Ottilie Abrahams: Passionate about education for liberation

Ottilie Abrahams: Passievol oor onderwys vir bevryding

Okuvelula oshiwana momahepeko Eengerki eenghwa Luther tadi popi
Welcome to another edition of Sister Namibia, in which we bring you a profile of one of Namibia’s staunchest champions for women’s rights, Ottilie Abrahams. During the interview it became clear that the profile should actually have been a book, documenting the rich life experiences of this educator who has remained true to her principles of participatory democracy and education for liberation based on the solid foundation of critical thinking and the willingness to take responsibility for one’s own governance.

Our second story celebrates the positive results of the recent Local Authority elections with regard to the representation of women. However, it asks how women are going to move beyond the current 4 percent representation at the regional level in the forthcoming Regional Authority elections. With 96 percent men represented on the Regional Councils, you would be forgiven for believing that there are no women living in the regions of Namibia! Why is there such a deafening silence on this issue?

Other stories deal with the political participation of women with disabilities, and the findings of a study by Lironga Eparu on experiences of people living with HIV and AIDS regarding issues of treatment. The community work of the Namibian Women’s Network is presented, and rising star Patricia Ochurus explains that she was “born to sing”.

Our story from Malawi portrays the undaunting struggle of former political prisoner and presidential candidate Vera Chirwa for the full recognition of women’s human rights and freedoms in her country.

With the 15th anniversary of Sister Namibia to be celebrated later this year, we showcase the photography of Tanja Bause of The Namibian on our middle pages with the aim of motivating all women photographers to send us a selection of their work. This will be displayed in a photography exhibition during our anniversary activities.

Enjoy!
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For Ottilie Abrahams, principal of Jacob Marengo Secondary School in Katutura, the liberation struggle is far from over. She firmly believes that education is key to the development of self-esteem and critical thinking, which she sees as the foundations of development still lacking in a country dominated for so long by apartheid and patriarchal rule.

No wonder she views her own educational path and the establishment of the Namibian Girl Child Organisation as the two major achievements of her life.

Having grown up in the former Old Location in Windhoek, she says "getting a degree, at the time when I got it, was something exceptional for people living on this side of the railway. One of the reasons I went to university was to show people that black people can achieve things, and also that a woman can achieve anything she really wants to achieve. And of course I wanted to show my parents that they did not waste their money by putting a girl through university."

Despite living in a segregated society, she describes the Schimming family home as cosmopolitan, and this becomes a recurring theme throughout her life. "I remember when black people came from abroad and landed at the airport, not realising that hotels were not open to them under the apartheid system, the police would bring them to our house. It was a house in which discussion and critical debate was encouraged. I grew up in the shadow of relatives and friends like Hosea Kutako, Clemens Kapuuo, Bethold Himumuine, Mbuende and Theo Katjimuine, who were the politicians of the time."

Ottilie learnt at an early age that education is a terrain of struggle in an oppressive system, and this fuelled her interest in politics. "I had a marvelous teacher from standard four to standard six in Windhoek. His name was Martinus Olivier. One thing that made me love history and fervent debate is the way he taught us. He would always introduce his lesson by saying: "Now I will teach you what you must write in the examination," and after that he would say: "Now I will teach you the truth." It is impossible to come from that background and not be consumed by politics. So already from the age of twelve I can clearly remember that I took an active interest."

Her political interest developed into activism during her years of study in Cape Town, where she started in standard seven at the age of fourteen. "For my standard nine and ten I went to Trafalgar High School, which was known as the school of politics. Our teachers were very radical politicians who vigorously opposed the Bantu Education System. As a result of their political activities, some of them were banned by the South African Regime. I became a member of the Cape Peninsula Students' Union and later graduated to the Society of Young Africa (SOYA). I was also a member of the Non-European Unity Movement. In these circles the culture was one of 'fighting ideas with ideas', and the debates we had were very stimulating. If you could not discuss Marx or Engels you were regarded as not being really human!"

She went on to the University of Cape Town (UCT), where she did a BA degree and a teacher's course. "During that time I became a member of Swapo. I also be-
londed to an underground organisation known as the YU CHI CHAN or YC3 CLUB (which is Chinese for guerilla warfare). This was a secret organisation operating cells in South Africa to prepare for the armed struggle against the South African Government. For us, at the time, South West Africa was not really regarded as a separate country in the sense that the oppressive ruler in both countries was the South African government." During this time she also met and married Kenneth Abrahams, who had completed medicine at UCT.

When the underground cells were uncovered, the couple returned to South West Africa. Together with Andreas Shipanga and other comrades, they established the Rehoboth branch of Swapo under the big white bridge leading out of Rehoboth. Hoping to melt into the back-

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ground, Kenneth Abrahams began work as a doctor. "But one morning about 10 trucks of soldiers came to arrest my husband." Ottile chuckles as she tells the story: "Those soldiers never reckoned with the people of Rehoboth, which was a semi autonomous 'state' where black people were allowed to own guns! There was actually a revolt, people came with their guns and said 'If you touch our doctor, blood will flow today!' Oom Maans Beukes sent a telegram to the UN to ask them to intervene! It was very dramatic and the police were given the order to withdraw. But of course we knew that as soon as the people dispersed, they would come back for us."

As they were returning to Rehoboth one Sunday evening after spending the day tending to the sick and dispensing medicine in the surrounding villages, emis-

saries warned them that the police had come back to arrest Dr Abrahams. And so the couple was forced to go into exile. "When I left I had two children, one was one year and six months and one was six months, she was still suckling on my breast. I could not take them with me since I was disguised as a young Herero girl who was expelled from Augustineum Secondary School for being pregnant. Leaving my babies behind was the hardest thing I have ever done in my life."

