to strengthen data systems to better track GBVF trends in schools and continue advocating for CEDAW-aligned policies on the global stage. The success of MWRI lies in its ability to merge community leadership with global advocacy, ensuring that survivors' voices are at the forefront of the fight against GBVF. By focusing on youth, women's governance, and creative platforms like art and sports, MWRI offers a replicable model for intersectional and sustainable advocacy that is changing the narrative around GBV and empowering women and girls worldwide.

## 7. LEARNING

Since 2019 when GAC entrusted GL with managing WV 01, the organisation has expanded its Grant Management Unit. From 2020 to 2024, GL managed Amplify Change's Voice and Choice Southern Africa Fund that included ten former WV grantees, providing bridging finance in the period leading up to RWV. In 2023, GL won the bid to lead the Women of the South Speak Out consortium funded by the FCDO, and this year the EU funded Marang LGBTIQ Southern Africa Fund. The GMU now constitutes 50 percent of GL's budget. As a learning organisation, we continue to learn from each of these experiences, and in particular apply our learning from WV 01 to the RWV. For example:

**Grant design and management:** During the onboarding and inception workshop in December 2024, Opportunity grantees expressed concerns about the CAD 25,000 (R300,000) being spread over three years. In response, the RWV team engaged with GAC and each grantee to allow funding to be disbursed over a period of one to three years, based on organizational performance. Additionally, before contracting, the RWV Manager and the Grants and Networking Coordinator worked closely with grantees to ensure they had a clear and shared understanding of their logic models and theories of change. Contracts were only finalized after these were agreed upon.

**Thorough due diligence:** GL demonstrated vigilance in identifying and mitigating risks. One applicant shortlisted for Multi-Year Core (MYC) funding was not awarded a grant after a whistle-blower alerted GL to possible mismanagement of funds within the organisation. The organization shut down in March 2025, underscoring the importance of GL's thorough vetting process.

**Capacity building and institutional support:** Opportunity and MYC grantees successfully completed the baseline Organizational Development Scorecard (ODS) assessments. Opportunity grantees will undergo a follow-up ODS in June 2026 as part of ongoing reporting and monitoring. The RWV team also provided tailored one-on-one training on results frameworks and report writing to Opportunity grantees during onboarding. For MYC grantees, the training took place over several months, which contributed to delays in the disbursement of their first funding tranche.

**Transparent communication:** Following a competitive call that yielded 190 full applications, GL anticipated backlash from unsuccessful applicants. To manage expectations, the team proactively shared detailed feedback with applicants who requested it and maintained open lines of communication across various platforms to ensure transparency.

**Flexibility and empathy:** GL recognized the value of engaging with partners empathetically and with flexibility. For example, GL granted Kuhluka Movement the necessary time to stabilize before initiating project implementation. Additionally, the team learned to accommodate project changes without compromising overall implementation. This experience, particularly

through the rigorous Request for Change (RFC) processes, has built GL's confidence that future funding cycles will involve fewer change requests.

**Visibility and networking:** To foster collaboration and knowledge-sharing, GL restricted the WVLC staffing to include a Grants and Networking Coordinator whose key performance indicators (KPIs) include ensuring the formation of grantee networks. These efforts have already led to the establishment of alliances and joint campaigns among grantees across South Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Furthermore, nine WhatsApp groups have been maintained post-grant to encourage continued networking and the sharing of opportunities.

**Policy and advocacy Support:** GL placed a strong emphasis on policy development and strategic communications during the fine-tuning of grantee RFCs, particularly around the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSPGBVF). Most grantees are actively involved in policy-related work aligned with the NSPGBVF. Additionally, the ongoing formation of learning hubs—comprising RWVLC grantees, WOSSO fellows, Marang fund grantees from five SADC countries, and former Voice and Choice Southern Africa fund grantees—is fostering knowledge exchange on innovative methodologies and advocacy strategies.

## 8. FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

GL commends GAC for the Results-Based Management Reporting for partners on 25 March 2025. The templates are intuitive and designed to build progressively throughout the project, supporting consistent and efficient reporting. Overall, the guidance significantly enhances the usability and coherence of project management and reporting processes.

As part of our commitment to capacity strengthening and cross-organisational learning, Gender Links shared its (ODS) tool with the GACs MEL team. By sharing this tool, we hope to encourage a culture of self-assessment and continuous development across our partner organisations. We hope that more organisations will adopt the ODS as a practical, user-friendly resource to guide their institutional growth, enhance accountability, and support long-term sustainability. This initiative reflects our belief that strong internal systems are the foundation for lasting impact in gender equality and human rights advocacy.

We appreciate the reporting guidance in RWVLC, missing in WVLC 01. We would like to suggest some improvements, including an executive summary, and ways to avoid repetition.

## 9. ANNEXES

- Annex 1: Output and Activity reporting worksheet (Excel Template provided as guidance)
- Annex 2: Outcome worksheet
- Annex:3 Common Output Indicator Report (including the List of Partners) (Excel Template provided as guidance)
- Annex 4: Communications: Two examples of communication products and/or events you are most proud of from the reporting period (include links to publicly available information)
- Annex 5: Annual work plan for next period