

TRANSFORMING POWER



A KNOTTED ROPE

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Contents

Introduction

Michel Friedman 5

Vukani Tsohang Africa

Vukani: The Curtain Rises - The Unraveling
From Dust to Diamonds

Fazila Gany 17
Elizabeth Mabitle and
Thandiwe Mtimkulu 20

Remmoho Women's Forum

Remmoho: The Catalyst for Birth
I feel 120%
Seeing with Kind Eyes/Confronting with Respect

Fazila Gany 30
Millicent Phillips 32
Nosipho Twala 34

Kganya Consortium

Kganya Consortium
Ashes for Beauty

Nina Benjamin 44
Gladys Mokolo and
Caroline Mashale 47

Sikhula Sonke

Building a Second Layer of Leadership: Sikhula Sonke Change Project
The Highest Trees Always Get the Most Wind
Changing Seasons

Nina Benjamin 53
Sara Claasen 56
Patricia Dyata 65

Justice and Women

Justice and Women: Strengthening Understandings of Power
Holding the Rope Together – A Case of 'Power With'
Picking up the Rope
Picking up the Rope – A Visual Symbol of Taking Responsibility

Michel Friedman 71
Bongiwe Zondi 74
Amber Howard 78
Jenny Bell 88

introduction
michel friedman

Sitting in a circle, all 14 participants, each looking tranquil. There seems to be magic in the air as we listen to them share moving pieces of writing. The writing is a reflection of their individual and organisational change. Voices filter - some with sadness, courage, hope and others letting go of grief. How powerful a space is this, I reflect.

The participants have enthusiastically taken on this writing process with Gender at Work. Their fulfillment of writing their personal change stories has certainly left its mark on many minds, and has also touched many hearts. Vukani, Remmoho, Sikhula Sonke, Kganya Consortium and JAW – the protective womb that houses people and issues. The stories, both personally and organisationally, need to reflect the Gender at Work Gender Action Learning Process.

Wings expanded - the participants are ready to soar in their last piece of writing - even through complexities and challenges experienced.

Fazila Gany, one of the writing mentors wrote this piece as a way of showing the participants how to write in a more creative way. She used the actual space we had created in the writing workshop as her content, so that everyone would be able to relate to what she was saying.

The workshop space, continually referred to by participants as 'safe', is well described by Nosipho Twala: "Above all this is a very nice space- we can connect at different levels. I admire the wisdom in this room. People care for each other. People we have here are invaluable. Everyone's contribution is deep." And Patricia Dyata says: "I can speak anything about myself without shame." (Writing workshop, Sep 2011)

At the start of this project, only one of the authors from the five participating organisations would have considered herself a 'writer'. Only three wrote in their first language - two in English, one in Zulu. All the other authors have taken the brave step of finding ways to express themselves and their experience through writing in their second or third language.

This book represents the culmination of a three-year journey we travelled with the authors and their organisations. The first part of the process included an eighteen-month organisational Gender Action Learning Process supported by Gender at Work facilitators from October 2008 to February 2010. The second part of the process included an

eighteen-month writing process with three peer learning writing workshops with Gender at Work writing mentors. Out of this process came the book of personal stories of change, *WRITING FROM THE INSIDE: STORIES OF HOPE AND CHANGE* published in 2011, and this second book on organisational stories.

A team of facilitator/ mentors¹ assisted the authors to produce the current stories through two workshops and ongoing mentoring. In between the two workshops, the authors were encouraged to break their writing up into bite-sized chunks through the support of writing homework and associated feedback from their mentors.

The learning process and the writing circle Fazila refers to above, acted as an ever expanding set of spirals forming an alchemical-like cauldron, which enabled multiple forms of transformation. Participants were gently encouraged to push boundaries and stretch towards new horizons, beyond the confines of closed spaces of oppression, structural discrimination, marginalisation, exclusion.

In the current book the authors from the five organisations look back along the road they have collectively crawled, cried, walked, hopped and run along – to share insights and perspectives about the changes they noticed in their organisations and the constituencies they work with. This writing makes visible and legitimates examples of good practice, reflecting its benefits.

Thandiwe Mtinkulu, for instance, describes how this process turned her from a piece of coal into a diamond (Writing workshop, Feb 2011).

“I came here with few skills in handling the public. Gender at Work had to unearth us from the soil. We came in very raw – with information. During the process we were purified and washed with chemicals – learning from others, being cooked and processed in these workshops by fire, being polished to bring out the good in us. We are now ready for use and marketable... Gender at Work worked at me to polish me as a diamond.”

Her metaphor made me realise just how profound a transformation this process had enabled for participants, not unlike that described by alchemists of old. “Ostensibly concerned with turning base metals into gold, alchemy was in fact dedicated to transforming the lead of self into the gold of spirit.”²

“The substance, whether material or human, must change its character, be torn into separate elements in order to be reformed into something other -- it must “die” in order to be reborn.”³

It seems to me that in different ways all the stories told in this book refer to aspects of the processes classically identified as part of an alchemical journey.

1 Shamim Meer designed and coordinated the writing support with Michel Friedman. Fazila Gany mentored Vukani Tsohang Africa and Remmoho writers, Nina Benjamin mentored Kganya Consortium and Sikhula Sonke writers and Michel Friedman mentored Justice and Women writers.

2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alchemy#Relation_to_Hermeticism

3 http://www.alchemylab.com/what_is_alchemy.htm

These stories and the process followed to generate them, prove how powerful the act of writing is in crystallising and articulating the meaning of an experience. The authors had to stand back from their everyday life battles of survival to reflect and write. That they were able to bring their passion, wit, humour, honesty, courage and artistry to their stories is all the more remarkable.

The ongoing tension of standing back in the face of survival struggles is made very tangible during the morning check-in on the second day of the third writing workshop. The check-in is a time for the writers to connect with each other and draw from the support of the group. Most of the rest of the time they are writing alone. We know how important it is to give time and space for emotional communication as well as recognising the complexity of the writer's lives.

At some point - near the end of an already long check-in, Gladys Mokolo from the Kganya Consortium starts to talk about how she had a hectic day on the first day of our workshop – that there is a crisis in her organisation – they have had their fourth burglary – where all their computers and equipment have been stolen, morale is very low, and she doesn't know what to do.

Yesterday was a hectic day for me. I was so miserable. There was a lot I was thinking about -the crisis at work. And my phone kept ringing. I was losing concentra-

tion. I was not sure what I was doing. I had back pain. At night I kept going to the toilet. Caroline was also very tired. We could not do what we said we would do. I will have to take calls today. The problem we are having at the recycling project is that a staff member had an accident and we have no one to help with working with the money, who we can trust.

I sit there thinking - this feels like déjà vu – there always seems to be a crisis at Kganya at the same time as we have our workshops scheduled and it is always a struggle for Gladys to get to the workshop. Gladys tells us that Caroline Mashale, the second author from Kganya wanted to leave the youth project she had started. Caroline also wanted to leave the writing process and Gladys and the Gender at Work mentor had to persuade her to come to this workshop. Gladys continues:

I was so worried when Caroline said she did not want to be part of the projects. Every week we had burglaries at the project. They took gates, groceries, computers. I asked is it because people hate us, want to see us fall down? Is it because of drugs? I am so confused. No funders want to invest where there is crime. Because of crime maybe we won't get assistance from any one. So I am happy Caroline changed her mind. I was frustrated, asking what will I do? Caroline is trained. If she leaves I will

have to look for someone else. I was thinking of not attending this workshop. I was very frustrated. We rely on fees and some parents are not paying for the crèche. We have no funds for the crèche. Computers, printers, are all taken. We are living in frustration. One of the burglars of the crèche was killed by the community. He was less than 18 years, very young. Caroline's project is the young ones. We don't know what to do. I cried when Nosipho cried yesterday. I felt bad because I face the same thing. If we close the project - 25 people are working there - what is going to happen? People put trust on you. It's very frustrating. [Gladys cried as she related the above]

I think to myself - now we are asking Gladys to concentrate, focus and be creative in her writing. Are we crazy? Is this a ridiculous idea? Why did we do this? Writing is a difficult enough task for seasoned writers, and here we were asking people who are activists, practitioners, doers - to stand back and communicate their stories - in the midst of ongoing crises and living in extremely challenging conditions.

The group responds to Gladys. They warmly hold the space to listen to and support her in her pain and despair. Some offer ideas and suggestions for how to move forward. Some offer healing prayers. The room feels thick and heavy. I listen to the sharing and then know why we do this. The inspiration

and change that is enabled from having a space where people can feel held is remarkable. The next day Gladys reports:

Thanks to your prayers I was healed. After I cried I felt fresh and we even enjoyed how to write our story. This thing of crime really affects me and I was just taking it. My husband tells me a strong woman does not cry and if I cry he doesn't want to see me crying. I said to him to cry is natural. I've seen a difference since I arrived here.

In this process we have learned that facing our pain, grief, fear, rage is a necessary step to creating new ways of living - ones that are respectful and valuing of who we are and what our experiences and life-knowledges have to offer. Touching into those parts of ourselves and our lives, that we most intensely wish to avoid, acts like a portal into the possibility of something new. What is actually being transformed in these processes? What does it mean to transform existing inequality to create new norms?

When we first meet participants we are faced with multiple histories - most often of pain, silence, poverty, loss, violence, despair, disappointment - written on faces, on bent bodies, in broken hearts. Faces and lives shaped by living in under-resourced and often violent and poverty stricken circumstances. And in time we discover and unearth love, humor, wit, power, creativity, resilience, passion,



Fazila Gany and Michel Friedman

vision, commitment. We learn more about how different women and men from various South African communities experience and are marked by the unequal conditions shaping their lives. The action learning processes create and offer a safe space, a container for participants to face themselves, each other and their lives. Through deep reflection and exposure to new ways of seeing and being, participants re-mould the clay of their lives and emerge transformed, able to engage in their own and their communities lives with new agency, purpose and confidence.

As facilitators of this process our experience lay in the gender action learning part of the program. Facilitating an action learning writing process with mostly very inexperienced writers was a new adventure. We had to construct the process along the way and we fast learned how challenging and difficult, yet ultimately rewarding it is to support 'new writers' in a group of organisations who have been through a complex process of change. Writing always takes much longer than you think.

These authors are courageous – willing to expose their “shadow” areas, vulnerabilities, difficulties, pains – and make them public. They learned the value and strengthening power of such exposure and all had to engage in profound negotiations in their own organisations to manage the emotional fallout. In some instances the writing itself set off new organisational challenges and dynamics. Sara Claasen says:

“to be honest and open is important but it can bring conflict. It was difficult but when I freewrite it comes back and it flows. Now I don't care if people throw stones.” (Writing workshop, Feb 2011)

In the beginning, we were not altogether conscious of what we were unleashing. We assumed that because of the prior eighteen-month Gender Action Learning Process – a lot of the processing had already been done. But of course the writing began to dig deeper and reveal yet more layers of buried material – often painful and which also needed healing. As Nosipho Twala put it,

“each time you write your subconscious goes deeper. I'm afraid of freewriting because things you've buried for years come up and stare at you. You're dealing with writing and your own history.” (Writing workshop, Feb 2011)

And Bongwiwe Zondi describes her revelation:

“For many years I was tormented by fear – I shifted blame to others. A turning point for me was realising that I need an inner reflection to know myself and what is holding me back. Unless I change myself I cannot help community members to believe in themselves.” (Writing workshop, Sep 2011)

All the writers describe the profound mental,

emotional and at times spiritual transformation that the process unfolded. The tangible material effects of these changes are inspirational. All participants successfully accessed what power they could to influence the situations they found themselves in. In this way they not only transformed themselves but also their conditions. Through the power of writing they have touched into their core power and accessed voice, they have learned to articulate and represent themselves, name their experience and become knowledge producers. This act in itself turns a key power dynamic of our society on its head. The value of the experience goes far beyond the writing of these short case studies. For example, Sara Claasen, a farm worker leader told us how proud she was to have written a seven page report for their recent Annual General Meeting on her own. When an external support person read it, she commented:

“I am not making changes, this is the voice of a woman worker – this is the language of a farm worker and a woman worker” (Writing workshop, Sep 2011).

Crisis and learning to manage crisis without self-destructing is a common theme among at least four of the organisations.

Sikhula Sonke is a social movement trade union that organises farm workers. It thus represents one of the most oppressed sectors of South Africa’s working class. In their change project they set out

to develop a second tier layer of women leaders at branch/farm level. In the process the organisation managed to ride some huge tidal waves – complex conflicts, personal and financial crises bedeviled them throughout the 3 year period. They showed enormous maturity in being able to grow through these crises rather than self-destruct. With the limited human and financial resources available to them their stories are inspirational. Among other things it teaches the importance of the quality of leadership. Having a certain percentage of women in leadership is not enough if you are not able to use your position in a different way from the male-stream. The Sikhula Sonke writers beautifully illustrate the tensions and conflicts women worker leaders face and what is required to sustain a farm worker organisation that attempts to abide by feminist principles.

The Kganya Consortium, a network of CBO’s organised into an umbrella body was like a phoenix rising from the ashes. The majority working in the CBO projects are women. When they started the process Kganya had come through a disappointing time and were very disillusioned. Their project was to re-grow the consortium and re-build the strength of the women. In the process they learned to validate the importance of women’s contribution to addressing unemployment, to integrate youth into the consortium and to tackle the eroding nature of drugs and crime. Perhaps these tasks are seen as invisible ‘women’s work’ because it is women that get involved, yet through the process they gained

more community respect, the ability to articulate and represent themselves.

Vukani Tsohang Africa started off as a classically defined income-generating project assisting mentally challenged individuals to learn skills that they could use to sustain themselves. Over time poor women began to join the classes. Vukani now has a parallel economic development and skills training arm together with a social development and 'empowerment' arm. Through the process, the Vukani participants learned the art of facilitating large community dialogues on topics that help their mainly women constituency to address all kinds of issues impacting their lives. In the early part of the process, their own work was largely invisible. Vukani members struggled to articulate, represent or deeply value the amazing contribution they were making. They did not know how to transform internalised oppression and had to grow the capacity to value that they should be paid for their labour. During the process they learned to transform traditional women's work into something powerful and recognisable. Their newfound confidence was quickly translated into material benefits and an expanded struggle for social justice. At the level of the state they won speedier action in procuring identity documents for community members, and a new fire station in their area. At the personal level, they managed to get polygamous husbands to build houses fairly for all wives, rights to pension payouts and to negotiate their sexual relationships in new ways.

Remmoho Women's Forum the women's section of the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) had set itself up to, among other things, tackle all forms of women abuse. Early into the process, they recognised the need to get clear about their own identity in relation to the APF and claim their voice. Soon however they were faced with an extremely challenging situation when three APF members were accused of rape, one of the accused being the partner of a Remmoho executive committee member. Remmoho succeeded in preventing this situation from destroying the organisation. The participants learned to recognise their own aggression, how much of the APF culture they had imbibed, and successfully overcame classic stereotypically female negative forms of gossip. They broke the cycle of violence by learning to confront 'offending' members within their own ranks, and among their male comrades in the APF, with respect instead of aggression. In learning to work in differently constructive ways they are fundamentally transforming some of the endemic conditions of violence permeating the air around them.

Justice and Women is the one organisation among the five, which experienced two rounds of action learning with Gender at Work. They thus had a longer time to implement what they had learned. They focus in their case study on the complexities of working with power in race, gender and class terms. They illustrate how much of a knotted rope power is – and that to transform victim and perpetrator 'psyches' requires considerable untangling.



Top: Shamim Meer

Bottom: Nina Benjamin, Michel Friedman and Fazila Gany

In the context where the management has been mainly white and the staff and interns black, the JAW writers show how greater power sharing in an organisation requires both sides to transform their role in the knotted rope.