Ottile Abrahams served as the first Swapo Secretary for Education while in Dar Es Salaam, but while on a mission to Kenya a few months later received the news that she and her husband were suspended from the party, ostensibly for 'disrespecting the leadership'. "How can you disrespect yourself?" she asks as she continues her story.

In order to continue the struggle and assist their South African comrades languishing at Robben Island, the Abrahams managed to gain asylum in Zambia and lived there for 5 years, joined by their children. Ottile taught at Kabulonga Girls in Lusaka, Chizongwe in Fort Jameson and then moved to the rural areas where she joined other teachers in opening a new school, Petauke Secondary School.

But their fortunes changed again in 1968 when she was imprisoned in Lusaka following the infamous meeting between South African President Vorster and Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda, which led to attacks against political parties and the targeting of leaders of the liberation movement. "I was never told why I was arrested and eventually I was let out. With the help of a lawyer my husband was also released from Isoka prison and this time we found asylum in Sweden, where we lived for 9 years. We also lived in England for a year, where my husband did a degree in tropical medicine."

While living in Sweden Ottile worked on a doctorate in English literature: "I finished all my exams; all I had to do was just to complete my thesis. Then one day in 1978, we were informed that we were granted political amnesty [during the deliberations on UN Resolution 435]. Within 27 hours my husband and I were on the plane from Stockholm to Windhoek. We left the children and everything else we had in Stockholm. For 16 years in exile, I had lived for the day when I would set foot again in Windhoek! My thesis was locked in a cupboard and since that day I have been involved in implementing the ideas discussed in that document!"

Back in Namibia they joined the campaign for elections, and Ottile served as Secretary General of the Namibia Independence Party, a member party of the Namibia National Front (NNF), of which she was also Secretary General. In 1990 the NNF gained one seat in the newly elected parliament; Ottile was second on the list but has no regrets that she did not become an MP.

"There was so much other work to do," she says with vigour. "We had formed different associations and organisations because we said 'we can never wait for the South African government to do things for us, we will do it ourselves.' We also supported a number of projects based on participatory democracy from here almost up to the South African border, in places like Snyfontein, Abrahamspos and Arhoa, where people were motivated to start projects which they controlled themselves."

Much of Ottile's time and energy went into starting educational projects, including the People's Pre-Primary School in Rehoboth and the People's Primary School in
Engendering Local Government

In the Local Authority elections held on 14th May, women gained 45 percent of the seats on local councils in Namibia. Women's representation thus increased by roughly four percent from the 41.3 percent gained in the 1998 elections. While this is cause to celebrate, campaigners for substantive gender equality have made it clear that they will not rest until true gender balance in positions of decision making has been achieved, as called for in the National Gender Policy of our country.

For example, in a letter published in the media directly after the elections, Verónica de Klerk of Women's Action for Development stated that while political parties had put forward gender balanced zebra-style party lists in the villages and smaller towns, they had favoured male candidates for the top positions of their lists in the bigger towns, thereby denying women the chance to gain experience at this level. She charged that when men were first elected to such positions they had had no experience, but that now women were required to demonstrate experience even before they have been elected.

She urged government to legislate for zebra party lists, with women heading the lists in recognition of the fact that women constitute more than 51% percent of the population and more than 52% of the electorate. She further called on government to legislate for quotas in the forthcoming Regional Authority and National Assembly elections. Namibia currently has a shameful 4 percent women elected at the regional level! Finally, de Klerk urged women to "act like a majority and not like a minority who begs for favours..."

One week before the Local Authority elections a national workshop of the Namibian Women's Manifesto Network, which brought together women from 30 towns and villages across the country, visited the Windhoek Municipality to present an Open Letter to the Local Authorities in Namibia. The Open Letter called on local councils to implement the National Gender Policy at the local level. The Network members then took this letter back to their towns and villages to present to their local councils there and begin a dialogue on how women's groups and organisations can work together from now with their local councils to engender local government. The Network members will provide feedback at the next national workshop in September on the responses of their local councils.

Open Letter to Local Authorities

Women and children are the poorest of the poor. Women work as subsistence farmers, domestic workers and in the informal economy, many of them as single parents with little support from the fathers of their children. They hold families and communities together in the face of poverty, escalating domestic violence and HIV/AIDS.

The Namibian Women's Manifesto Network has called on political parties and associations to study the National Gender Policy and the international instruments for gender equality signed by our government. Political parties must have policies to implement these agreements at local level.

Following the May 14 elections we will call on Local Authorities to work towards gender equality and the empowerment of women in our towns and villages in the following ways:

The Development of Gender Policies

All Local Councils must use the tool of gender analysis to develop gender policies. This should be done in consultation with the local community to ensure that all development and service delivery strategies are gender sensitive and result in gender equality in the community.

The Establishment of Gender Desks

All Local Councils must establish structures such as gender desks or committees to oversee the implementation of the gender policy, and mechanisms for community participation in the monitoring and evaluation of progress.

Gender Budgeting

All Local Councils must use the tool of gender budgeting to ensure equitable distribution of resources to all citizens as well as to correct past imbalances.

Beyond this, the Namibian Women's Manifesto Network calls on local councils to:

- Develop and implement programmes to eliminate poverty
- Promote the economic independence of women
- Provide access to affordable housing and land
- Provide affordable and safe childcare facilities
- Combat violence against women and children
- Support prevention programmes and the provision of treatment and care for people living with HIV/AIDS
- Promote reproductive and sexual health and rights of girls and women
- Promote access to education and lifelong learning
- Promote the equal sharing of domestic responsibilities between men and women.
Political participation of women with disabilities

By Alexia Ncube

What is the present reality facing differently abled women with regard to participation in general? Are women with disability visible? If they are, where are they visible? What prevents their visibility? Do you see them in the family? Do you see them participating actively in the community? Are they visible in meaningful positions in the disability movement? I will not even ask the question in relation to their participation in the political mainstream.

We need to understand the factors that make it difficult for differently abled women to engage actively. We need to recognise the double, even multiple sources of invisibility of certain categories of women and girls. Depending on economic status, ethnicity, tribe, (dis)ability, colour, caste, HIV status, and age, some women and girls may suffer multiple forms of discrimination, thus making their functioning in civil society particularly difficult.

We are discriminated against by our fellow women. We are discriminated against as we grow up in our families, because we are regarded as not valuable. This discrimination affects our educational opportunities. A boy with disabilities is more likely to be sent to school than a girl, as he will be expected to make a living for himself as an adult. And his family will always be able to find a woman to marry and take care of him. But for a girl with disability it's different, why would she need an education? And what would she be good for as a wife? We are further discriminated if we become HIV positive - as people wonder 'how can she have a sex life?'

We are even discriminated against by men with disabilities in our own movement. The dominance of men in leadership at different levels in our society is mirrored in the disability movement. The point I am making is that the playing field is not level. The same structural injustices (traditional beliefs, prejudices and practices) that exist in our society and cultures affect women with disabilities in particular, as they do women in general. Unless we understand this, we will not know how to level the playing field. The stakes are heavily loaded against women with disabilities.

There is no doubt as to the crucial importance of political participation of women with disabilities at all levels of our society, but we need to see this happening in the context of a process. In other words, political participation is not a single event but can only be achieved through a process that utilises a variety of means, among which the following are included:

- We should build effective groups and organisations of women with disabilities as part of a strategy of capacity building. Our own structures give us the space and confidence to build our political skills, among other things.
- The self-representative structures of women with disabilities have a primary responsibility of creating awareness in the community about the situation facing women with disabilities.
- Again through their organisations women with disabilities need to engage effectively with the national disability movement and challenge it in terms of the issues of gender equity, power and leadership.
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Born to sing

Initially it was difficult to reconcile the woman sitting behind a desk occupied by a PC, stacks of papers and files to the woman I saw on stage just a few days earlier, leading a ‘rainbow’ crowd into a frenzy of song and dance. Her soft-spoken and serene demeanor belies a force that is fast becoming a Namibian household name.

27 year-old Patricia Ochurus was born in Windhoek and "grew up in the streets of Katutura," the country’s oldest and biggest township. Namibians first took notice of her when she developed the traditional classic Ai-se Mama Se into the jazzy rendition Afrika Tsela. This song, as the first song on the album A Handful of Namibians with Papa Wemba, introduces the world to Namibian musical treasures, and musicians now becoming solo artists in their own right.

Patricia aims to continue “keeping the culture” by singing in her native tongue, Damara. "Singing in my language is such a good feeling. It is somehow keeping me close to who I am and my roots," she explains. She wishes other Namibian musicians would do the same. "We are Namibians, not Americans or Europeans. Why should we try and imitate other people?"

The woman now compared to two of South Africa’s leading female singers, Judith Sephuma and the late Brenda Fassie, started her career in singing at the age of seven when she joined the women’s church choir attended by her mother. Thereafter she joined the Bethel Lutheran Youth Choir, followed by several other church choirs. She also performed with Kayec, a Katutura based multi-cultural youth group, regularly called upon to represent Namibia at international events. “I still perform with Kayec when I have the time. I love the singing and dancing,” she says with a big smile.

At the beginning of her professional music career, Patricia thought that being a woman, black and from a poor background, would disadvantage her. She however, soon realised that it would not keep her from what she was born to do – sing.

A period in her career that she will always be grateful for is her experience during the nationwide televised talent search Fame Factory, a Namibian version of Pop Idols. She managed to reach the finals, competing against two other bands for a N$40 000 cash prize and all the fame that goes with it. She was surprised when she reached the finals.

"My sisters and friends told me to believe in myself but I really did not think that I would make it that far," she says. “Fame factory really gave me the platform to introduce myself to my people. Now most people recognise and know me.”

Like most Namibian artists, Patricia has a full time day job, working as an administrator at Namibian Worker, a newsletter focusing on labour issues. “I have this job because I need the income. Being an artist only does not keep the pot cooking, but I’m also doing it because I like being exposed to different aspects of life, as it contributes to my growth as an artist,” she says.

Besides her career and office job, Patricia is also mother to three year old Dandiba (Honey), whom she describes as her joy. In her free time she loves listening to a variety of genres but gospel music and Damara Pantzi, a fusion of pop and traditional Damara music, are her favourite.

Patricia writes most of her music herself, but works closely with her producer, Stephen Naruseb. She of course would like to spread her wings and test the international scene. “But I will remain Namibian and represent my country,” she promises. Another reason for her plans to go international is because she would like to work with artists from other countries, “just to see how they do it.”

Her message to young Namibians is to believe in themselves. "If you don’t believe in yourself nobody else will. We all have the ability to have a fulfilling and successful life and career."

So, as she urges us in her song Khaima! - it is time for Namibians to stand up and make it happen.
Christine Modise of Gobabis is the Lironga Eparu coordinator for Omhheke Region. Speaking at the launch in Katutura, she said that there was no treatment for people living with Aids in her region. "Every week we lose five or six people to the disease."

Martha Shikongo, Lironga Eparu board member and coordinator for Oshikoto Region, said she cannot take anti-retroviral treatment because she also suffers from diabetes and hypertension. "It is so hard to know that the treatment is there but I cannot take it. I am trying to keep a healthy mind."