In sum, this writing process has built multiple capacities. The individual authors have improved their reflection, thinking and writing skills and learned how to work in a writing partnership. The writing has played a role in clarifying and reflecting back to the organisation key issues in its process and dynamics. In some organisations, the writing continued to play a role in surfacing new issues and/or making existing issues more conscious. It has enabled some non-hegemonic voices to be surfaced, a great deal of healing to take place and an emotional maturing in the authors.

The authors and the organisations have built their capacity to reflect upon and own difficult issues as well as negotiate/integrate multiple and sometimes painful perspectives.

In documenting these stories, the authors help others benefit from their experience. Sharing these authentic stories that show both the 'dark' and 'light' sides of profound processes of change will hopefully inspire others. Joan Borysenko's⁴ words powerfully and eloquently sum up what this process and the stories it produced are about:

In this culture, we are told to set goals. We are supposed to know where we are going and then take specific steps to get there. But this is not always possible, or even wise. It is the male model of linear, rational thinking. But the life process of women... is more chaotic and disorderly, more circular and intuitive. Sometimes we can't see the next horizon until we step out of the old life. We don't yet know where we are going. We may not know the place till we arrive (p173).

During (these) frightening initiatory periods of becoming more wholly and holy ourselves, the stories of other women who have weathered similar storms can be life rafts. Personal stories provide wisdom that can sustain and inspire us. We may find ourselves saying, "If she lived through that, so can I". Truly archetypal stories are like blueprints for soul growth. We hear them and some part of our being clicks in and locks on, like a homing device (p174)

4 JOAN BORYSENKO. A Woman's Spiritual Journey. Finding the feminine path to fulfillment. 1999, Piatkus, London.



Vukani Tsohang Africa

The Curtain Rises - The Unraveling

Fazila Gany

Vukani is an organisation that has helped hundreds of women to acquire skills in order that they may be economically empowered. Although their initial initiative was geared at helping intellectually challenged young men and women, this changed after they recognised the need to assist all community members. This was also a subtle overture to allow society to look at the intellectually challenged in a non-discriminatory way.

When we first met them, staff worked in fragmented ways without consulting each other much, with little ability to take initiative and with great reliance on Ma Thandi (Thandiwe Mtinkulu) for everything. As Vukani founder and co-ordinator, Ma Thandi carried the responsibility of program implementation and the role of leadership.

While staff relied on Ma Thandi to make decisions, there was a covert undercurrent of growing discomfort. The Gender at Work Gender Action Learning Process became a stimulus to unmask the many submerged issues. The Vukani change team⁵ began to look more critically at situations with a gendered eye. For their change project, the team chose to develop their internal structure, rebuilding governance and improving their financial sustainability.

Vukani staff members were both comfortable and uncomfortable with Ma Thandi's reign. Initially voice was minimal and there was a lack of confidence to engage with any issue. The process began to unravel that staff had grown complacent with an unquestioned leadership. This was something familiar – for in their households it was the men, the patriarchal rulers that made decisions. It was a memorable and significant moment when the change team, including Ma Thandi, realised this. The women of Vukani felt a deep sense of relief and through affirmation began to embrace themselves as individuals with degrees of uniqueness. Ma Thandi realised that she could let go and this lifted the weight off her shoulders.

As staff became more responsible, confident and cooperative, the change began to be mirrored in the students who came to Vukani. Students, of their own initiative, put money together to polish the building and replace used light bulbs.

The Vukani change team experienced the Gender at Work Action Learning Process as participatory and engaging and as enabling reflection and the reclaiming of voice. This helped them to see that the Vukani skills development programme needed a supporting space where the community could engage in dialogue on issues of concern. This space grew so that up to one hundred and forty community members participated in these sessions and took action on issues such as lack of adequate firefighting, domestic violence, HIV and AIDS and a whole lot more.

⁵ The change team of three to four members from each organization was responsible for making sure that the organizational change project was implemented. The change team members act as 'change leaders' and are the participants in the peer learning workshops.

The Gender at Work Action Learning Process created a space where Vukani staff began to see how they devalued themselves as women and how being devalued as women at home and in their personal lives, perpetuated their devaluation at work. They saw the need to value themselves as women. They identified that there was need to build capacity for fundraising and they made efforts to bring in money. This is the start of a long journey and some staff have ventured out to study as well as to become their own entrepreneurs.

*The song of transformation
The song of change
We run through the townships
We run through muddy paths
No need to rap on doors
We touched their lives
We touched on our own
The stone is cast, the ripples form
They may never touch
But they all have arisen from one space
Many voices
Many thoughts
One goal, trans form...transform*



Elizabeth Mabitle and Thandiwe Mtimkulu

From Dust to Diamonds: Elizabeth Mabitle and Thandiwe Mtimkulu

It is a hot day of winter. There is so much happening at Vukani. It is the graduation day for the first class of 2011. The graduates are excited and looking forward to the graduation ceremony. They are moving around preparing the hall, setting table decorations. The hall is beautiful. All the tapestry products are hanging. We have other products exhibited – doilies, tray cloths and beadwork. The facilitators are busy supervising, waiting to usher in the important guests.

Vukani is an organisation in Evaton about 60 kilometers from Johannesburg, an area full of shacks, where unemployment and poverty are rife. Vukani was formed to alleviate the plight of intellectually challenged youth who could not be employed because of their intellectual ability. Ma Thandi (Thandiwe Mtimkulu) decided to resign from the school in which she taught to start Vukani. She started with some youth and two staff members from Thabo-Vuyo (a local special school for disabled children). Youth were taught skills of tapestry and beadwork.

This programme developed so well that it grew to include women, youth and all people with disabilities (deaf, physically disabled) in a skills empowering programme - teaching tapestry, beadwork, dressmaking and designing. Vukani also began to run programmes on first aid, HIV/AIDS and domestic abuse, and helped community members to access disability grants.

From Tapestry to dialogue

It is a day full of hope as all who came to the meeting seem ready to engage in the new adventure of self-discovery. The mood is filled with excitement as the first aid team enters with their equipment. At the start of the programme the group is happy and ready to learn how to use the sewing machines, draft patterns, cut and sew. As the work progresses, friendly relationships form between us and our students. These relationships extend beyond the skills people come to learn.

After a few weeks we notice the change of attitude in some of our students. One or two would be absent on Mondays. Others withdraw from their friends and prefer to work alone. Some talk to each other in harsh voices. The women who come with children look miserable and their children are restless. During our morning devotions some children cry as we sing and pray.

At lunch time we as Vukani staff discuss our observations. As staff we are also worried about absenteeism and we decide to address this with the students. As we raise our concerns there is a lot of tension in the room. No one responds. We realise we have to create a safe space as practiced in the Gender at Work Process. We need to assure the students that whatever is discussed will not leave the room.

The Gender at Work Process helped us to reflect on our programmes and the way they were run. We began to see the need to place emphasis on dialogues to open up space for communication between men and women. We created a space to freely discuss the issues that affected students from first aid to HIV and AIDS, domestic violence, women rights and wellness. This helped build community, where the skills development and dialogue complemented and strengthened each other.

Our dialogues at Vukani are spaces where women and men come together and a topic is chosen by the group. We get a specialist from outside who

gives a talk and answers questions. We then open it up for discussion. Initially talks used to be given, but after working with Gender at Work we saw the need for a participatory and interactive process in order for men and women to freely discuss issues. The safe space was empathetically created.

The dialogues started when one first aid member revealed her HIV status. She advised the house to take treatment and lead a healthy and peaceful life. She also stated that her six month old baby is HIV negative because she took Nevirapine before delivery. She testified that after sharing with the group she was able to laugh and feel good about herself. After she revealed her status we could see that people felt safe in the space to share information.

This led other women to open up and speak about their abusive husbands, being HIV positive and their struggles with in-laws. We had so much to teach and learn from each other but above all we shared love. It was nice to have people listen with interest. Everyone felt free and eager to test for HIV, as in tomorrow. We created a focus group for all affected by HIV instead of only for the infected. We looked at testing, treatment and encouraging those who are negative to stay negative.

The dialogues help women to speak out. Women have been enslaved for a very long time. Culture and tradition have enslaved them for many centuries. We were raised to be dependent on men.

A husband becomes the head of the family, has to make all laws that govern his household. He is expected to build a house, protect his family, and provide food, clothing and education for his dependants. Our culture teaches women to be submissive and that we are inferior to men.

We are taught not to be loud but speak soft because we are women. That we have to be gentle and kind. We are taught to adhere to all the laws and rules that oppress us and that favour men. We are taught to keep all the family secrets because a wise woman protects her family from outsiders. That is why women suffer alone in silence and do not share with others. Abuse becomes a cycle because we are taught not to speak out. That is why people get healed after attending dialogues that encourage them to speak out.

From dialogue to action

Students who were coming to Vukani started telling other women about us, and more women started coming to Vukani. It seemed like women were using skills development as a means to get help with bigger issues. They were attending the dialogues and their neighbours commented, “what’s happening? your look has changed.” That led others to become interested. We saw that the community needed us, so we started taking up community concerns.

The dialogues opened doors for free and happy health visits and led to an improved attitude among health workers. Women spoke out in the dialogues

that they are afraid to go to clinics because of the bad treatment they receive from health workers. The Vukani staff approached the clinic and discussed the women’s concerns with the clinic sisters. All patients are now treated with respect because of our intervention.

Evaton has a lot of poverty stricken people and unemployment is rife. Shacks are built very close to each other and in an event of fire it is easy for the whole neighborhood to catch fire. Winter is very harsh and cold, leading most families to sleep with mbawulas (self-made stoves) to keep warm. This is dangerous because we sometimes wake up in the morning to find that many have died due to smoke inhalation. We have strong winds and it’s easy for a spark to catch and for the fire to spread. Since the statistics of deaths related to fires were outrageous in the community, the first aid team and Vukani approached the town council to motivate for the building of a fire station in Evaton. The community joined Vukani in advocating for the fire station. We hope for fewer deaths now that the fire station has been built and the community has been taught how to make their households safe and free from fire. We also received training on how to extinguish fires and deal with burns in our homes.

We ran a very successful domestic violence and sexual abuse dialogue with Ujama, an organisation based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and linked to the theology department. Ujama focuses on gender issues and opens up discussion on



violence against women and domestic violence, drawing on Bible stories. We also had a chance to look at culture and what this meant in our lives as women, at how culture further compounds and supports violence and abuse against women. This dialogue encouraged many to speak out to end violence. Speaking out is one of the many ways that can help end violence against women.

The dialogue was conducted with great empathy and most got a chance to heal from their childhood traumas of abuse. People opened up and many thank Vukani as they managed to lift the baggage they have carried for years on their shoulders. Women got a chance to cry, speak and deal with the trauma. One of the participants shared how she was raped daily by her uncle for fifteen years and how she was threatened not to tell anyone. She said “at last I feel free, thanks to Ujama.” Another participant said:

“Enough is enough; I had to work very hard to sell bunny chows in order to put bread on the table and support my family. My husband would always come home drunk with other women and chase me away. He did not respect me because I do not have children. One day he wanted to kill me and I had to sleep under a car. Thank you Vukani for giving me my life back.”

The space encouraged even those that were shy and unable to express themselves in public to gain confidence and speak. Most women were able to gain voice and express themselves in different ways and for different reasons.

One woman who is in a polygamous marriage asked the group to help her because as the first wife she does not have a house, while all the other three wives have houses. She lives in a shack with her children and the husband only visits her once a week or when one of the other wives is ill. He has money but does not want to build her a house. This woman was advised to make an appointment for Vukani women to see her husband. She was scared to tell him but in the end she convinced her husband to meet the women. The husband got so scared that he immediately joined the ‘12 men home’ which is a society for people who want to build houses in the area. This group contributes R2000 a month and buys building material, draws a plan and pays for the builder after buying all the materials. We are proud as an organisation that this woman has now started laying the foundation to build the house.

Really the safe space has created women of integrity and boosted our self esteem and self-worth. These are women who can speak out and fight for their rights. They are emotionally, spiritually, physically and socially stable. Their work has improved and they plan to start a safe house for abused women and children.

We have also dealt with issues of maintenance, ID documents and birth certificates. We make referrals, do follow ups and we give information in all our dialogues. We are proud for creating a safe space and building safe and better communities where women can stand firm and are able to exercise their rights. Spouses, families and in-laws know that they have to treat women with respect.

Mathabo, one of our staff members and a pioneer ex-facilitator, now owns a business, Sarah a former student is now employed by a group sewing school uniforms. We are proud to have produced many others who were trained by Vukani and now work to sustain their families. Thoko, a local designer, motivates others and has managed to pass her matric very well. She is going to university next year to further her studies.

Getting our organisation right: Building a team

The internal structure is the engine of any organisation giving power to the effective running of the project. A successful organisation has a very strong and dedicated structure that propels its functions and smooth running. We are faced with many challenges.

When we started with the Gender at Work Gender Action Learning Process the internal structure was not functional because of:

- The death of the chairperson and disillusioned committee members.
- Lack of funding and government's

failure to keep their promise of funds for the period agreed upon.

- Lack of finances which led to unfair labour practice because we all need to be paid for our work. Lack of equipment and resources made it a challenge to continue with our programmes. We were at times unable to pay rent and overhead expenses.

- Managers struggled to run the organisation effectively
- Seminars were haphazardly run.

We were in the dark, deep in the muddy pit when the Gender at Work Process uprooted us to a safe broad space. The safe space created trust and honesty amongst us as staff. We learnt to value and respect every member of the team in the organisation and all participants felt free and confident to be part of the dialogues and discussions. Not being fluent in English and inferiority complexes were no longer barriers. The team became strong and was able to tackle difficult challenges to rebuild the organisation.

Staff had never seen fundraising as their role. Ma Thandi had always done the fundraising. Staff never had the confidence to do this. Staff thought they were “little minded people” who did not have the ability to run Vukani. This little mindedness is linked to centuries of suppression and oppression of women who have been devalued in their homes and community. We lived best what we were used to - being devalued, to work as unpaid workers like

we do in our homes.

There was also little trust amongst staff. As women we were always so submissive in our household and we were used to someone leading, so at Vukani we fell into an “uncomfortable comfort” zone. During the Gender at Work process we began to see the need to build trust. We had to start with ourselves then build trust with the community.

We also realised that we had no idea of funding and how it worked or how to even take care of the funds. We did not even know how the board functioned. Ma Thandi got ill partly because of the stress of feeling responsible for the lack of funding. What created more stress for Ma Thandi was that one of the staff members was in a highly abusive relationship and Ma Thandi felt helpless as she could not provide adequate income for the staff member to be independent and leave the relationship.

Action from reflection

Vukani has been grossly hit by having no funds. The staff had been willing to work very hard without earning a living. This was hard but acceptable to women because they believe that money belongs to men. Women do all the work that is not noticed and unpaid. We are brought up to believe that men do work that is valuable and are the only people who have a right to be compensated.

The students trained by us opened up their own

businesses and had moved on. Gender at Work posed a question to us: if we were empowering others why were we not empowering ourselves? This question stuck in our minds. The change process made us realise that our work is important and we deserve to be paid for the good work that we are doing for our community. We had to build a positive attitude as women of status and be confident that we are entitled to receive a salary after we have performed good work.

The Vukani team with the manager came up with strategies to raise funds. We organised an open day to show case our products to the parents, community and local businesses and companies in our area. This was done but did not yield good results even though we placed adverts in the media and advertised by word of mouth. We wrote donation letters to companies but the responses were negative due to the economic climate.

After long engagements and assistance from Vukani staff members and from Gladys Mokolo who heads up a CBO in Orange Farm, the team proposed that new students must pay a registration fee. This did help for a while although the once off fees could not sustain the organisation. People who come to the project cannot afford to pay monthly as most struggle to even pay the registration fee.