Zelma Uiras of Rehoboth, Lironga Eparu coordinator for Hardap Region, is one of the lucky few to receive anti-retroviral treatment for Aids.

Survey findings launched on treatment for people living with Aids

The National Association of People Living with HIV/Aids, Lironga Eparu, recently launched its HIV/Aids Treatment Consultation. This study was conducted among members of the organisation countrywide during 2002-2003 to establish the views and perceptions of HIV positive Namibians with regard to issues of treatment. Lironga Eparu currently has 26 support groups for people living with HIV and Aids spread across all regions of the country. The majority of these support groups are coordinated by women.

David Lush, one of the researchers involved in the consultation, emphasised that "it was important that the study was done by ourselves, since we are the targets of treatment." He said that Lirongo Eparu took a holistic view of treatment, including issues of diet, testing, counseling as well as access to ordinary and anti-retroviral drugs. While acknowledging that the Namibian government generally has good policies on HIV and Aids, for example with regard to confidentiality, he charged that these were not "getting to the ground." He highlighted the major findings of the study as follows:

For many people living with HIV and Aids, even ordinary medicine needed to treat opportunistic diseases is too expensive and often not available, with long distances having to be travelled to clinics and hospitals. There is further a lack of awareness of specific treatment for HIV and Aids, even among people living with the disease. Professional health care staff was found to stigmatise and discriminate against patients, while the quality of counseling was often poor. The survey recommended that more people living with HIV be trained as counselors, as they would be in a better position to empathise with their clients.

The study found that families need help in coming to terms with the disease and caring for their infected family members, and that there is still discrimination at the workplace despite progressive policies. Poverty alleviation was seen to be crucial for infected people to be able to live healthy lives.

Lush stressed that "knowledge is power", saying that 'positive' people needed more information to make informed choices, for example, with regard to their reproductive rights. "It's important for us to know about methods of protecting babies from the disease, because some of us have the desire to be parents, and having children gives us inspiration and encouragement."

He said that the findings of the study have been used to inform the campaign for 'Treatment Now!' "Some approaches of this campaign have received criticism. However, Government must understand that there is a lot of hopelessness and frustration out there. We are asked to break the silence - now that we are standing up and expressing our viewpoints, don't push us down again!" he concluded.

The survey was concluded before the Ministry of Health and Social Services launched its programme for anti-retroviral treatment in mid-2003. Speaking at the launch, Dr Flavia Mugala of the Ministry said that more than 2000 Aids patients were now on anti-retroviral treatment, with the target for 2004 being double that number. The treatment is available at six government hospitals and four Catholic hospitals in the country.

According to estimates of the Ministry of Health and Social Services, there are approximately 200 000 people living with HIV and Aids in Namibia today, of which some 50 000 require anti-retroviral treatment now. Sixty percent of these are women. With a roll-out of treatment to only 4000 Aids patients by the end of 2004, it seems that the hopelessness and frustration will continue for a long time to come.

Contact Lironga Eparu at 061 213638 or 213653 for information about the support groups or to receive a copy of the HIV/Aids Treatment Consultation.
Facing the future together

Extracts from the Report of the UN Secretary-General's Task Force on Women, Girls and HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa

I don’t want to die before I’m 110 with great grandchildren. I don’t want to die before I turn 25. I refuse to sit down and watch my generation fall to pieces. I am going to make a difference. Will you?” asks Rumbidzai Grace Mushangi, 15, of Zimbabwe.

If we can stop the spread of HIV among women and girls in southern Africa, we can turn the epidemic around. While HIV prevalence is high among all sexually active women, girls and young women are particularly affected. The vast majority of young people aged 15-24 living with HIV/AIDS in southern Africa are female. Even more worrying, data shows that many young women are being infected almost as soon as they start having sex.

The findings of the United Nations Secretary General’s Task Force on Women, Girls and HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa show that gender inequality fuels HIV infection because many women and girls cannot negotiate safer sex or turn down unwanted sex.

The findings also demonstrate that HIV/AIDS deepens and exacerbates women’s poverty and inequality because it requires them to do more domestic labour as they care for the sick, the dying and the orphaned.

Although the problems are complex, the Task Force has identified key actions in relation to its six focus issues, which can make an immediate difference:

1. Prevention among Girls and Young Women
   We must collapse the bridge of infection between older men and younger women and girls. Many girls have sexual partners who are five to ten years older than them, and these men are more likely to be infected than boys and younger men.
   Relationships with older men are more likely to be based on unequal power relations, leaving girls vulnerable to exploitation.

2. Girls’ Education
   We must protect female enrolment figures. AIDS may be taking girls out of school. Although gender parity has largely been achieved in educational enrolment in southern Africa, we need more information on the impact of the epidemic on the education of girls, particularly orphans.

3. Violence against Women and Girls
   We must protect girls and women from the direct and long-term risks of HIV infection as a result of violence. Girls and women who have been sexually assaulted are at increased risk of HIV infection, through direct transmission and because of the long-term effects of sexual violence on risk-taking behaviour.

4. Property and Inheritance Rights
   We must protect the rights of women and girls to own and inherit land. In Southern African countries there are but a handful of small initiatives by determined organisations that provide women and girls with legal education and advice or assistance to prevent dispossession or restore taken property.

5. Women and Girls as Care Givers
   We must put in place a Volunteer Charter articulating the rights and responsibilities of women and men who provide care and support to the sick and orphaned. Communities, families, governments and development partners cannot continue to rely on ‘women’s resilience’ to provide safety nets for the sick and orphaned.

6. Access to Care and Treatment for Women and Girls
   We must address gender norms, violence, stigma and discrimination as potential barriers to women’s access to care and treatment. Although women may have greater access than men to anti-retroviral treatment through public health systems, they may miss out on treatment opportunities because of fear that their partners will discover their HIV status.

(This report was compiled by a taskforce consisting of 27 eminent persons drawn from nine Southern African countries: Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The Namibian representatives on the Taskforce were Dr Libertina Amathila (Minister of Health and Social Services) and Ms Maria Nangolo-Rukoro (National Social Marketing Programme). The full report can be found at http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0000839/index.php)
From prisoner to presidential candidate
an interview with Vera Chirwa of Malawi

Vera Chirwa, together with her husband Orton Chirwa, was jailed by the colonial rulers for her role in Malawi’s independence struggle. In Malawi’s first government under Hastings Banda, Orton Chirwa became Attorney General and Minister of Justice. However, when the regime turned dictatorial, the Chirwas joined the opposition. Soon they were kidnapped by security forces. Vera was imprisoned for twelve years, spending four of them in solitary confinement and three in shackles. She was released in January 1993, shortly after her husband died in prison.

Undeterred, Vera Chirwa has continued fighting as a human rights activist in the role of Special Rapporteur on Prisons and Conditions of Detention in Africa, as well as president of Women’s Voice and director of Malawi CARER, two rights-awareness organisations she initiated. After rejecting several requests in previous election years, this year Vera Chirwa announced that she was going to run for office in the May presidential elections.

Klaartje Jaspers interviewed her whilst waiting for the controversial results.

Why did you withdraw as Malawi’s first female presidential candidate?

Actually I did not withdraw, I stepped down. Many people in Malawi asked me to stand; it was under that pressure that I decided to declare myself an independent presidential candidate. But later the church saw the opposition was not very strong, so they decided to form a coalition. We needed a change of government, for many reasons.... There were nine parties at the time, so the church advised me not to stand, because I was going to divide the votes. So I applied to join the coalition. Unlike all the others, I satisfied all the conditions to be their presidential candidate but I hear they rejected me when they discussed my application. They were afraid of me. Here in Malawi we are still chauvinistic.

Do you think the elections were free and fair?

Free - yes. Where I was voting there was peace, people voted freely. I am president of Women’s Voice and director of the Malawi Centre for Advice, Research and Education on Rights. We participate in voter education and we also do monitoring. All the information I received from my own offices told me the elections have been almost peaceful.

Fair - I doubt. They should have been fair from the beginning. It started last year when the president of the country and the United Democratic Front, Muluzi, imposed Bingu wa Mutharika on his party as the presidential candidate. That was not good. Then he started campaigning last year, which is against the rules. Muluzi was taking advantage of his presidential role. It was not good for those who wanted to stand as presidential candidate.

Then the UDF monopolised the public media, the Malawi Broadcasting Co-operation and TV Malawi. The Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) did nothing to stop this practice. Then it was revealed that the MEC had produced about two million extra ballot papers - why? In the last elections of 1999 a lot of rigging took place, so people are afraid the government is buying ballot papers. This made the elections not fair.

What do you expect the outcome will be?

I am just hoping God will meet us. When I wanted to stand as a presidential candidate, the UDF demanded that I pay some money. I told them I wanted to stand because corruption should be abolished - how could they expect me to pay?

Next time, I know what to do. I will stand again, as someone working for democracy and the freedom of Malawi, the recognition of human rights. In colonial times I was there when we fought, I got imprisoned.
We got freedom but we spoiled it, it is worse now. My husband died in prison, by a lethal gas injection. The people of Malawi are still in prison because they don’t know their rights. To change that I started Women’s Voice in 1993 and Malawi CARER in 1994.

At first, the Muluzi government started very well as far as human rights were concerned. But then corruption came in and violence came again; the Young Democrats are harassing people, and poverty got worse. That’s why I decided to stand as an independent candidate. We will have to wait and see what the new government is going to do. If they don’t improve on the things I value and I’m still alive, I’ll stand again. I am 71 now, so by that time I’ll be 76. I’ll still be there, I’m strong and healthy. It seems God has compensated me for the time in prison; I went in a young lady, I came out old.

My husband and I were thrown in jail twice; the first time was in 1959, during the colonial days. We were sent to Salisbury and got imprisoned for six months. I was the only woman put on trial for unlawful assembly and incitement. The trial lasted for two weeks. I was acquitted, but put back into detention because I refused to leave without my husband.

The second time was after I completed my studies in the United Kingdom. After getting my masters degree in law and a diploma in international law, I had trained to be a barrister and joined my husband in Tanzania. Banda and his government were still oppressing the country; there was a lot of violence, killings, unlawful imprisonments and harassment. We formed an underground organisation called the Malawi Freedom Movement.

When Banda heard of it, he sent security people to kidnap us. We were tried by a court he had created especially for those who were in opposition, in order to make an example of us. Loudspeakers were set up so the people outside could hear. We used it to tell the people our views. My husband and I enjoyed that trial. They sent us to prison for twelve years.

When I got out, I found that Malawian men didn’t know their rights, and even less did Malawian women. You know our culture – women regard men to be superior. In certain cases women are very much respected, but their political place is in the kitchen. So when I came out of prison, the first thing I did was form Women’s Voice, to share what I had gained through my experience and education.

How do you encourage Malawian women?

Through visiting them, meeting with them, having discussions about women’s rights. Before the elections Women’s Voice organised training. We encouraged women to stand as members of parliament or councillors. We teach women they have something to offer. They are just as good as men, and can even do better.

For instance, in Mchinji most women are illiterate. Through our project they know their rights, and after they know, they voluntarily go and teach other women. You’ll be surprised to find women there who have memorised the chapter of our constitution that deals with the human rights of women and children.