Gradually some staff ventured out on their own to run successful entrepreneurships. Two staff

remained running Vukani. None of the staff had marketing skills to professionally market Vukani so even though they were unhappy to, they ventured out on their own. Gender at Work helped these staff members to feel strengthened to take the plunge even though it was not Gender at Work's intention that we go our separate journeys.

Opening our minds

Gender at Work helped us to "open our mind". By this we mean that as women we saw the need for vision and put into practice what we were teaching others to do. Gender at Work provided spaces for reflection and critical thinking, in peer learning workshops and in ongoing processes with our facilitator, Fazila Gany. We started to use this reflection process even amongst ourselves as staff. If there was an issue with staff we went home and came back the next day to say to the other person involved "I was not happy with...". We felt confident enough to confront and express our feelings.

We in turn, role-modelled this for our students. When we could work as a staff team we saw the need to help students work as a group. We guided them and presently a group of ten women function in a business together. They have started a cooperative that is registered and they are successful.

We took the reflective spaces and actioned it. Even our dialogues worked in a way where people reflected, discussed and acted upon the issues on hand. This space of negotiating and planning has

built our confidence. We are aware that as women we must earn a living wage to be able to sustain ourselves and our families. We are doing odd sewing jobs for the community. We sew uniforms for women's social groups, parties and weddings. We are proud that we are known and that we are of great help in the community. We also hire out our chairs and tables for a small fee to raise funds. Our future is bright and promising. We started as dust but we have emerged as sparkling diamonds.



Elizabeth Mabitle



Remmoho Women's Forum

Remmoho: The Catalyst for Birth:

Fazila Gany

A noisy meeting is about to begin, the men stroll in laughing and teasing the women present. The meeting space boasts almost 90% women and the rest male. It is one hour late already and many items are on the agenda. The women are anxious as they have left kids with other family members and household chores still await them. The men trickle in, no worry at all.

This is a typical meeting at the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF). Women make up 90% of those attending, yet they would soon have their voices drowned by the minority men present. The women shrink in their seats thinking this is a space for these powerful men who can make reference to Marx, to Che, as if they were relating a folk tale. Feeling inadequate as well as not listened to, the women from the APF increasingly begin to identify the gap and the imbalance of voice as well as issues that pertain to women. Domestic violence that affects many of these women is seen as miniscule, not as important as water or housing issues.

Finally women began to gather and make a decision that a space was needed in order to allow women to have their voices heard, a safe space to share problems, and to form a women's movement. Remmoho was born.

The ideal was a space that allowed the freedom to express issues as well as a space that was not dominated by men. The men in the APF became suspicious and at every opportunity wanted to know what the women were up to. Some of the women were amused and some were anxious as a few of the girlfriends of these men were part of Remmoho. The issue of confidentiality became the concern. When Gender at Work entered, bubbles of concern were floating around and women were not sure how to deal with this and were somehow scared that if it got out of hand they would be scorned by the APF. Having succeeded in securing a small amount of funding they were able to be more of an organisation but with limits as they discovered.

Remmoho's change project aimed to help them clarify their own identity, their values and their relationship with the APF, and to develop more supportive and empowering ways of working together as women.

Issues of anger

At one of the meetings I facilitated, I sensed from the body language of the fifty or so women present that something was happening. The meeting started two hours late and we commenced with Tai Chi⁶ as a way of helping us de-stress. Finally a full room, we settled into our chairs. As a facilitator one learns to read the room with heart as well as mind. So taking my queue from the issue of late coming I asked, "What is the one thing you would

⁶ We typically start our day with Capacitar's (www.capacitar.org) adaptation of Tai Chi, which focuses on mindfulness of inner experience via breath and simple movement—plus connection to the energy of earth and community broadly defined.

like to change about yourself?” I felt like I had removed the lid off Pandora’s Box. It took strength to listen and hold the emotions that spilled out. There was an overall sense of anger as women spoke, about their feelings of helplessness. One woman, of about sixty, told the group she felt so angry all the time, so suspicious of people – she wished she could feel less angry and be more patient.

Confront with respect

Now that they had started their own organisation, separate from the APF, the women in Remmoho had a choice in how to run things and they could decide who they wanted as leadership. But the excitement in the air did not last long, as one of the key role-players on the executive committee had her credibility questioned. She was allegedly harbouring a rapist – her ex-boyfriend accused of raping a sex worker. He was a member of the APF.

The impact of this was further heightened when one of the leaders of Remmoho took the accused in and gave him shelter. Emotions, gossip and many other reactions were unleashed. Gossip in Remmoho was fast becoming a hindrance in building relationships. Women were scared of talking. They could not trust each other to keep confidential what they shared in confidence. This was opened for discussion in a meeting and as Remmoho women began to engage with the issue, it became clear that their responses were tied to their low self esteem and to the wielding of hidden power. Years of being silenced had taught them a

different way of coping with other women.

They realised that many of them were either in or had come through abusive relationships and this had triggered anger as well as lethal finger pointing. They started questioning. They then accepted and saw that they could speak about difficult issues, understand with empathy and look with what they called “kind eyes” which would lead to the outcome “confronting with respect”. This respect was not one which was just one sided but rather a reciprocated respect based on the fundamental elements of dignity, listening, openness and most of all compassion. When they affirmed this, they began to relook at the Remmoho leader with “kind eyes”.

During the course of the change project we worked long and hard to look at concepts like patriarchy, socialisation and power and link these to gender as well as women’s experiences. The women began to see how decades of oppression had been internalised and projected onto other women. They slowly recognised the need to confront in a way that allowed them to be honest and respectful but more than that, empathetic to each other’s situation.

It is important to recognise that women in Remmoho, like all women, are not without influence from the worlds they emerge from, the worlds they work in, the communities they come from and the movements they are part of.

I feel 120% (this is my response these days when people ask me how I feel)

Millicent Phillips

Translated from Zulu by Nosipho Twala

My life for a long time has been filled with anger and sometimes violence builds inside of me. Years of abuse by my ex-partner had left me feeling resentful and full of rage. I became isolated and also extremely ill. This is my story of transformation, my story of small victories. A story I'm sure many other women can relate to, celebrating the same victories.

As women we were part of the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF). This organisation struggled for basic services, especially water, housing, proper sanitation and electricity for poor people in the community. As women in this organisation we had no voice and were oppressed as our leadership was male dominated. They expected us as women to listen and agree with them at all times without questioning or challenging any issue.

We sat down and discussed the problem of being voiceless and concluded that we will have a woman structure in order for us to have a voice, a safe space and a say in how the organisation is run. We knew that Remmoho would be able to speak for all women collectively and also challenge some of the decisions taken on behalf of women.

In this space we will be able to share, dialogue and discuss problems we face as women in our homes, at work and in the public space. This is one of the reasons why we formed Remmoho. We wanted to engage without any anger as previously you needed to fight before you can be heard in the APF. Gender at Work taught us to deal with our anger and to always confront with respect. It showed us the value of respecting others and appreciating the wisdom that all of us bring into the space.

We learnt Tai Chi⁷ which helped improve the mood especially if people had difficult issues to deal with. As an individual I learnt to deal with the anger that I had internalised for more than fifteen years. I was violent and I would fight back when confronted. I have now turned this energy towards helping others who need help in my organisation. I am now a part of the solution rather than the problem. I now embrace the slogan on our T-shirts that says we stand against all forms of abuse. The organisation is different because we are now able to share our personal stories with trust, knowing that they will not get out.

I think it is important for Remmoho to participate in writing a story in order for us to be able to share what we have learnt and how we have grown as members since participating in the process. We need to love each other in order for our organisation to grow.

Gender at Work changed everything in my life. When I started I was shy and did not want to

⁷ Simple movements focused on mindfulness of inner experience and connection to the energy of earth and community. See www.capacitar.org

answer or speak in public. If a person laughed at me I wanted to attack them. I could not understand right or wrong and would lose my temper easily and for no reason. I am now a role model in my community. I can sit down and listen to somebody regardless of whether I know a person or not. I do not hurry to respond but I listen to the person until she finishes. Now when people ask me how I am, I say “120 %”.



Nosipho Twala and Millicent Phillips

Seeing with Kind Eyes/ Confronting with Respect

Nosipho Twala

It's Sunday morning and we are sitting in a very cold conference room. We can all hear the sound of the air con and feel the cool air as it blows from the wall. Every member of the group is in tears. The room is so quiet that you can feel everyone's breathing and pounding heartbeat. A box of tissues is lying empty on the floor and we are using serviettes on the coffee table to wipe our tears. We are all listening attentively as we hold the speaker's thoughts and feelings in our hearts.

Everyone in the room is crying because we are discussing the gang rape, how it affected us and why we had to be hard on ourselves as Remmoho members. When we first heard about the rape it made us feel numb. It disabled us and made us wish to run away. It was difficult to imagine that an organisation vocal on women abuse could be affected by something like this. This was a big, difficult and challenging issue.

It was difficult and challenging because the three men accused of the rape were members of the Anti-Privatisation Forum, the organisation we all belonged to and from within which we as women decided to form Remmoho. It was made doubly difficult because one of the accused was the partner

of a Remmoho executive committee member. As an organisation set up to ensure women's rights, what were we to do about this? Who should we support? And how? We felt placed in the middle of an impossible challenge.

Pain and confusion

As an organisation we felt pressured by the Anti-Privatisation Forum, other organisations and members to issue a press statement. This was difficult as it was an order from above and not an action we felt we wanted to take as Remmoho. We needed to consult and speak to all our members, in order to understand what they were feeling and how they wanted to deal with this issue. The pressure was too much and it took three meetings to come up with a collective agreement and be able to speak with one voice. Every member agreed that all the alleged perpetrators should be expelled from the organisation. But different affiliates and members favoured some alleged perpetrators over others, seeing some as less guilty even before the court could make a ruling.

The rape charges and the manner in which it was handled polarised the organisation. Within Remmoho we also started pointing fingers and we started fighting with each other. This was a difficult issue to handle without emotions. It challenged our existence and all the things we stood for as an organisation.

This case also surfaced the reality most of our

members live. Because two of the perpetrators were in paid jobs in the APF and because ninety eight percent of our members are unemployed, there was a lot of opportunistic behavior and this compromised the success of the APF internal investigation committee. It became hard to follow leads and some members did not want to testify as they were friends of the perpetrators. This was like a trial by media. This made us experience how difficult it is to handle issues of violence, especially in your organisation. It highlighted that it is easy to give advice when you are very far from an issue. We will be more thorough and patient in future if we handle such an issue as it could destroy the unity and trust in an organisation.

This crisis led to a breakdown of the relationship between Remmoho and the APF which we had worked very hard to build. The events as they unfolded put the Remmoho change team⁸ (who had worked with Gender at Work) in a predicament as we wanted to handle the situation differently but still get our desired results. We wanted our intervention to build rather than destroy the organisation. We needed to ensure that we built peace and not war. As a team we wanted to build peace and develop a new way of running our organisation.

The crisis had given rise to two camps. When one of the Remmoho leaders began to support an alleged perpetrator of the rape, we were reminded of our own internalised oppression as women. Most members were defensive because they lived

the same reality of living with and supporting men who are violent, who abuse women and who may even rape. We lived this reality either in the past, or we were still in it. It was too painful to find the strength to challenge ourselves, as it is easy to blame others. This is the culture we were used to. And then we started asking why we were responding in this manner. It was evident that decades of our own abuse had left residues in other parts of our life as women. It was time to clean up.

Accountability

We invited the Gender at Work facilitator (who had worked with the Remmoho change team) to facilitate one of our meetings. Relationships in Remmoho were so sour that members could not bear to be in the same space or even to speak to each other. The meeting with the Gender at Work facilitator was healing, and helped us go forward because the rape incident had almost paralysed us. The process helped us look at each other with kind eyes and remember that we were all affected by this incident. We got an opportunity to cry and deal with the issues as a collective.

As an organisation we really struggled with the issue of accountability. This was really difficult. Accountability was a buzz word which created uneasiness and discomfort. It was difficult to be accountable to each other as women. In our daily lives at home and in our families we are accountable to men, in very authoritative relationships. This seemed to also be the kind of relationship

⁸ The change team was made up of three to four members of the organisation, who acted as 'change leaders', participated in the peer learning workshops, and were responsible for making sure that the organizational change project was implemented.

of authority of the APF over Remmoho, and this is what we so desperately wanted to change.

However our attitudes changed after we understood why accountability was important for every organisation. Being accountable to each other and to the organisation meant that we had to become more responsible not only for our own actions but also for our feelings and emotions. We had to abandon the victim within us which we had carried for so long, and which had played out even in leadership positions.

The Gender at Work Gender Action Learning Process provided a space to help us look more in depth at accountability, and an opportunity to reconstruct accountability. Our attitudes changed after we learnt from our interaction with the other organisations in the Gender at Work Process, that accountability was important for every organisation.

Dilemmas around who to support

Initially the rape charges gave rise to a lot of fear among women in Remmoho. Most of our members did not want to deal with this issue and some were not sure as to whether we needed to support the victim or let the law take its course. As an organisation we were associated with the APF and this gave rise to a new conflict since the APF felt we were abdicating our responsibility. Some Remmoho members and women from APF supported the victim by going to every court sitting.

As Remmoho we decided, after much unpacking and processing of feelings, to support our executive committee member who was in a relationship with one of the accused. We felt her's was a lived reality which most women face every day in their lives. As women we also identified that we have so much bottled up inside and often we never have the space to talk about these feelings of anger, frustration and even fear.

But supporting our executive committee member meant that we were not giving outright support to the victim and led to continued divisions among our members. We were also made aware that one of the accused was being supported by a huge women's delegation from his area as they felt he was innocent and that this was nothing but a set up for a committed and vibrant leader.

In light of all this it was difficult to ask our members to go to court because we did not want to have women fighting each other at court instead of supporting the victim. We also felt that we had internal issues which caused us pain and because of this we failed to handle the situation. Going to court while we have unresolved issues might have been detrimental. It would have meant that we had two faces - one for the public space and one for the organisation. Therefore those who went to support the victim did so as individuals because as an organisation we respected the individual's opinion.

Reflecting back at all this the question for me is:

why were women the only group that supported the victim? Is it because rape is seen as a woman's problem? It is common practice that gender issues in our organisations are seen as women's issues?

Confronting with respect

One of the most important things we learnt from the Gender at Work process was to confront issues, but to do so with respect, because naming and shaming destroys rather than builds the organisation. Traditionally respect is seen as humility. As a woman you have to respect the man who was the head of the household, irrespective of whether he gives you respect or not. As a woman you are expected to submit to your husband without receiving the same from him. But now we had grown to see this as a mutual process – where we both give and receive. And you are not only given it - you have to earn it and you have to give it to others in return. We talk now of a new found respect that embraces you with empathy as well as with wholeness. As the Remmoho change team we needed to be the change that we wanted to see. This allowed other members to learn from us and contribute in changing the organisation.

We learnt that we spent a lot of time responding to and solving problems of the world but we did not work on ourselves as practitioners, to ensure that we grow with our organisation and that we deal with issues and relationships in our organisation. Participating in the Gender at Work process taught us to reflect after every action and to draw on Tai

Chi⁹. We started every meeting with Tai Chi to help us engage respectfully and give mutual respect to each other. Tai Chi also kept us grounded and ensured that we did not give out of an empty bucket – that we replenished our energy and felt whole as individuals, in order to be always present and recognise the uniqueness and wisdom that others bring into the space.

We also drew on our experience of the check-in space at the Gender at Work workshops. The check-in gave people the opportunity to speak of their concerns and feelings. It made Remmoho members feel important, valued, taken seriously and respected. It also helped improve relations and kept us grounded and focused as a group. Women do not always get an opportunity to be asked how they are, what is happening in their lives and to be engaged in discussion in a respectful manner. An opportunity to be listened to is very important because often our concerns and inputs are viewed as complaints. We do not even get an opportunity to ventilate without someone rushing to give advice while you may be requiring someone just to listen and hold the space on your behalf.