We have evening classes and discuss issues such as inheritance. There are things in our tradition that can offer solutions. We explore how women can teach their communities, for example by doing drama for the chiefs. It works, people take it seriously.

We are encouraging women to vote, and vote for a fellow women if she qualifies. This year was very disappointing because parties did not back women in the primary elections, in which people are elected to represent their party in the national elections later on. So they were left out. We encouraged those by-passed to stand as independent candidates. Three of them have stood, we are now waiting for the results, but it looks good...

We want 30% women in politics and decision making bodies - now it’s 8.8%. We want to see women applying for jobs and we are encouraging government and employers to opt for women when they are qualified. We have enough qualified women to reach that 30%. If men were accepting us as partners, we would reach that even this year. We need to educate the men; we know discrimination and oppression comes from men - let them understand too. It is useless to teach women without teaching the men. In villages we have very interesting discussions, about who is responsible for the children and so on. Women say men are irresponsible, so it’s better to educate both.

You are Southern Africa’s representative in a Nobel Peace Prize project that aims to honour 1000 grassroots women for their work. Why only women?

Men are a bit greedy. There are women in Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia who fought against colonisation, but now they are all forgotten. Men have been recognised, streets are named after them... but not women. A lot of good work done by women is invisible, cultivating crops that feed the whole country; looking after Aids patients – that takes a lot of courage and love. They qualify for the Nobel Peace Prize project if they have been doing such work for five years or longer.

(More information on Malawi CARER can be found at www.malawicarer.org. Candidates for the Nobel Prize can be recommended via malawicarer@sdnp.org.mw)

Klaartje Jaspers is a Zambian-based journalist reporting on Southern Africa; for more information visit www.klaartjejaspers.com)
Namibian Women’s Network

Established in 1997, the Namibian Women’s Network (NWN) is a grassroots women’s network that works towards solidarity among women, and lobbies and advocates on issues such as women’s human rights as well as gender and development.

Marianne Erastus, National Coordinator of the NWN, told Sister Namibia that the Network came about following workshops held by the Legal Assistance Centre on women’s human rights. “The women who attended these workshops felt that they wanted to take this further by establishing a network that would work towards empowering rural women to take up their rightful position in all spheres of Namibian society,” she explained.

The goals of the Network are to improve the living conditions and legal environment for women – by increasing the capacity of the rural groups in decision-making and self-reliance as well as co-operating with other non-governmental organisations and government departments on issues of health and women’s and children’s rights.

The network has women’s groups running a variety of projects in the Hardap, Kunene, Erongo, Otjozondjupa, and Oshikoto regions.

Their major focus is in the area of HIV and Aids. Realising the importance of healthy nutrition for people living with HIV and Aids, women started gardening projects in their backyards to provide fresh fruit and vegetables to those living with the disease.

Network members also work as home based care volunteers and provide counseling. One of the main challenges the volunteers face is people’s unwillingness to get tested. “People fear being rejected by their families. Since they are already living in poverty they are afraid that their families will chase them away, saying that they will infect them,” Erastus lamented.

Raising awareness on the Prevention of Parent To Child Transmission Programme and where it is available is another aspect of this work. Erastus is concerned about the growing number of Aids orphans and calls on government to start centres to care for these children that can then be handed over to NGOs to run. “Every time I go to the north a neighbour has died and you only find the elderly and small children,” she said.

A drop-in center in Otjiwarongo cares for three orphans fulltime and provides lunch and dinner daily to children from impoverished backgrounds. Local businesses donate food and other necessities, while the municipality provides the home.

The women running the centre are also beneficiaries of the Network’s capacity building project, which provides training on small business management and household food security. A number of saving clubs were also started in some towns and villages.

The Network works closely with the Legal Assistance Centre to increase women’s awareness on important gender related legislation and to get women to participate when public hearings are held. “The LAC always informs us when such Bills are introduced and our members attend the workshops held, and when it’s time for public hearings we are duly informed and participate,” Erastus said.

She emphasised that “women have the ability to make tremendous change” once they receive guidance and access to relevant information, providing an example of women farm workers who came for training, and who had been promoted to managers by the time they returned for follow-up workshops.

She is a firm believer in the 50-50 Campaign slogan ‘The hand that stirs the pot can also rule the country.’ “If we can manage households we can play a role in leadership. Men have been doing it alone the whole time, that is why we are having problems,” she charged.

She does however call on the women of this country to refrain from petty behavior such as jealousy and instead support each other. “The elections are coming up - if you know of a woman who will make a good leader, support her, and if she is elected continue supporting her.”

She stressed that partnership between men and women in the building of the country and the fight against HIV and Aids is essential. The Network works together with Namibian Men for Change and the White Ribbon Campaign, inviting both women and men to workshops that analyse the ways in which gender inequality impacts on the spread of the disease.

Challenges faced by the Namibian Women’s Network include raising enough funds to cater for all their projects, but Erastus stressed that the satisfaction members get from the positive change they make in their communities makes up for the many challenges they face in their work.

The NWN is always willing to take in volunteers to ease the ever-increasing workload. They can be contacted at 061 – 246331.

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Mentally handicapped woman living at Hephata shelter. The shelter accommodates about 12 people.

Tanja Bause - Photographer on the rise

Bringing dire socio-economic conditions to the front pages

About me

I have been a newspaper photographer for nearly 8 years. I try to take photos from interesting angles and they must be interesting to the newspaper's readers. A photo should be able to stand on its own and be exciting. I am well known in the Informal settlements and there is usually no problem in me taking photos, but I always explain why I want to take it and ask permission.

I enjoy my work because through my photos I give something back to the community. Often people phone after a photo was published and offer help. For example, a little orphan girl was adopted, and soup kitchens received support. That is what makes it worthwhile, knowing that through my photo someone's life may have improved a little bit.

I use an Olympus C-750 Digital Camera.

(Tanja works at The Namibian. All photos used here and on the back page, courtesy of The Namibian.)
I wonder what my future holds ... Jerry at the entrance of his family's shack. His mother is in the background.

A pensioner in Babylon explains to a reporter the hardships of having no running water and electricity. With her are two children from the neighbourhood.
Well, sometimes bathing can be fun... Jerry and Reinhard of Freedomland informal settlement cooling off in the summer sun.

Let there be meat... drying meat in Okahandja Park Informal settlement
Three little kiddies went to fetch water ... children in Freedomland carry water from communal water points to their kambashus from an early age.

Sister Namibia Photo Exhibition

Sister Namibia is celebrating her 15th anniversary this year. As part of our celebrations we are preparing a photo exhibition. We call on all women photographers, professional and amateur, to send us up to three photos for consideration. We will include at least one photo from each photographer in the exhibition.

The themes for the exhibition are:

Women's Activism, Work, Sport, Friendship and Intimacy, and Abstract or Still Life.

The closing date for your entries is 31 August 2004.

Please send us paper prints only, we can then discuss which images you can e-mail or provide the negatives for. We will enlarge and frame your photos. Sister Namibia will sell the photos at the end of the exhibition to cover our costs.
Voor Ottile Abrahams, skoolhoof van Jacob Marengo Sekondêre Skool in Katutura, is die bevrydingsstyd ver van verby. Sy glo vas dat onderwys die sleutel is tot die ontwikkeling van 'n positiewe selfbeeld en kritiese denke. Dit is ook die bestanddeel van 'n fondasie van ontwikkeling wat volgens haar steeds kortkom in 'n land wat vir so lank deur apartheid en patriargale beheer beheere onroerheers is.

Dit is dus geen wonder dat sy haar eie opvoedkundige roete en die totstandkoming van die Namibian Girl Child Organisation as die twee grootste mylpale in haar lewe beskou nie.

As 'n kind wat in die voormalige Ou Lokasie in Windhoek grootgeword het, s0 sy "om 'n graad te behaal in die tyd wat ek dit gedoen het, was iets buitengewoon vir mense wat aan hierdie kant van die treinspoor gewoon het. Een van die redes waarom ek universiteit toe is, was eerstens om aan ander te bewys dat swart mense ook iets in die lewe kan behaal en ook om te bewys dat 'n vrou enigiets kan behaal wat sy regtig wil. En natuurlik was dit 'n bonus om aan my ours te bewys dat hulle nie regtig hulle geld gemors het deur 'n meisie universiteit toe te stuur nie."

Ondanks die feit dat sy in 'n afgesonderde gemeenskap geleef het, beskryf sy die Schimming-gesinshuis as kosmopolitaans en dit het deurgangs 'n herhaalde tema in haar lewe geword. "Ek onthou toe swart mense van oorsee afgekom het en by die lughawe geland het, onbewus van die feit dat hotelle nie vir hulle toeganklik was onder die apartheidstelsel nie. Die polisie het hulle na ons huis toe gebring. Dit was 'n huis waar bespreking en kritiese debatte aangemoedig is. Ek het grootgeword in die skadu van familieledes en vriende soos Hosea Kutako, Clemens Kapuuo, Bethold Himunuine, Mbuende en Theo Katjimuine wat die politici van dié tyd was."

Ottile het op 'n baie jong ouderdom geleer dat onderwys tydens 'n onderduikkingstelsel 'n stryd was en juist dit het haar belangstelling in politiek aangewakker. "Ek het 'n wonderlike onderwyser in Windhoek vanaf standerd vier tot standerd ses gehad. Sy naam was Martinus Olivier. Die een ding wat my liefde vir geskiedenis en vir die debatte tot gevolg gehad het, was die manier waarop hy ons geleer het. Hy het altyd sy lesings begin deur te sê: "Nou gaan ek julle leer wat julle in die eksamen moet skryf" en na dit het hy gesê: "Nou gaan ek vir julle die waarheid leer". Dit is onmoontlik om van so 'n agtergrond te kom en nie deur politiek vasgevang te word nie. Ek kon goed onthou dat ek reeds van die ouderdom van 12 af 'n aktiewe belangstelling in politiek getoon het."

Haar politieke belangstelling het tydens haar studieloopbaan in Kaapstad tot aktivisme ontwikkel. Sy het op 14-jaarige ouderdom haar standerd sewe jaar in Kaapstad begin. "Vir my standerd nege en tien jaar het ek na Trafalgar Hoërskool gegaan, wat bekend gestaan het as die skool van politiek. Ons onderwysers was baie radikale politici wat die Bantu Onderwystselsel ferm teëgestaan het. As gevolg van hul politieke aktiviteitie is sommige van hulle deur die Suid-Afrikaanse regering verban. Ek het 'n lid geword van die Kaapse Skiereiland se Unie vir Studente en het later aanbeweeg na die Society of Young Africa
Ek het grootgeword in die skadu van familieledle en vriende soos Hosea Kutako, Clemens Kapuuo, Bethold Himumuine, Mbuende en Theo Katjimuine wat die politici van dié tyd was.

ook vir Kenneth Abrahams ontmoet en is met hom getroud. Hy het medies aan UCT studeer. Toe die ondergrondse selle onthloot is, het die partajie na Suidwes-Afrika teruggekeer.

Saam met Andreas Shipanga en ander srydgenote het hulle die Rehoboth-tak van SWAPO, onder die groot wet brug op die pad wat uit Rehoboth lei, op die been gebring. In die hoop om op die agtergrond by die deelnemers van die Suid-Afrikaanse regering om dinge vir ons te doen nie, ons sal dit selfdoen'.