Changing organisational culture and ideas

The Gender at Work Process has helped us to create new ways of working. One of our challenges as an organisation was our relation to money. As ninety eight percent of our members are unemployed there is an element of mistrust in relation to a person handling money. Most women

⁹ Simple movements focused on mindfulness of inner experience and connection to the energy of earth and community. See www.capacitar.org

who are unemployed do not handle or have control over the money in the house because someone else provides the money. This makes them very critical of anyone who handles the money, no matter how honest the person might be. To them money equals power, equals man. The manner in which those who have the money and resources relate to them causes women to be on guard when they deal with those that have and control money. They are always degraded, undermined, devalued and coerced to do certain things because they do not have money. Money can sometimes make you even lose your own voice. So in the organisation people who handle money are labelled as difficult or controlling because they compile the budget. Their questions are viewed with contempt no matter how gentle their approach. Members relate to this person as a husband who expects a wife to account for the money she has spent. It becomes difficult for our members to see these questions as part of a fair and necessary process in order for transparency to exist in an organisation.

Another challenge is that we have inherited a culture of late coming from the APF. People did not see this as a problem and would not even send an apology. Now there is a realisation that this is wrong and it's a sign of disrespect to those who come early. People send apologies but it is still a challenge to most, although we have a few people who now make an effort to be early. There has been a small shift from a few individuals but for most of our members keeping time is a struggle.

While we recognize that change is a slow dance, we must continue to ensure that we improve in this area in order to grow as an organisation. Remmoho provides transport money to members to enable them to attend meetings. We agreed in our Annual General Meeting that we will not give transport money to people who are late by more than thirty minutes and to those who do not send an apology.

Although this is in place it becomes impossible to apply because most of our members are unemployed. Most are dependent on their partners for money and they sometimes struggle to leave the house before they do certain chores. If we implement this, it means we do not take into account the contradictions in women's lives and we use our power (money) in order to control them. Having said this we also know that there are those who take advantage of the situation and refuse to change.

Members used to complain about the catering arrangements at Remmoho meetings. We have dealt with this by encouraging women to bring their own lunch to meetings and then get reimbursed for it. Those who cannot bring lunch get money at lunch time to go and buy lunch. The unintended outcome of this practice is that it has encouraged sharing and gives us enough time to dialogue, share and laugh as compared to spending a whole hour in a queue waiting to be served.

No matter how much we try to encourage women



Nosipho Twala and Millicent Phillips

to own the space and think of themselves, as they do not have an opportunity to do so in the world we live in, women cannot enjoy a meal while they do not know what their children are eating back at home. Giving money, no matter how small, allows women to buy or cook something they can share with their families.

The issue of childcare created conflict because some of our members did not understand why we needed to pay for childcare. They saw this as a role that must be played by other women, free of charge. We drafted a policy of childcare based on the idea that women with young children can only attend meetings if they have someone to take care of their children and based on the idea that the work of caring for children needs to be valued and paid for. We thought that a policy would help to solve our problems but it complicated things further. We emerged from the process realising that we need a workshop for members to understand why women need to be provided with childcare support. We also needed to discuss our identity - we need to know whether we are a feminist, women's group or a social movement.

We have been using feminist political education and methodologies as a group but we do not call ourselves feminists. We need to educate each other and know that providing certain things like childcare for instance helps improve women's activism. We need to value the role women play in looking after children while realising that men can also play this role.

Clarity and healing

It took redefining the space, changing our methodologies and becoming more embracing, for our members to start understanding our new culture of working and the need to work on our identity as an organisation.

Before we participated in the Gender at Work Process we were always asked as an organisation to clarify our identity. We did not understand this and we saw it as a sign of disrespect. We got angry each time we were asked the question as we felt that we were being undermined by men in the APF. The importance of clarifying our identity only dawned to us after participating in the Gender at Work Process. At the Gender at Work peer learning workshops we found we had to explain our relationship with the APF, as it was not clear. In light of this we even chose clarifying our identity as the first peer learning assignment.

The Gender at Work Process also helped us clarify our assumptions for change. One of our assumptions was that when you give people information and they are aware this will automatically translate into behavior change. We also thought that if people know that 'power over' is bad for the growth and functioning of the organisation, they would relate to power differently. We did not look at the process of change because we did not look at the reasons that make people abuse power. We did not consider that most individuals who abuse power view their input as sovereign and see no need to surface other voices in the space, or to consult

others. The Gender at Work process was healing, and helped us go forward. It helped us look at each other with kind eyes. It was like a human personification of spring as it was therapeutic, warm, comforting and bright. It healed both our body and mind. Its effects could be felt in our body and in our veins. After the process something said 'yes!' in our souls and spirit. We emerged committed and united.



Kganya Consortium



Nina Benjamin, Caroline Mashale and Gladys Mokolo

Kganya Consortium

Nina Benjamin

In 2008 when the Kganya Consortium decided to participate in the Gender at Work Gender Action Learning Process the organisation was at a crossroads. Many of the Consortium's member organisations felt demoralised at the challenges they were encountering in addressing the needs of the community in Orange Farm, an informal settlement outside Johannesburg with high levels of poverty and unemployment.

In our first action learning workshop, "Hearing the Stories", the change team¹⁰ decided to focus on rebuilding and re-igniting the initial enthusiasm that had characterised the formation of the Kganya Consortium in 2001. Change team members noted at this workshop:

"People have in some way lost hope but we can revive the process. We need a new strategy that will help us mobilise again."

At the peer learning workshops members of the change team shared how the process had enabled a safe space and a platform of support so that women felt free to speak and could make the shift to being empowered agents:

"We feel free when we are in the organisation, because we can talk about our

problems and about personal things that are happening at home. Everyone has the right to speak freely. Before it didn't feel this way!"

"It's significant because women have taken it on themselves to strengthen themselves, to break the silence. They are tired of being abused. Now they have power they can see themselves as human beings now, not punching bags. We also see each other as friends."

Change team members spoke of the organisational and personal change they had experienced as women. The revival of the Consortium had reinforced women's collective power and provided an umbrella for ongoing actions.

"... It is an umbrella and we learn from each other. We have workshops together and people get to know each other and to talk to each other. If you stay by yourself you only see your sewing machine but when you get together it is better. We are also doing events under the name of the Kganya Consortium."

"More women are involved, the most abused are women and this gives a place for them to speak out about how they feel. Women are leading many of the projects and more women are involved in construction work."

¹⁰ The change team was made up of three to four members of the organisation, who acted as 'change leaders', participated in the peer learning workshops, and were responsible for making sure that the organizational change project was implemented.

“We are spreading like a tree with nice flowers.”

The two oldest members of the change team noted that in their personal development they were now able to speak out and listen, to respect and acknowledge others, be patient, and more reflective. All of this has helped in empowering their agency to act in addressing community needs.

“Before I was very shy – I am not well educated. I thought I could not be with people. The first thing I learnt is how to talk and to listen. Even if they do not take from me, I take from them. I learnt to respect, to have patience and to love. All this is building me. I am a hard worker – but I could not do marketing. Because of these workshops I feel I can talk – it is building my personality.”

“I learned how to speak to others, how to accept myself and acknowledge others. Now I am able to give advice to others, to teach others. Now I am able to relate to different kinds of people because I work with all these different people. I have grown.”

“Before I used to just work, now I am reflecting more. We have more regular meetings and get feedback. There is better

communication. In my life I feel proud. I took the youth to drug rehabilitation and found ways to help the mentally ill get better access to services.”

In the pages that follow, the Kganya change team writes about the processes of deep reflection and healing that enabled them to revive and rebuild the Consortium. They elaborate on what the process meant for them personally, for the member organisations and for the Consortium.





Ashes for Beauty

Gladys Mokolo and Caroline Mashale

*For every sad face there is a smile
Where there are political problems there
is a good friend
Where there is darkness there will be
light
For I have a rand and it is better than
having 5 rand that I did not sweat for
What a smile?
“I wonder”
As I draw closer to them I learn to smile
I grow and become strong
“Oh my ashes”
My ashes made me today
Where there are ashes
There is beauty!!!*

The Kganya Women’s Consortium was formed in 2001 by a group of women involved in community projects in Orange Farm, one of the most disadvantaged areas in Gauteng, about 45 kilometres south of Johannesburg. The Consortium came together to develop a collective approach to addressing the problems of widespread unemployment and poverty. Gardening projects, sewing and knitting projects, HIV and AIDS projects, sports projects, the human rights advice office and other income generating projects all joined the Consortium.

We started this organisation because as women we felt that it would be wise to come together and fight against the injustices in our community. We also thought we should help each other with resources as some projects have better resources than others. We all had a common purpose of uplifting our community. Our idea was to assist each other to overcome the challenges that we face in our community and in our organisations.

Kganya was born in 2001 in Orange Farm to eight, lovely women led projects called “Let us Grow”, “Inkanyezi”, “Itsoseng”, “Ikemeleng”, “Palesa entle”, “Tsosanang”, “Tsohang”, “Gro Bacha” and a few supporting brothers from “St Charles Lwanga Advice Office” - all of them very concerned about community development. Her name was Kganya Women’s Consortium, Kganya meaning light. She had people who loved and cared about her. But times were not always good and her family of projects struggled with getting resources and eventually as a result of demoralisation they separated. Kganya’s light went out. There was no one to cry to, her family was breaking up. Until she met Gender at Work and was introduced to others who just like Kganya were trying to survive and bring change to their communities.

Gender at Work’s aim was to facilitate friendships, to find and develop new strategies, to share ideas and to learn to overcome challenges. Gender at Work had an impact on Kganya’s life as a young girl and later as a woman.

Rebuilding the Kganya Consortium

When we started the process with Gender at Work we had many challenges. There were funding problems, no land to operate from, Kganya was not registered and did not have a constitution. The eight organisations that were members of Kganya Consortium felt demoralised because everything was taking too long. Some of the women were forced to leave these projects to look for other work. Some also started to create tensions - for example accusing others of witchcraft and discriminating against those with lower forms of education.

In one of the exercises at a Gender at Work peer learning workshop, we drew a picture of a tree to symbolise Kganya. The tree had a long stem and roots but it did not have leaves and other branches. We realised where Kganya was - a tree with no new leaves or branches. To make this tree grow we would have to water it. This picture helped us see that Kganya was not growing and not going forward. The drawing guided us as we were able to evaluate the organisation. In this peer learning workshop we realised that we needed to find new branches and leaves for Kganya. This meant we needed to find new friends/organisations and also to visit and bring in the old friends/members.

Meeting organisations like Sikhula Sonke, Remmoho and Vukani at the Gender at Work workshops helped us to begin to understand Kganya's challenges in new ways. As we listened to the experiences of the other organisations - how they

worked in their different communities, how they applied for funds, how they recruited members, we learnt a lot.

The Gender at Work peer learning workshops created social spaces that allowed us to feel free and safe. Every morning when we arrived at the workshop we were greeted by fellow participants with a smile. Doing Tai Chi¹¹ helped us feel safe, especially the activity of appreciating each other where everyone looked into each other's eyes and hugged each other with their eyes. One of the things that made us feel safe was that people who came to the workshops were trustworthy, caring, respectful and responsible. This helped to create a safe space. Being in the group of people of the same gender made us feel safe - because when you are a woman sitting in a group of women you feel free to contribute, to talk about things that affect you and you are able to relate to other women's personal stories.

At the last writing workshop with Gender at Work and the other organisations, we broke down in tears about the crime in our community. Crime is really affecting the women in all the projects. When young women tried to start a sports project, all the equipment from the project was stolen. Kganya's computers, printer and food were stolen. The gates at the recycling project were also taken. We did not understand the causes of this crime but as we talked about this in the writing workshop we realised that the other organisations had the same problems -- for example Vukani also had some of

¹¹ Simple movements focused on mindfulness of inner experience and connection to the energy of earth and community. See www.capacitar.com.

their equipment stolen. We realised that we were not the only organisation affected by the problem of crime and that if we started talking with the community they would help with the crime problem. Building relationships and continuing with the seminars and awareness raising activities around drug abuse and domestic violence would help to bring people in the community together. It would bring together the women in the community, women who are victims of domestic violence but also who see their husbands and sons doing the crime in the community. We also want to bring together the young men who are using drugs and doing crime and we want to try to get them into rehab.

The girl child Kganya was nourished and grew in wisdom through the workshops. A community based organisation outside of her circle of friends passed by Kganya. She was surprised at how well Kganya looked. Kganya was looking beautiful and she was glowing. The community based organisation entered Kganya's premises because she was interested in the changes in Kganya. They started talking:

Outside CBO: "Hello"

Kganya: "Hi, how are you?"

Outside CBO: "I'm fine, you are looking good"

Kganya: "Thanks"

Outside CBO: "What keeps you young and strong?"

Kganya: "Going out and meeting with different organisations like the crèche associations and young women doing home based care. I have managed to find a number of organisations to come and join me. I never knew that some of these organisations existed in our community. We also hold meetings to update one another about what is new in our organisations."

Outside CBO: "Oh! That sounds great"

Kganya: "We also do seminars and campaigns on Workers, Women's and Youth Days. Some of the events we host bring organisations closer to us. With drug awareness we have built relations with SANCA and with youth activities we have relations with Love Life and Youth for Life. Also, we work with crèches from different areas and we do joint fundraising. We also made a fund so that we can pay end of the year bonuses to the women who work in the crèches. We organise joint outings and this year we are all going out for a dinner. For many of the women in the crèches this will be their first time to experience a buffet. This has helped us grow stronger."

Outside CBO: "Oh! Ya Ne! You are looking happy"

Kganya: "It's because we build our relationship so that even when you are expecting competition for example between two crèches in the same area,

you will be surprised to see them working together. They are not cold towards each other. They are women working with each other. We also share information, ideas and teach each other how to apply for funding, and how to write reports. These people in our family are caring. They are showing the community that if you build good relationships people can work together, that everything does not have to be sad, that people can enjoy themselves with entertainment like the picnics we organise every year.”

Outside CBO: “What do you mean when you say you build relationships and you are caring?”

Kganya: “In the peer learning workshops with Gender at Work, one can grow personally and organisationally. When I am at the workshops I feel comfortable to share about work happening in my life and my organisation. When I am in my family of other organisations in Orange Farm we also share our personal and organisational stories and in this way we grow strong together.”

Outside CBO: “Since you have different organisations that are part of your family, how do you manage?”

Kganya: “We meet according to our organisational sectors. For example if we have a meeting that is going to benefit Day Care Centres, only the Day Care Centres meet and then we also meet as the whole Consortium i.e. organisations from all the

different sectors - for example recycling or knitting and sewing. When we meet in our own sectors we try to create an open and comfortable space for people to speak about all their issues and we try to develop strategies for that sector - for example as the pre-school sector we can deal with the Department of Social Development together.”

Outside CBO: “Why do you meet with everyone from all the different sectors?”

Kganya: “The projects have different needs, that’s why we meet according to our different sectors but there are times whereby we all meet as Kganya members. This can be when we are doing awareness programmes about domestic violence for example. We are also meeting now to prepare to go to Durban for the Climate Change Conference. Now members from all the groups are meeting to prepare for the Conference. Most of the members of the projects are women so it will mostly be women who will be going to Durban. For many of the women this will be the first time that they go to Durban, the first time that they see the sea. From this experience they are learning that climate change also affects them and that they must make their voices heard. When the members go to activities like this, we are motivating them to continue the good work they are doing in their projects.”

Outside CBO: “That sounds good. How do I become a member?”

Kganya: “You can just join us at our next meeting and there are no affiliation fees. Maybe you can join us now while we are discussing climate change.”

Outside CBO: “Thanks. I am going to be in your next meeting.”

Kganya: “Sure, you are welcome”



Gladys Mokolo

Sikhula Sonke



Building a Second Layer of Leadership: Sikhula Sonke Change Project

Nina Benjamin

Sikhula Sonke is a women led farm worker trade union in the Western Cape. Sikhula Sonke was registered as a farm worker trade union in December 2004.

Sikhula Sonke entered the Gender at Work Gender Action Learning Process with a question many other civil society organisations ask: “what is needed to build women’s leadership”. Realising that organisational leadership is as strong as the many different layers of leadership that exist, the Sikhula Sonke change team chose to build a second layer of women led leadership - that is leadership at a branch or farm level.

Sikhula Sonke’s goals for their change project included strengthening the capacity of the Branch Executive Committee members, and deepening democracy within the organisation to ensure that the organisation was member driven.

Sikhula Sonke goals as set out at the first Gender at Work peer learning workshop were:

“In 18 months Branch Executive Committee (BEC) members are conscious, informed and proactive and hold the Sikhula Sonke leadership accountable.”

“In five years Sikhula Sonke enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of members, farm committees, branch executive committees and deepens the democratic process so as to improve strategising and decision making amongst non NEC members ensuring Sikhula Sonke remains a member driven organisation.”

These were important goals given that a democratic, member driven organisation was a new experience for the organisation’s members – and a far cry from their daily experience of dependence in the face of authority over them by farmers, husbands and partners.

At the first peer learning workshop the Sikhula Sonke change team explained the rationale for their goals as follows:

In 2008 we secured our own office and funding. We are now independent, have our own national executive committee, we have our own policies. Now it's for us to take that next step. All of us are farm people who have never governed such an organisation before. All these years we have tried to establish our structures, now we have to expand and make it national.

In the “Hearing the Stories” Gender at Work meeting one member of the change team¹² spoke about the dependency of members on organisers and the need to build the self esteem and confidence of members so that they can hold leadership accountable. She said:

...it is the members on the ground that must make decisions and hold the leadership accountable. On some farms it works well – but we want more of that. It's not easy when people have been scared and so on. We are trying to build people's self-esteem constantly. It is farm workers that feed the nation. We should be proud that we are feeding the nation. We need to help people to feel self-worth. We try to build collective leadership. It is not an easy thing and it takes time.

As they worked on their change project over a period of 18 months, they faced new hurdles, most notably the resignation of the organisation's gen-

eral secretary. Yet they kept going and were able to make progress in developing the second layer of leadership. As the change team noted at one of the peer learning workshop discussions:

We can see that the second layer of leaders is visible. More and more the members are driving the organisation. The organisers and officials used to make more of the decisions, now the members hold the leadership accountable. They phone in to the office, they write letters to the NEC. In many of the local farm cases, they no longer phone us for small things and are dealing with their own disciplinary hearings. They chair their own BEC meetings and write their own reports.

Both Sikhula Sonke writers tell their stories of the change process from “inside looking out” – locating themselves as women, as farm workers and as leaders. Patricia as a staff member writes about the growth and development of the BEC leadership, and intertwines this with her own growth as a woman leader.

With great sensitivity she puts up a mirror to her own challenges and victories as a woman and in this mirror she sees not only her own reflection but also that of the women farm worker leaders around her. She sees herself as both catalyst and product of the development of the BEC leadership.

¹² The change team was made up of three to four members of the organisation, who acted as ‘change leaders’, participated in the peer learning workshops, and were responsible for making sure that the organizational change project was implemented.

Sara as a NEC member takes us into the mind, heart and home of what it means to be a woman farm worker rising to the challenges of building a farm worker organisation. Sara Claasen the woman, mother, farm worker and organiser lays bare what it means to be a leader in all the spaces she occupies. Sharing her story is sharing the story of the many other women farm worker leaders that make up Sikhula Sonke.

Both writers highlight the many victories and challenges in being a leader and in inspiring, encouraging and training new layers of leadership. What they offer is more than a list of successes. Both reflect deeply on the many personal and organisational challenges of leadership. Their writing is deeply personal, their challenges very real, and at no stage do they separate the personal from the organisational. For both writers “the everyday” work of home and organisational chores, responsibilities and joys forms the cloth from which leaders are made and it is through this lens that they describe their own growth and in turn the growth in Sikhula Sonke women led leadership.



Patricia Dyata and Sara Claasen

The Highest Trees Always Get the Most Wind

Sara Claasen

My thoughts as a leader

All eyes are on you. Shouting and screaming, whispering in my ears. Blame and criticism and stones are thrown at you, but you have to catch them.

First I was not keen to come to this workshop. I felt tired, disappointed, sad and confused. In my mind I started doubting, asking myself: “Is it the right thing for me - the president of Sikhula Sonke, a trade union for farm workers, a woman who in so many ways feels crucified – to continue writing about the organisation.”

Questions whispered in my ears. Will I do the right thing? Because of all the criticism and blaming I thought: “What will the members in my organisation say when they read this? Will they punish me again by judging me for what I am writing?” My mind was so stuck that I felt I could not concentrate and focus on what was expected from me.

Everything was blank in my mind. I realised that this was because of all the hard work in the organisation, all the difficulties with being part of the organisation but also because of the difficulties in the workplace - the farm. the workplace - the farm.

I am a farm worker, a shop steward and my farm is in the process of retrenching workers. Workers are worried and they are looking for answers, worried about whether they will have an income and a plate of food on the table for their families. I feel that I have to do everything in my power to protect the farm workers and myself because I am also the breadwinner in my house.

Sometimes I feel so mixed up, I feel like dropping everything and everybody. This makes me feel empty inside.

All the confusion and bad feelings told me “drop everything including the Gender at Work workshops”. The workshops where I get a safe space to feel free and express myself, to express my feelings on paper and at least have some quality time away from all the pressure.

But part of me said: “If you continue to be part of the Gender at Work group and participate, your input and contribution will make a huge difference.” And I told myself, “this will take my mind to positive things.”

So I spoke to friends and told them how I felt. They encouraged me to go to the workshop. They told me it’s not about people or what people think of you, but it is for your organisation and it will do you good to be away from everything that makes you

feel stressed. And I said to myself: “As a leader you will always get criticism and with that you grow stronger. The highest tree always gets the most wind.”

Writing about the organisation

Now, I’m at the workshop and I have decided to make the best of it although it is difficult to write about your organisation. For me it is easier to write a letter to someone, or to write about myself or my family, but about your organisation – “whoaa!” You are so scared of what your members or staff or even the rest of the National Executive Committee (NEC) will say because they always want to see the best in the president. Again there were questions whispering in my ears: “Will they compliment my work, will they be proud and excited that the organisation’s name is in a book, or will they point fingers at me for writing the wrong stuff, or will they rather want to be silent about things they do not want other people to know?”

But I want you the reader to be encouraged and realise that even though we as leaders have our shortcomings, we always have ways and steps when we face difficulties.

A new year, New challenges

It’s 2011, a new year and a new season of new ideas and hope for Sikhula Sonke. Everybody is back from the holidays and we still have the spirit of the Festive Season. Hymns whisper in our ears. Joy and happiness in our bodies and souls wel-

come a new year. We look out and reach out for good things, after the difficulties of 2010 – the biggest being the financial crisis.

The year welcomed us with new hope and joy, without knowing that joy will come with tears. When one of the staff members got sick we had to make hard decisions in the best interest of the person, a person who was really a rock and pillar in the organisation. Someone no one can easily forget because she played a very important role in the organisation and at the office. But there were also hard times for her, trying to do the best for the organisation without all the support – but yet she also had her shortcomings. There were dark clouds hanging over the office. As the NEC we were not at the office from day to day but we found ourselves in the middle. We were the mediators without the necessary skills and we always had to deaden the fires.

All of us grew in different ways from being ordinary farm workers, who do farm work from day to day. In the organisation we have to think more broadly, to take action when it is necessary. I had to put my friendships aside, pull out my organisational jacket and do what was best for the organisation.

I wanted our NEC to be on the same page to build each other, to build the organisation and take the organisation forward. There was a time when staff said there’s no need to complain to the NEC because the NEC took sides and ignored mistakes.

But the NEC was now changing to take on the challenges.

Because the NEC is the highest structure in the organisation you can't take things lightly. And to take disciplinary actions or handle CCMA¹³ cases against your own comrades is not easy. Sometimes I felt my fellow comrades would see me as a heartless leader and sometimes I felt I had let them down but in the end I had to act in the best interests of the organisation.

Even though the sun shines bright through our organisational windows, dark clouds can suddenly come making the brightness of the sun disappear. But the different experiences we had to deal with brought a brightness to my mind. I also began to learn that it is different from being a shop steward representing a farm worker and being part of a disciplinary hearing against your own comrades.

For me it was difficult but very challenging. I had to twist my mind to think more broadly. I had to make sure the right procedures are followed. I had to get legal opinion from more skilled people. You see, when you are a farm worker and a leader in the organisation, people - even your own staff - can undermine you because some think you are not skilled enough to handle cases.

As I carried on my path the breath of fresh air, the smell of clean nature, the breeze of the blue sea, calmed my heart. Peace entered my mind. While I was sailing on the peace boat, thinking that

the disciplinary hearings are over – suddenly the peace boat sank and the National Executive Committee faced a CCMA case. It felt that my whole life fell apart. I asked myself “what now?” I tried to be calm. The treasurer and I had to deal with two CCMA cases, get legal opinion, prepare ourselves

There were sleepless nights. I put my personal feelings aside. I neglected myself and my family. To do what's best for my organisation was number one on my mind.

When the day of the first CCMA case came, I had to represent the organisation. I was much calmer and tried to focus on the reality. I can easily suppress my fear and be the strong leader, and when the CCMA process started, I cooperated from the bottom of my heart and spoke the truth. As the clock was ticking I learnt and experienced another skill. The same staff member who took the organisation to the CCMA did not want to go for arbitration and decided on a settlement with Sikhule Sonke.

In a silent atmosphere we went back to the office. We were stressed out and tired from all the pressure. We took a deep breath and thanked God for carrying us through this difficult time.

Can you imagine what it is like to take a clean breath, to smell jasmine and fresh blossoms, to massage your brain and soul, and then suddenly another thunderstorm comes and breaks all your mirrors. I was so frightened and scared because

¹³ The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) a dispute resolution body established in terms of the Labour Relations Act, 66 of 1995 (LRA).



I wanted to hold on to the fresh smell of jasmine and blossoms, but a second CCMA case came and plucked out all the joy.

“Why? Why? Why?” I kept asking myself. But I pulled myself together. I could not believe it was happening again. If my hair were dreadlocks I would have pulled them out one by one. But I had to deal with the second CCMA case.

Imagine you are going to the CCMA for a case against someone who used to give everything to the organisation – our General Secretary. It was a nightmare. I felt scared, confused, angry and sad. How can I testify or act against my fellow comrades, but I had to think of what’s best for the organisation. It felt like a stone was holding my head and heart.

Deep inside I had the fear – “what if my answers are incorrect and I fail the organisation? What then?” It was hard because I didn’t want to lie to keep our friendship, but I had to go back and face other comrades and take the organisation forward, so I spoke from my heart and did the best for the organisation.

I felt sorry for my comrade who took us to the CCMA because I knew her heart was with Sikhula Sonke. In her own way she fought fire with fire and she lost that battle because the outcome was in favour of Sikhula Sonke. When we left the CCMA building I greeted her and told her that whatever happened at the CCMA was an organisational fight

and that I am not her enemy. Today there is peace between us.

Working as a collective

Let me introduce you to our National Executive Committee. We are all farm workers. This is me, the President. Together with the other seven women and one male guy who is the treasurer we make up the NEC. We became so close. We tried to do things differently. We made decisions collectively. We did things as a collective. It is very important that when an organisation faces a dilemma we work as a team and give support to each other.

As an NEC we grew in the process of taking full control of the organisation. We took a stand on financial decisions. We looked at what we could afford and what would be most suitable for the organisation. Taking full responsibility for our mistakes was a huge step forward. The relationship between the paid staff, worker leaders and the NEC was shaky but we had to do things differently, to draw the line and make decisions in the best interest of the organisation.

By bringing in these changes we got a broader and clearer picture of what needed to be done in the first place when we as the NEC are under pressure. And yes, sometimes the NEC was also manipulated and took the wrong decisions. Part of the problem was that there was no clarity of our roles and responsibilities.

Personally I went through a tough time. When I needed the support of my team but found that people were not strong enough to stand up and raise their voices, it felt like I was swimming in mud. Then I came to the realisation that I cannot give up. I am a leader and I do not give up easily without a fight in a good positive way.

As the NEC, and especially for me as the president, dealing with staff disciplinary hearings which led to CCMA cases was tough. There was a lot of tension between the staff and the NEC about what is best for the organisation. Staff did not want to accept the NEC as their superiors. At times they saw us as villains.

The NEC had to face the rest of the Branch Executive Committee members and inform them about the situation with the CCMA cases, and at the very same time the General Secretary resigned. We had an open discussion with our Branch Executive Committee because they were looking for answers. They had questions and did not understand the situation.

For me as the President this was the most difficult time in my life. I was very worried about our union. Funders called to ask questions. The office would telephone me at any time. I had to leave my work on the farm and I had to leave my family to sort out the problems at the office, to fix all the empty holes. I neglected my family and my church many times to sacrifice for this organisation. I tried to be

strong but it tired me out and I cried a lot at night. I worried about the organisation but I also worried about the person because really the General Secretary had done a good job in Sikhula Sonke. I remember one night I woke up and the whole Sikhula Sonke was in my mind and I prayed to God to please give me a rest.

My heart is in this organisation because I am a founder member. In our organisation there is that shift of active, responsible role players - the President, Vice President, Treasurer and Deputy General Secretary. And the most difficult role is of the President, who has to take full responsibility and control situations.

There was a time when I thought that things were resolved, that there was a sign of growth and improvement in the relationship between the staff and the NEC. The NEC and staff members were close during the time of the CCMA case of our former General Secretary. There was that bond between the NEC and staff because the staff felt that the previous General Secretary was too hard on them. The NEC had to be calm and deal with all the fires.

Today after all the hard work of the NEC in dealing with all the difficulties and dark clouds there is an unbalanced and sour relationship. The moment the NEC took responsibility and acted in the best interest of the organisation some staff members felt that the NEC cannot make decisions and are too

bossy (all because they were keeping their eyes on the wellbeing of the organisation).

The NEC tried their best to manage the organisation, to save it, because people out there were wondering if Sikhula Sonke would survive without the General Secretary. She was the political face of the organisation and she was really the rock in Sikhula Sonke. Some farmers also wanted to see the downfall of Sikhula Sonke but again the NEC convinced everybody that we can lead and build the organisation.

As Sikhula Sonke we were planning for the National Congress in September 2011. The election was to take place at the Congress. Staff, NEC members and one advisory board member were all busy with Congress preparations and making good progress.

But tension came up again at a preparation weekend workshop. We suggested that we invite the previous General Secretary to the Congress for a short time, to give her the opportunity to say sorry that she left us the way she did. Some Branch Executive members attacked the NEC. Again we saw that shaky relationship between some staff, BEC and NEC members.

Everybody knows how things go with elections. Sometimes people want to elect their friends to positions. But the important and wise thing is to elect leaders who will serve the best interest of the organisation. There was pressure again on the

President. Because in the end the President and the Treasurer have to be the pillars. In times like these the President needs someone who will listen, who will lift her up, not throwing stones and crucifying her – but someone who will appreciate her. It is not always easy to be a leader but for me as President every difficult situation is a new challenge. Every difficult situation makes me stronger and more powerful and is an eye opener. The difficulties in our organisation were hard lessons but they helped us to be more aware and alert to signs like these.

I learnt that in every difficult situation there is a gift. A gift where I can learn and do things better in the future – what I also learnt is that you need to be able to handle negative people and this will help you grow.

What is important is that organisations can collapse when faced with crises like this – but Sikhula Sonke survived.

How the Gender at Work Process helped

With all the doubts I had, all the criticism I got and all the fear, to be part of this Gender at Work writing group gives me the opportunity to be myself. In this Gender at Work workshop I found the real me. I can easily speak to Nina¹⁴ about my pain.

Expressing my feelings on paper is something new and I enjoyed it. It gives me new hope to be writing my own story. I realised in this Gender at Work Process that actually I have a lot to tell and if I ever

14 Nina Benjamin, Gender at Work facilitator/mentor

doubted, now I know that I can write a story. It's a new challenge for me to do the writing. At home or in the organisation I do not have the opportunity to be myself, express myself because you always have to be an example. Here I can breathe, I can spread my wings. Spread my wings so that I can be happy. Gender at Work brings out the real me. To be able to be mad at some moments – this is the change that Gender at Work brings in me. Through Gender at Work I have also learnt how to do things differently in my own organisation – how to bring changes in the structures.

The Tai Chi¹⁵ exercises contributed a lot and I realised that we can do it in our own organisation and also at home.

I have also become more empowered on how to take criticism.

In terms of the writing process, the corrections and additions of the facilitators also taught me and gave me clarity on how to write in a way that the reader can read and enjoy it.

Two things in this process stand out for me:

- The Tai Chi exercises – I close my eyes and focus on the exercises and it brings relaxation in my body and mind.
- The writing – the additions and clarities helps to explain more. It looks tricky but I learnt how to write so that the reader can catch it. You can move away from how it was.



¹⁵ Simple movements focused on mindfulness of inner experience and connection to the energy of earth and community. See www.capacitar.com.



Changing Seasons

Patricia Dyata

Situated in the heart of the wine lands of the Western Cape, surrounded by beautiful mountains, vineyards and orchards, the different phases of our organisation can be compared to the seasons changing - from green to leafless trees and vineyards.

In this journey we faced our weaknesses, uncertainties, failures, strengths and the success of overcoming challenges. Acknowledging our failures made us stronger, drove us closer but sometimes drove us apart.

In Sikhula Sonke (meaning we grow together) we are working with farm workers and dwellers. Women on Farms Project took the women farm workers through training and empowerment up to the point that these women registered their own trade union in December 2004. Sikhula Sonke has become the most progressive trade union in the Western Cape and in the agricultural sector. This trade union is led by women leaders. These are the members of the Branch Executive Committee and the National Executive Committee, between 60-90 percent working and living on the farms. Even the employed staff, are 80 percent former farm workers, with some still living on farms.

Sikhula Sonke has become a home where we can laugh, sing, dance, cry and pray together, where every member becomes family, assisting and sharing so that no one needs to go to bed hungry.

Organising to end abuse and oppression

What a beautiful world ours seems if you don't see what lies behind the mountains, the vineyards and orchards. Yes even the language is made beautiful - hiding the reality of farm owners making people dependent on them for food, shelter, health and education. Hiding that what should be rights have become part of this dependency.

The farm workers and dwellers are isolated, scattered on farms with electric fences, far from the businesses and the house of the farmer - prisoners and slaves in our birth land just because we don't have the means to survive. The paternal farm owner has made it very hard for the trade union to organise the workers and dwellers despite their right to belong to an association of their choice.

Every one of our beautiful women leaders has experienced some form of abuse. They know how it feels to be beaten up by a spouse, to have a drunk spouse every day, not to have a piece of bread to feed families, not being able to send children to school or help them become something in life because there is no money.

They know what it feels like to come to work and be told by the farmer: "I no longer have work for

you... you must empty your house by the end of the week because I need that house for a new worker.” Yes, these are the things that drove farm women to start their own organisation.

Getting ready to lead

Sikhula Sonke leaders are getting ready to lead the dusty, rainy, snowy, sunny seasons. They are determined and devoted to bring change in their work places and communities. They realise the seasons can be survived when workers are empowered to take action against those who abuse and oppress them. They know they are capable of breaking the monsters of abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence and low literacy. They know they will find the strength and courage to break away “step by step out of the paternalistic relations.”

For the leaders of Sikhula Sonke being in an elected position is like being the pesticide controller of the vineyards and orchards. If a pesticide controller does not give the right amount of pesticides to the vineyards she can harm the vineyards. If an elected leader does not give the right direction she can break instead of build an organisation especially when working with the most vulnerable group of people.

As the vineyard grows we realise that the pesticides are weak and not able to kill the pests. The pesticide was just strong enough to make the vineyard survive by a 60 percent chance. Increased and stronger dosages of pesticides are needed to

enable good and healthy grapes to grow. In a similar way an organisation needs nurturing and ways to make the Branch Executive leaders aware of their inner strength. To make them bring out what is within them. To transform anger, fear and hurt into love. Accepting that our different emotions can be turned into different responses - so that we will be able to confront with respect and generosity. Where we find the humanity in all the challenges and we ask ourselves the question....”how would we like to be treated if we were in the other person’s shoes?”

We acknowledge how powerful we can become as the Branch Executive and that we are using our strength and uniqueness to ensure that our seasons will remain spring and summer, where winter and autumn lasts only for a few days as we are able to compromise to ensure that our vineyard does not die.

Branch Executive members as pesticide controllers that go beyond just using pesticides but also giving love, nurturing the vineyard and ensuring that the bond grows so that the fruit will be healthy. This is how we need to nurture our organisation and everything in it.

Staff supporting worker leaders

We rise from being nobodies to being somebodies. Working together in love and respect is an example for the generations to come to Sikhula Sonke. We don’t need to be identical or agree on the same

things. As teachers we speak with one voice and acknowledge our different contributions to the organisation.

As a staff member of Sikhula Sonke I see how powerful the Branch Executive Committee and National Executive Committee leaders have become. They have grown from ordinary farm workers to outspoken, powerful leaders who sacrifice for their organisation. They have the strength of an army and are using their voices as ammunition to bring change. Staff could suffocate the voice of the worker leaders by stepping into their roles without being aware that they are doing this. This would not allow the branch leaders to become strong and independent supervisors within their branches and in the organisation.

As supervisors they have the opportunity and space to debate and make their own decisions in the interests of the workers and the organisation. Being the supervisors gives them the opportunity to hold the National Executive accountable. Staff can guide and feed worker leaders with knowledge so that they can own their organisation. It is important that staff do not run ahead and leave the leaders behind. Instead we need to hold hands and form an unbreakable chain, as we walk together and transform the branch leadership so that they are ready to be on the National Executive Committee when their turn comes.

Going deep inside oneself and being willing to change

In 2008 I was given the opportunity to be part of the Gender at Work Process. We met with five other organisations in an old building that used to be a college for priests. This was a process of soul searching – personally and in relation to our organisations. Sikhula Sonke's goal was to build a second tier of leadership.

As I sit in this room I become overwhelmed by what I am feeling. I am looking at the diverse group of women who all have been through hardships either personally or organisationally. I am sending a little prayer to my heavenly father and thanking him for giving me an opportunity that many women can only dream of. As I listen to the women I am trapped in myself, battling with my own demons - the process is forcing me to look deep within and to dig up even the blocked stuff. I am asking myself if I am worthy to be in this space. How can I expect people to change if I am still struggling with my alcohol addiction. Yes this is the change project but if I want to walk out a winner I must acknowledge my inner demons and start to fight back. I was left with no other choice when I was thinking about the people that I love so much, my God, my mom, my children, my siblings and the family of Sikhula Sonke.

As I battled with myself I thought of all the hurt my behaviour and addictions caused a lot of people especially those I love so very much. It was important for me to unveil the skeletons. The process

was not easy as I was in denial but the breakthrough came when I acknowledged my shortcomings and weaknesses. There were a lot of tears, anger, fear, pain, joy and resentment. I started to see the light and I was letting go of all the bad things that happened to me. I realised that being a leader meant not being ashamed of what happened to you because the more you are silent about these things, the more difficult it becomes to open up.

I started the introspection with myself and used free writing which was very therapeutic and later I had the courage to join AA¹⁶ with the assistance of one of the Gender at Work facilitators. I have confronted the illnesses of this social war we are living, with my pen and my paper, and this has given me the opportunity to be free to write - even about the bad stuff I have blocked away for many years. I also realised that it is time to practice what I preached.

We started to work more intensively with our branch secretaries and branch chairs. I believe that was the beginning of transforming my life so that I can contribute to the organisation I am working with.

Enabling the BEC to come into their power

Coming from the Gender at Work workshops I knew we were not doing enough to enable our Branch Executive Committees and Sikhula Sonke members to know how much power they have. I realised how the National Executive Committee and the staff

suffocated the voice of the BEC by not making clear to them that they are the supervisors and not just pesticide controllers. I also realised that Sikhula Sonke staff have been practicing this role for too long. It is going to take time and the Branch Executive must be told of their role on a continuous basis. The staff and NEC, and also the workers in the vineyards, are supposed to be the pesticide controllers. The BEC are the supervisors.

To enable the Branch Executive Committee to come into its power, at every meeting with the Branch Executive and branch members the emphasis was on the Branch Executive taking the lead in the branch and in their organisation, and holding staff and the National Executive accountable. The Branch Executive Committee members became more outspoken and said that they did not want to be excluded. They wanted to be informed of dilemmas and challenges facing the organisation. When there is pain they want to experience it, so as to be able to pray for the organisation. They wanted to be part of the every thunder, raindrop and snowball we were making. We were in this together.

I felt my heart melting and aching as I observed the growth within our branch leaders. The important message was that these leaders wanted to be part of the collective leadership taking the organisation forward. But the strength and growth of our branch leaders posed a challenge to our National Executive Committee.

¹⁶ Alcoholics Anonymous org

Historical moment in Sikhula Sonke

It is the beginning of Autumn and the cold days have crept in. The vineyards have lost their green and are yellow and brown. The leadership of Sikhula Sonke is gathering at our office. They headed into taxis straight from work. They have not had a chance to have a bath, or even a cup of tea. It is about 20h00 on a Thursday evening and as I observe the faces I see some tired but still managing to smile, some uncertain, others curious. The President has called the Branch Executive and National Executive Committees to this meeting, to inform them that one of the most important leaders in the organisation – the General Secretary - resigned.

”Wow” the leadership of Sikhula Sonke together talking about the most difficult challenge for such a young organisation. Looking and listening to the response of our Branch Executive Committee members, I did not need any more convincing that these farm workers and dwellers have grown in such a way that they are able to take care of their own vineyards. They were determined to keep one vineyard alive and healthy, so they will be able to feed the Sikhula Sonke family.

I believe that the leadership of Sikhula Sonke was making history because this was the first time within Sikhula Sonke that a meeting like this was held. Branch Executive Committee members were claiming back their roles and space. They were also very clear on how the road should be walked from now on. They want transparency and to be up to

date with what is happening within the organisation. They reminded us as leaders why they put us there and how they can take us down should we not fulfill the interests and the needs of our organisation and members. I felt the joy and tears as I was amazed by the transformation. I also noticed the strength and growth in the President as she chaired the meeting. At 1h30 that morning the meeting ended with staff and leadership bowing our heads in prayer – giving praise and worship to our God for keeping and carrying us through the most difficult times. As leadership and staff left the office I realised that most of them would only have three to four hours sleep before getting ready for the next day of work.

I felt the adrenalin running through my veins as I saw a side of our leaders that I had not seen for the past three years. So much confidence, strength and determination to do what is good and best for the organisation as well as the people involved, so much empathy and humility.

Justice and Women

Justice and Women: Strengthening Understandings of Power

Michel Friedman

Justice and Women (JAW), was formed in 1998, in Pietermaritzburg, in KwaZulu-Natal. Initially JAW focused on helping women access justice, particularly in accessing maintenance grants from the fathers of their children. In 2010 JAW underwent a huge change with the old JAW closing and a new one beginning.

JAW's current vision is to transform cultural values and customary practices that are harmful to men, women and children. Much of the new JAW's work happens in Yanguye, a deep rural village near Melmoth in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. Here JAW's interns, who are recruited from among unemployed black women and men, live with little access to water and electricity, and with little formal education. As part of rebuilding the organisation, JAW's two white managers developed an internship programme to develop the skills and confidence of interns.

In setting their goals for the Gender at Work Gender Action Learning Process the JAW change team¹⁷ focused on the personal and organisational changes needed to establish a strong organisational system where staff could take initiatives to identify

their own projects, and be accountable and responsible. At the first Gender at Work peer learning meeting in July 2008 JAW change team members expressed the focus of their change project as follows:

We feel we need a stronger inner core for us to be able to go out and do the work we are doing in the community. The change process is really to strengthen this inner core – within ourselves as interns and managers. Hopefully the strengthening and greater coherence will come through more in the ways we run our programs in the community. The focus for our change project will be on the inner work to establish a strong internalised organisational system.

At this first peer learning meeting the change team noted that one of the new norms JAW wanted to develop was being a collective so that:

Staff identify their own projects and are accountable and responsible for them, reporting back to the entire group. This is a way of developing a collective responsibility rather than having a hierarchical structure. A structure where people are collectively responsible at different levels.

To establish this strong, collective organisational system, the JAW change team felt the need to work at strengthening their understandings around

¹⁷ The change team was made up of three to four members of the organisation, who acted as 'change leaders', participated in the peer learning workshops, and were responsible for making sure that the organizational change project was implemented.

power – and especially race, class and gender power. They explored what it means to transform the victim and perpetrator that lies deep within each person, especially as we may be reproducing ‘power under’ and ‘power over’ without being conscious of this. Working at this level of depth to achieve personal and organisational change was a challenge and the process was not always easy. How to move from silence to debate was an issue expressed at the first peer learning meeting:

[We need to] Deal with the passivity and raise up a critical voice within the organisation - how do we in our group actually get to a point where argument is the order of the day, where we are contesting, debating and arguing? How do we as a group start developing that skill when it's not been the norm in families, the community or the schools? The norm of having critical debate or critical engagement is a new norm we are trying to create in JAW because in the current norm we sit out huge silences. The challenge is how to move past this to a point where you develop a norm where people can be allowed and feel comfortable to debate or argue.

Amber Howard writes in her contribution on the silence at the start of the process. I experienced this silence at one of the first meetings of the Gender Action Learning Process in Melmoth in June 2008, and wrote about this at the time as follows:

I'm in hot Melmoth. The room we're working is on a beautiful and large property – a B and B owned by a white couple. JAW uses this as a venue for workshops as it is reasonably accessible to the nearby village of KwaYanguye, where JAW staff live. The room is quite dark and we sit on school-like benches. Most of the staff – majority women with a few men - are new and have never met me. There is silence – a strong loud silence. People seemed either depressed or intimidated. I didn't know what to do to change the energy in the room. Even the Tai Chi – didn't seem to help. I felt very frustrated and doubtful that what Gender at Work could offer was going to be useful in this moment. I was trying to get a sense of what had changed since the last process and if JAW wanted to participate with us in a second round. For an organisation that we had already worked with once before, I hadn't quite expected this. It felt like drawing blood from a stone. Eyes looked away from me or at the floor. A strong deathly silence hung over us like a cloud a lot of the time, unless I broke the group into buzz-pairs where isiZulu was a more comfortable medium. I felt a lot of shyness, fear – I start wondering – “is it me?” “Would it be different if I could speak isiZulu?” “Is it the group?” I questioned my skill as a facilitator. I felt at a loose end and desperate. I wondered if this group

was ready for what we were able to offer. I remember using the metaphor of bricks in the road to help them reflect on obstacles in the organisation that such a process might help them with.

JAW managers took on the challenges and through their perseverance, creativity and hard work managed to build the new JAW through the Internship Programme. The three JAW writers each tell of the experience from their specific vantage point. Bongiwe Zondi writes about how empowering the process was for her as an intern, how it enabled her to dig deep within herself, and to challenge the managers and the organisation. Amber Howard writes on her reflections as programme manager, on the challenges to achieve change at deep levels. Jenny Bell JAW Co-ordinator writes about the signs of change and JAW's realisation that greater power sharing in the organisation required both sides – the managers and the interns - to transform their role.





Holding the Rope Together: A Case of Power

Bongiwe Zondi

I started to work for JAW as an intern, while I was a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal doing the development and facilitation diploma. JAW trained me on maintenance and how to organise and facilitate workshops. As part of my development in practice course I presented on the JAW maintenance project. My presentation was very powerful because of the training, support and words of encouragement from Jenny like, “You have potential”, words I was hearing for the first time in my life and which helped me to come to a turning point - from feeling like a failure to a conqueror.

When I was done with my practice JAW offered me a part time job, to work for 40 hours per month. I was very shocked when Jenny told me that I was the one who was going to develop my own work plans – that I was to create my own job. This gave me a shock because I was used to an autocratic style, where someone has power over me, and tells me what to do.

To help me Jenny took me through the power triangle and the importance of holding the rope together, so that there is ‘power with’ rather than ‘power over’. I saw that power sharing goes with transparency where the management shared everything, including budget with the staff. But the most

moving part was that management treated us as subjects rather than objects, and encouraged us to develop our own plans regarding projects, make our own budgets and do the report writing.

Over the months I got to know more about the organisation's values - like taking responsibility, taking ownership and creating safe spaces where all staff members including management can share our personal as well as work issues without any judgments or condemnation.

For me the safe space is like a vehicle which helped me to reach my destiny, though it was a scary process. It was hard for me to accept feedback because I related that feedback to my past and thought that they are judging or criticising me. But JAW didn't give up on me. They organised for me to start the Social Work course with UNISA, and for my personal growth with Lifeline.

Wearing many layers

Once I was in the job I started to make relationships with shelters and facilitate on maintenance. People started to come and ask for help like writing complaints letters to the magistrate's court. This helped me gain more confidence.

Things were going well, but at the same time during these periods I was so frustrated because I knew there was something wrong with my life. But it was hard for me to figure out what it was.

In the middle of 2011 UNISA gave me an assignment. I was supposed to watch a movie called "Lars and the Real Girl". In the movie, Lars was so defensive that he decided to wear many layers in order to prevent himself from being touched by others. After watching the movie I tried to ignore the fact that it related to my life.

Soon after, I attended a Gender at Work writing workshop in Johannesburg where many inspirational poems were shared by participants and the words that became alive to me were those Michel read, which made me realise that you mustn't allow the enemy which is in your mind to accuse you. This helped me to look back to my childhood and try to integrate Lars's movie and Michel's words. The answer was like, "You've been wearing these layers for too long and allowing your mind to hold you back but now it's time to move on." That's the power of the safe space within Gender at Work and I'm a new person indeed.

The silent killer

Fear of the unknown is like a silent killer. If you are not surfacing conflict in life, either on personal or work related issues - this does not mean that it's not affecting you. It can be more hurtful when you share with people who won't help you at all to solve it. But deciding to keep quiet about it can have a negative impact not only personally but also work wise, and you can become dysfunctional.



Sometimes you will find that if you use the space to share it will benefit you. But fear of losing opportunities, and the fear of not being heard silently killed us as staff and the same thing is happening in our communities. This silent killer is like an HIV, where people are in denial of surfacing conflicts. They keep quiet about things that deeply affect their lives spiritually, emotionally and psychologically.

I wonder why this disease is killing so many people. This opportunist is killing our brothers and sisters. Even in this time of democracy their minds are still in captivity. It is hard for them to unlearn their past experiences and they unconsciously entertain the enemy to destroy their lives forever.

If only I could know that the same weapon I used to fight my inner battle would help others, I would tell them how powerful it is to renew your mind by not allowing your past experiences to tell you who you are.

I had struggled for more than twelve years of unemployment and the cock crowing every morning seemed to be reminding me: "I'm against you, you are a failure, you are unloving and no one is going to rescue you." I was near collapse. Then came Mr University and his bursary and I can't explain the joy I experienced. But doubt continued, and I wondered, "Where am I going to use this qualification?"

Small voices inside of me kept on encouraging me to pursue knowledge and skill. During my last year of my studies I was caught in the darkness of not knowing how to pay for my studies because the bursary was only paying half. Not knowing where to do my practical work. In the middle of that darkness light arose when Grace Ngema introduced me to JAW. It was a blessing and I tried to explore my potential with the help of the management.

When the organisation introduced the idea of sharing power I couldn't believe this and I told myself that these were just empty words. But it became real when Jenny trained me on maintenance, and when she asked me to organise and facilitate the workshop on my own. It was hard but worth it. As scary as it was, at the same time it was inspiring.

Picking up the Rope:

Amber Howard

We are layers of stories and histories to be excavated and sifted through.

We are archeologists with pick-axes hacking away at the stone-hard, sun-parched soil, writing a reconstructed history of ourselves. Each story we write is true – partly.

We are the red bloom of aloe in July, the strong cup of tea, the painted toenails, the hospital bed, the stolen spoons, the wounded son, the orphaned daughter.

We are flashes of light dancing at the points of a triangle.

We move like water around its periphery waiting to be saved, saving.

Waiting to be hurt, hurting.

Sometimes we move out of this three-sided constellation that has been embedded into our collective psyche. We move into the direction of the wind and the cloaks of the victim, the perpetrator, the rescuer fall away. In that moment we see each other clearly as women with baskets of stories on our heads and children on our backs. We see through the shadows in our hearts, the colors of our skin, the shapes of our bodies, the lineage of our ancestors with deep compassion even as deadlines, and families, and unwritten reports bang at the door.

Sometimes I imagine us standing together there at the edge of the escarpment, where the wind is fierce and the cold mist covers the red aloe in grey smoke. There where the valleys are steep and barren and the soil is rocky.

I imagine us holding a thick, woven rope tightly in our hands as though it is something sacred. We do not use it to rescue or to hang, but to bind us together like anchors so that we can descend the steep cliffs and reach the vast, wild oceans below.

The drive from Pietermaritzburg to Melmoth takes three and a half hours on a good day, and five on a bad one. So, there is a significant physical distance between the two JAW offices which puts time and financial constraints on us as an organisation. But the distance between the two offices in terms of access to resources is even greater. The communities surrounding Melmoth where most JAW staff/interns live are deeply rural places under traditional authorities. Some areas still have limited access to water and electricity, and women spend many hours collecting firewood and water, walking up the steep and beautiful valleys that lead down to the Swart-Umfolozi River and past the vast sugar cane plantations. The distance between the resources of staff/interns and management are similarly vast in terms of education and economic security – primarily because of the racial and demographic disparities that are the legacy of South Africa's history of colonialism and Apartheid. It is across this chasm of inequality that Jenny Bell, the manager,

and I, a programme coordinator, (both of us white women – I a US American, Jenny a South African) sought to build a new kind of organisation that deals with power and gender transformation in a new way. We had our work cut out for us.

Where we ended and started again

After a funding and organisational crisis in 2005, JAW closed its court-based access to justice programme in Pietermaritzburg, retrenched all the staff and sought to start again. Jenny, the JAW manager and I (a US American volunteer who stayed on and became the Access to Justice Programme Coordinator) wanted to use the “old” JAW strategy of recruiting unemployed women from the areas in which we worked, and through their involvement in the organisation, build their capacity to work with gender and power in a different way.

Our focus issue was increasing rural and urban women’s access to family law rights. At that stage Jenny and I had professional qualifications (Jenny is a social worker and I am an attorney), we had organisational experience, shared a similar value system and a similar vision. We felt strongly that we needed to work from two different geographical bases, one urban and the other rural as we felt that the contexts created different challenges for poor, black and/or otherwise marginalised women’s ability to access and maintain their rights. We wanted to learn how to work with these different experiences organisationally without replicating the raced, classed, gendered hierarchies that had

given rise to women’s oppression in the first place. We were conscious that sometimes we as feminists had re-perpetuated these hierarchies by assuming that because women were oppressed by men they could not oppress one another; or that all women experienced oppression in the same way. We went into the process of building JAW trying to be aware of our power – the power that came to us through our whiteness and our economic privilege, and trying to be open enough to allow these power inequalities to be examined without being defensive on the one hand, or martyrs on the other.

So why did Jenny and I want to do this? The answer is multi-layered – deeply personal and deeply political – mostly because of a belief in the potential of communities to move from oppressive and unequal ways of being, towards more loving and more equal ways of being. We wanted to be a part of facilitating a process that leads to greater equality and deeper compassion – but realised that even with our best intentions, shadows of “power-over” and “power-under” lurked. I also learned that you cannot facilitate a process of change for others without allowing yourself to change, too. You have to give up on your own expectations and your own attachment to outcomes, and allow for storms of anger, accusation, resentment, and grief to knock you down. You also have to give up your pride and learn with humility – lessons that I still struggle with learning.

Over the last five years Jenny and I initially, and



over time joined by Grace Ngema (a former intern who is now the Melmoth Office Coordinator and part of the management team), worked to build the organisational funding base to recruit, mentor and train staff interns. Together with the interns we developed the organisation's programmes.

This is the story of rebuilding JAW - by first building women's (and some men's) leadership through the Internship Programme and learning how to use and share power in new ways personally and organisationally, even as the layers of the past and present inequalities, histories of trauma, victimisation and deprivation continued to surface.

The Internship Programme

JAW's interns are primarily women from the communities we serve - they are both beneficiaries and organisational staff. The majority of JAW's interns are middle-aged black women who come from impoverished backgrounds. JAW's Melmoth-based interns live in traditional Zulu communities, while the Pietermaritzburg-based interns live in urban Townships. This way of working reflects our mission to use the organisation itself as our primary learning and teaching tool. It also signifies our commitment to living our values and actually experiencing with one another what gender transformation feels like - how it is lived in our organisation and in our own lives. We believe that if we cannot embody the change we want to see in the world - through using power respectfully, taking responsibility for our own growth and development (which are central factors in what we understand as gender transformation) -

then we cannot effectively advocate for this change in the community. We also feel that building women's (and men's) leadership ability to role model new ways of using power and to become agents of change in their own communities is central to our understanding of sustainability. We hope that long after JAW has closed down, these values will live on and the women we have worked with will take up leadership roles in other organisations and in their communities.

This way of working was also born out of our experience working in the Justice sector on women's/ family law rights issues. Through our involvement in the first Gender at Work Process, we had been introduced to the Gender at Work integral framework (the four quadrants of change)¹⁸ and could see that while there had been changes in terms of the laws and policies in South Africa, there had been little change in the "deep culture" or in individual consciousness which is why women still face such incredible difficulty accessing their legal rights to maintenance, inheritance, protection orders etc. We felt that if gender justice organisations like JAW were going to make an impact, we were going to have to work to find ways of challenging the deep, often un-surfaced culture, attitudes, practices that perpetuated gender inequality within the Justice system as well as within private systems like families. By its nature our work is deeply personal and deeply political. We had tried to work organisationally to challenge these inequalities while being conscious of our own "shadow" - our

¹⁸ See Michel Friedman and Ray Gordezky "A Holistic Approach to Gender Equality and Social Justice", paper prepared for Organisational Development World Summit, Budapest, Hungary, August 2010 at <http://www.genderratwork.org/learning-centre>.

own deep culture – that might also perpetuate inequalities along the lines of race, class, and gender. The obvious power inequalities that exist between JAW management and interns has been both a challenge and an opportunity for us all (management and interns) to try and learn together what it feels like to use power differently.

In practice, the Internship Programme means we recruit, from the communities we work in, women (and some men) who have potential to facilitate growth and change for others. We provide them with formal and informal skills training. As a rule, we do not hire ‘experts’ from outside the organisation to do community-based work. We believe that community development requires community-based leadership and that gender change happens when people – men and women – in communities – begin living and acting in new ways and sharing power respectfully. For most of our interns, there have been few opportunities to experience “power with” others – their experience has been of hierarchical ‘power-over’ relationships. We believe that if we can help people have a different experience and integrate it in their personal lives they can be role models and facilitators for others. In a community meeting someone once described JAW as a strange seed – and we are in a way – a strange tree planting strange seeds – but hopefully respectful, loving compassionate ones.

Creating a new normal – Exploring the uncharted territory of shared power

When we first began our organisational change process with Gender at Work in 2008, we decided that we needed to start at the beginning (or what we thought then seemed like the beginning - we now see that feminist organisations, like all living organisms, have many beginnings and many endings. To stop this cycle of change is to destroy the ability of the organisation to respond to oppression and catalyse social change). So the first beginning for us was to create a ‘new normal’ inside JAW. This entailed creating a shared vision for change and articulating the values that would help us embody this change within ourselves and within the organisation.

The process of creating this ‘new normal’ starts in silence. Or at least silence on the part of the interns. Jenny and I did a lot of talking. What is this silence about? Why are people not participating in decision-making processes? Don’t they want to create a shared organisation? The silence and non-participation became the topic of all our meetings over the next few months – what is at the source of it? How can we overcome it? We discussed that our voice was our power – no voice was no power – we had to start talking.

Through these conversations, we began to see that the silence was the sign of deep fear, self-doubt, intense feelings of powerlessness borne out of personal histories of oppression, poverty, depriva-

tion, victimhood. How are we going to deal with the silence? If we can't change this inside, how can we empower communities outside? Slowly we started to get answers:

“Speaking in English makes me feel deeply vulnerable. What if people laugh at my mistakes?” The fear of humiliation was intense. *“I have never spoken to a white woman like this before.”*

“I am not sure that I can trust the people in this group with my story.”

Slowly the silence started lifting. We started English lessons, which opened up opportunities for interns to participate in formal learning programmes. Interns got library cards and dictionaries; we held all meetings in English and Zulu. This was really the first step in our organisational change process – just talking to each other. But getting to the point where interns could simply speak and ask questions, was a painstakingly slow process.

Mentoring and management

The drama triangle as a tool for reflecting on power

In the beginning the interns were more beneficiaries of the organisation – receiving training in technical skills, but also receiving intense emotional and psychological support. As a manager, one of my primary jobs is mentoring, training and providing emotional support to interns, who in turn transfer skills and knowledge back to their communities.

When we began building the organisation through the internship process, we did not have a clear sense of when the process would end or how long it would take for interns to take over responsibility for running their own projects. Working the way we do in JAW is exhausting. It is time and spirit intensive, and the results of our efforts are not always readily apparent. Because most of our work is on a deeper spiritual/psychological level (which is where development and transformation take place), there are moments when Jenny and I doubted we were helping to bring about change in people's lives. When you work with people, like our staff/interns who have experienced high levels of trauma, violence and overwhelming loss, it takes a long time to reawaken to new possibilities. We have often been afraid that we cannot show the “results” to justify spending so much time and money on the Internship Programme and investing so heavily in a small group of eight interns.

We know that our work does not comport with the value for money calculations (we don't work at national level and reach thousands of people – we work at depth at community level) or the need for short-term results. We are in the business of soul-changing or transformation which is hard to squeeze into the logframe windows of organisational form.

Our work is messy. It blurs the boundaries between family and work, personal history and present organisational need, the public and the private. A



staff member's HIV-related illness and need to access ARVs lead to the formation of our HIV Support Group Programme – Vukanawe! The birth of my two sons led to the development of our maternity and childcare policies. Solla's (a veteran staff member's) ageing lead to our “senior associate” programme.

When a new intern came to JAW, she shared her story with me over time. It was one of multiple losses and pain. Her parents, her sisters, her twin brother, her partner all died from illness and violence. The affects of HIV and AIDS that began ravaging communities in the 1990's continue – and all of our interns have lost family members, many have been orphaned and have raised their siblings, their nieces and nephews. They sacrificed their own childhoods and dealt with enormous amounts of grief, despair, and intense anger. Poverty, unemployment, lack of skills, the legacy of apartheid, experiences of victimisation, violence were like layers of silt that buried many of the interns when they came into the programme, and over time it is amazing to see the life and faces begin to re-emerge from the trauma. With the help of Gender at Work we have begun to understand more clearly how trauma and violence block people's ability to learn and engage.¹⁹This understanding has been tremendously important, as it allows us to understand anger and rage, lack of participation, silence, in new ways. Jenny described it as waking someone up from a deep sleep – you do it gently and it takes time for a person to awaken fully and engage.

For women in particular, awakening often means having to confront the shame of sexual violence, of HIV, of unwanted children. These experiences have been so deeply shrouded and silenced by patriarchy they often take years to emerge even within the “safe space” of JAW. These experiences also act as unnamed blocks that stop learning and personal integration. For example, for the last two years we have been focusing on sexuality, physical development, anatomy, menopause, pleasure. Each time we revisit the issue of sexuality, the learning is deeper and becomes more personal and sometimes more painful as it opens up past experiences of violence, family histories of sexual abuse and even asks us to think about our children's sexuality and how we are consistent (or not) with what we learn and what we practice at home.

Giving feedback to interns is an important part of the mentoring process, as it helps develop self-awareness and also critical development skills like facilitation. For many interns getting positive feedback is incredibly powerful, but receiving critical feedback however gently couched is painful. Sometimes in giving feedback, I was met with deep rage and sadness – and it was difficult to be in the space and also to accept criticism back. For example, the interns raised their concern about a lack of clarity about the internship process, when it ends, when benefits will be improved etc. (All interns receive a monthly stipend and some benefits, but those benefits are not the same as full-time staff. Interns work about 100 hours per month and also

19 An important resource we drew from was Lynne Forrest. The Three Faces of Victim An overview of the Drama Triangle. 2008: http://lynnforrest.com/html/the_faces_of_victim.html

participate in University courses and other formal and informal learning opportunities for which JAW pays. At the time of this writing, Jenny Bell, Grace Ngema and I are the three full-time staff members). Hearing the criticism, I felt my own defensiveness but I also had to recognize that sharing power was about also being open to feedback. The lack of clarity about the internship had become like another kind of abuse in people's lives because it left them with a sense of uncertainty and inequality.

We are still grappling with how to formally end the internship phase of JAW, how to address the ongoing need of interns for continuing mentoring in job skills as well as formal education and training. There is also an ongoing need for counselling and emotional support. The internship process allowed us to avoid certain questions that come up in a more formal workplace environment – like work performance evaluations and salary scales. Ending the process means formalising our workplace and to a certain extent that creates more clarity and transparency, but that also means a more formal manager/employee relationship and less of a mentoring one. I think that this transition is healthy as it signifies a move toward independence, but there is also a feeling of loss and a sense of uncertainty about how we move into this more formal space without losing a sense of the personal connectedness that has made our work powerful and that is at the heart of gender transformation.

As a manager – a white woman manager working with black women interns the power dynamic replicates the raced, classed history of oppression and there is no escaping falling into the roles of the victim, rescuer, perpetrator. In women's organisations in particular, I think the drama triangle plays itself out as part of the deep culture that the Gender at Work Process helped us unearth. As a manager, I had to accept the perpetrator in myself - my potential to oppress. I think that for us as women's organisations there is a feeling that we are working against patriarchy and hierarchy, so how can we also be perpetrators of abuse? But retreating from owning and acknowledging the perpetrator in ourselves is not only dishonest, it is what leads to a deep culture of abuse that is disowned and un-surfaced. If we don't allow for anger and rage in the organisation, we keep the power dynamics hidden.

Through supporting JAW intern Bongiwe Zondi in her social work course (she is currently completing a BSW through UNISA), we have been learning together about Carl Rogers and the 21 Propositions. This process has helped us reflect on the issue of defensiveness and projection, and how our anger can protect us from having to engage and reflect on the parts of ourselves we try to disown because they make us deeply uncomfortable. Even though it is painful sometimes, the process of working through the defensiveness – sifting through the layers - allows us to become more whole and more integrated as people and members of the organisa

tion. It allows us to be more compassionate with one another and ourselves, as we make space for our own contradictions even as we try to live more consistently with our values. Jenny has been talking a lot about paradox lately— about how we can be two things at the same time. It is a strange concept, but when we understand and acknowledge our different faces, how we move around the different corners of the drama triangle - we become more whole people and more powerful as an organisation. Perhaps most importantly, this process allows us to see one another's humanity more fully, which is the starting place of shared power or "picking up the rope" together. It is a place from which we can begin descending the steep cliffs to the uncharted oceans of ourselves and to a new kind of organisational life.



Picking Up the Rope A Visual Symbol of Taking Responsibility

Jenny Bell

The organisational mantra that we have developed of “pick up the rope” came from a workshop of deep silence which Amber describes in this book, and in this situation I had reached breaking point. I raged to the group about how we needed to learn how to work differently with power - that continuing silence meant that Amber and I had the power - that the other end of the rope (them) was lying limply on the floor. I ended with an injunction to ‘pick up the damn rope’ and banged my way childishly out of the room. I came back later, apologised, and started to talk about my deep feeling of frustration with the situation and how it could not go on like this. The group listened, we regrouped and started again.

Our route to learning how to be an organisation that is more mindful of power dynamics has been filled with engagements at this level of intensity, this level of at times acting out childishly, this level of disclosure, talking through, exposing one’s own inconsistencies and ultimately one’s own human frailty. It’s not a path to be trod with a “do it yourself manual” in hand and methodologies at one’s finger tips, and that is ultimately its challenge. That does not mean that we went into this process completely devoid of guides, and over the process

of the 3 years these were the most consistent tools that framed our actions and reflections:

- A definition of what we meant by power – we drew from Srilatha Batliwala’s²⁰ definition of power which we found most clear. Power is the degree of access to and control over needed resources – that is physical, emotional, financial, and spiritual resources
- To locate our own relationships to power we drew on the work of Karpman²¹ and questioned whether we were acting as perpetrator, rescuer or victim. This helped us to unravel how we had got there and helped us identify the forces and feelings from our pasts which kept us stuck in these positions. (Bongiwe Zondi gives a sense of how she has worked on this in her contribution in this book).
- Drawing on the work of Just Associates²² we looked at the ways in which power is used in the

20 Srilatha Batliwala, 1995, Defining Women’s Empowerment: A Conceptual Framework in Education for Women’s Empowerment, ASPBAE Position Paper for the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, September 1995, New Delhi, Asia-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education.

21 We drew on Karpman’s work from Lynne Forrest, 2008, The Three Faces of Victim. An overview of the Drama Triangle: http://www.lynneforrest.com/html/the_faces_of_victim.html

22 Lisa VeneKlasen with Valerie Miller, 2007, ‘A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation’ <http://www.justassociates.org/ActionGuide.htm>





world – power over, power with, power to, power within. We drew on the work of Steven Wineman and added the idea of the power under.²³ This has become the language in which we communicate as a group. I have come to understand that working with power does not mean that I as a manager cannot exert power over others in the organisation. Through practice I have come to understand where I need to use this power and I state and own it clearly – saying “I am now using my power over and these are the reasons why I am doing this”.

- Gender at Work introduced us to the integral framework developed by Wilbur²⁴ and modified by Aruna Rao and David Kellerher²⁵ which helped us understand that for any change in power relations in our organisation to be sustainable – we need to (1) increase interns and staff’s access and control over needed resources; (2) We needed to deepen our critical consciousness of how and why we related to power in the way we did and we needed to surface a new understanding, a new language of how to work with this; (3) We had to embed changes within policy frameworks for the organisation; and (4) we had to be ever mindful of shadow – the deep culture in our midst, the un-sayable, the recurrent tense moments that surface – which speak to something that needs to be addressed .
- Space for reflection – our participation in the

Gender at Work Gender Action Learning Process also provided us with a much needed opportunity to reflect on what was happening. The process challenged us to think more deeply, to learn to use ourselves, to connect the “dots” of our experiences and to surface our own meaning of our process.

What follows below is more about the “how”, since Amber Howard’s piece in this book gives an indication of the “why” of our practice.

How we did this work

We learned as we developed our Internship Programme, that to challenge anything with any real degree of power, requires confidence in oneself, a degree of autonomy or independence. We realised that to use one’s power can be a deeply frightening experience and one that requires a level of trust between interns and management. The trust does not come over night. It grows through experiences in which it is tested, where the consequences of the testing either increase or decrease confidence. I give an example: You may have read Bongwiwe Zondi’s story in this book – her reflection is one side of the story, what I write here is another. Both stories are true and both need to be held with balance – this is the paradox of learning to work at this level.

Bongwiwe Zondi was the intern who raised the issue of the inequality of the internship and questioned when it would end. We sensed her frustration. Her anger was palpable. It raised old demons for me – “Who did she think she was? Did she not under

23 Steven Wineman, 2003: Power-Under. Trauma and Nonviolent Social Change www.TraumaAndNonviolence.com.

24 Ken Wilbur, 2007, The Integral Vision. A Very Short Introduction to the Revolutionary Integral Approach to Life, God, the Universe, and Everything. Shambhala, Boston and London.

25 Aruna Rao and David Kelleher “Is there life after gender mainstreaming? in Gender and Development, Vol. 13, No. 2, July 2005. pp 57-69

stand how much we were trying to do? - She was ungrateful. She was too demanding.” My judgments raged and my responses to her were tinged with this perpetrator anger. Bongiwe, long conversant in the arts of victimhood, continued to find opportunities to needle. She did it quietly, but naggingly insistently and soon a prime opportunity presented itself when she was part of an organisational review with one of our funders. Bongiwe rose to the occasion and voiced her discontent – I felt unmasked and deeply angry, and the funder, sensitive to the power dynamics at play, voiced the sentiment that ‘maybe a mediator was needed to help raise these issues in a safe way.’ I became angrier – feeling that the funder had played into Bongiwe’s hand. I was deep into the drama of the triangle developed by Karpman²⁶ – where my feelings seesawed drunkenly between perpetrator and victim. Thankfully a conversation with Michel Friedman helped restore a sense of balance. Her timely reminder about shadow – ‘what did Bongiwe represent?’ - helped me gain perspective and we opened up a space where these issues could be owned and voiced constructively. I learned again through this engagement the value of discontent in organisational life – for it represents that which we do not want to see or acknowledge. By refusing to give it space – it becomes a larger and larger presence and the energy needed to hide or deny it kickstarts old repressive patterns of power and domination. Now I thank Bongiwe for taking the gap however hard it was for both of us at the time.

To return to our process: there have been many other moments like this where we have all tried to revert to the safety of the known, the safety of hierarchical ‘power over’ or victim relationships - where we wait to be told what to do, have little investment in outcome and if challenged project blame outwards. The safety of games, where we catch the powers that be by their own tail and tell them ‘I told you so and you would not listen.’ Where we rescue endlessly and revel in the narcissistic feelings of our own goodness, ego reigning supreme.

Gender/Power transformation

What do we see as the signs of confidence which enables transformation - of interns using power in new ways - of becoming active agents for change in our lives, in the organisation and in the community? To answer this question clearly means revisiting our processes:

Building access and control of resources: We started by building interns’ knowledge of family law issues. We gave them opportunities where they could use this knowledge in communities. We started slowly – first role modelling how the work could be done. With time we encouraged interns to take charge of processes, and we gave them clear feedback on the improvements that could be made. Finally interns ran their own workshop processes. Together we worked out workshop expenditure so that interns had clear parameters about how and where to use money and how to account for it.

26 See Lynne Forrest, 2008, The Three Faces of Victim. An overview of the Drama Triangle: http://www.lynneforrest.com/html/the_faces_of_victim.html

Through these workshops interns built the confidence to manage group processes with large numbers of people (some of whom were their own parents). They received positive feedback, they gained a new sense of themselves, a new identity in their community. Having access to financial resources through receipt of monthly salaries impacted on intern's lives in the following ways – some obtained drivers licenses, others completed work on homes, others were able to think about leaving their families and getting married/divorced. JAW offered interns access to educational courses which were accredited and which offered marketable qualifications – such as qualifications as social workers, paralegals, development practitioners. We stressed that leaving our employment was not a sign of failure but rather a sign of organisational success – people were free to go and we celebrated their advancement in the world.

Developing critical consciousness: In her contribution in this book Amber has described this aspect of our work. Developing critical consciousness hinged on the quality of relationships that we developed as a group, and is about the climate we had to create to break the silence. But once the silence was broken we were faced with overwhelming stories of trauma from the life experiences of JAW interns, and we had to set up debriefing processes to help interns deal with the pain. Gender at Work introduced us to Capacitar²⁷ – a mind body practice – which we used when words failed, and we learned how to contain, calm and shift energy lev

els. We came to see how trauma truncates time to the present, the day to day. We had to find ways of helping interns build their capacity to remember, as this affected their ability to report on work. At times we referred interns to other sources of support, often intervening beyond the bounds of a 'normal' employer/employee relationship. In addition to working at these deeper levels of consciousness, we also offered interns exposure to different experiences thereby helping them develop a broader world view and awakening their curiosity. Interns attended training events and participated in funder's meetings. They traveled both within South Africa and abroad. They stayed in hotels, bed and breakfasts, shared dormitories with foreigners in backpackers. These experiences broadened their horizons, and made them more confident in different situations. They became aware of others sharing similar issues to their own and that people lived in different ways, had different world views. They met sex workers, lesbian activists, people living openly with HIV, and people of different cultural backgrounds. This helped the interns become more open, accepting and tolerant of difference and diversity. It broke the isolation that poverty brings and which it thrives on. It awakened a curiosity about the world and questions started emerging – “What do white people do when they get married – do their parents also pay lobola? How did white people experience apartheid?”

Development of organisational policy: In developing our organisational policy we started by develop

27 See www.capacitar.org

ing the underpinning values of our work and organisation and came up with descriptive statements of intent that helped us shape how we deal with others in the community and with ourselves. We developed our policy organically as far as possible or in response to external demands – but we always linked it back to our values statements. We feel strongly that our values are the soul of our organisation. Having these in place offer containment and a clear space in which we can engage with one another when values or policies were breached or disciplinary action was called for.

Signs of change

In the past year there have been signs that JAW is entering a new organisational phase and that the phase of being driven by the pioneer founders is coming to an end.

We see changes in the interns – their increased ability to work on programmes, to take initiative, to move processes forward, and to pass on knowledge and power to others. They are learning to be mentors to new groups of interns (community based facilitators) and they are acting with deep compassion and desire to share with others what they have learned.

Interns raise questions – interns pressure JAW to review policies, practices and its own view of itself. One intern recently publicly defended JAW's right to be viewed as an organisation when he challenged the community by saying that JAW is not one person (the Manager Jenny) but an organisation

made up of many people.

We see changes in the role of management – as managers we are more involved with helping staff plan, think through challenges, engage in critical reflection and we are less involved in the daily implementation of project work. We see decreasing need for personal debriefing within the organisation as interns have built internal resources to secure support.

We see also normalisation of previously hidden issues - four staff members recently disclosed their HIV status. They are on treatment and are reaching out to others in the community to start breaking these silences.

Organisational response

For the managers, Amber and I, these signs are “freeing”. We see that we have built something that is demanding to live independently. The next organisational phase will challenge us all to strengthen institutional processes without becoming institutionalised, will strengthen the governance structure of the organisation, change the nature of our management, and develop further our approach in working with gender and power. The way we have worked with our interns has deepened organisational understandings of gender and power and helped us develop authentic responses to issues like HIV and AIDS, gender based violence, and economic dependency in women's lives. This approach is something we will draw on as we move into our next phase of development. New lessons await!



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