Ons het verskillende verenigings en organisasies gestig, sy nie 'n lid van die parlement geword nie. In 1990 het die NNF een setel in die nuutverkose parlement (NNF). Sy was ook die sekretaris-generaal van die NNF. wat in daardie dokument bespreek is.

In Swede het Ottilie aan 'n doktorale graad in Engels kommunikeer. "Ek het al my eksamens voltooi en moes nog net my tesis voltooi. Een dag in 1978 is ons ingelig van politieke amnestie aan ons toegestaan gedurende die onderhandelinge van die VN Resolusie 435. Binne 2J uur het die Suid-Afrikaanse regering om dinge vir ons te doen nie, ons sal dit selfdoen'.

Het hulle een Sondagaand na Rehoboth teruggekeer nadat hulle die Rehoboth-tak van SWAPO, onder die groot wet brug op die pad wat uit Rehoboth lei, op die been gebring. In die hoop om op die agtergrond by die deelnemers van die Suid-Afrikaanse regering om dinge vir ons te doen nie, ons sal dit selfdoen'.

Mense het met die hulp van 'n prokureur is my man ook uit Isoka se gevangenis vrygelaat en die keer het ons asiel in Swede gekry waar ons vir nege jaar gewoon het. Ons het ook vir 'n jaar in Engeland gewoon waar my man 'n graad in tropiese geneeskunde gedoen het.

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Het hulle einde na afloop van die ongewilde vergadering tussen die Suid-Afrikaanse president John Vorster en die Zambiese president Kenneth Kaunda, gevang se geneem is. "Niemand het ooit vir my gesê hoekom ek in hegtenis geneem is nie en ek is eindelik vrygelaat. Met die hulp van 'n prokureur is my man ook uit Isoka se gevangenis vrygelaat en die keer het ons asiel in Swede gekry waar ons vir nege jaar gewoon het. Ons het ook vir 'n jaar in Engeland gewoon waar my man 'n graad in tropiese geneeskunde gedoen het.

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Terug in Namibië het hulle betrokke geraak by die veldtog vir die verkiesing en Ottilie het as die sekretaris-generaal van die Namibie Onafhanklikheidsparty gediens wat 'n lidparty was van die Namibie Nasionale Front (NNF). Sy was ook die sekretaris-generaal van die NNF. In 1990 het die NNF een setel in die nuutverkose parlement gewen. Ottilie was tweede op die lys, maar is nie spyt dat sy nie 'n lid van die parlement geword het nie. "Daar was soveel ander werk om te doen," sê sy vurig. "Ons het verskillende verenigings en organisasies gestig, want ons het gesê 'ons kan nie wag vir die Suid-Afrikaanse regering om dinge vir ons te doen nie, ons sal dit self doen'.

Ons het ook 'n paar projekte ondersteun wat gegrond was op deelnemende demokrasie van hier tot amper by die Suid-Afrikaanse grens, in plekke soos Snyfontein, Abrahamspos en Araub waar mense gemotiveerd was om iets te doen wat hulleself kon beheer.
Toe ons Jakob Marengo begin het, was 'n kwart van ons leerders van Suid-Afrika waar skole afgebrand is – hoogs gepolitiseerde kinders, terwyl die ander groep van die noorde van Namibië gekom het waar die sekondêre skole moes funksioneer onder die waaksame oë van die besettingsmagte. Ons het ons werk beskou as voorbereiding van kinders vir 'n onafhanklike staat, vir die ontwikkeling van die land.

Ottile Abrahams en in 1993 het sy die Regstellende Gelykheidsbeweging begin, wat dit as die eerste vroue-organisasie wat nie partypolitieke aangehang hou nie of aan 'n universele liggaam behoort het nie. Dit was eerder 'n onontmoë organisaasie van vroue vir vroue.

Veral nadat die Namibiese regering die Getroude Persone Gelykheidsbeweging soone van hardheid en egskeiding, verduidelik sy. "Wanneer vroue met egskeiding gekonfronteer word, wil hulle met niemand daaroor praat nie, hulle voel skaam omdat dit gewoonlik die vrou is wat geblameer word vir 'n mislukte huwelik en mans nie bevraagteken word nie. Juus dan gebeur dit dat vroue baie eensaam word en gewoonlik nie weet waarheen om te gaan na raad nie, want selfs al kan 'n man nie bekostig om vyftig dollar vir onderhoud te betaal nie, kan hy bekostig om vyfduisend te betaal vir 'n prokureur. Die vrou aan die anderkant moes gewoonlik haar opleiding prysee om die kinders groot te maak en huissvrou te wees en die gewoonlik nie die soort werk wat haar toelaat om 'n prokureur aan te stel nie. Met die ondersteuning van Legal Aid en die Legal Assistance Centre kon ons werklik daarin slaag om geregtigheid vir vroue in egskeidings te verseker, sowel as vir kinders wat onderhoud nodig het."

Die bemagtiging van vroue was egter nie genoeg vir Ottile Abrahams nie en in 1979 gestig is as die eerste vroue-organisasie wat nie partypolitieke aangehang het nie of aan 'n universele liggaam behoort het nie. Dit was eerder 'n onontmoë organisaasie van vroue vir vroue.
Okuvelula oshiwana momahepeko
Eennerki eenghwaluther tadi popi


Rosa Namises, oshiloyo shomutumba wopashiwana nomunailonga wonghalonawa noku na eshiivo lefimbo lile moilonga oyo, oye a li umwe womovapopi va fimana poshoongalele osho. Okwa li a shiwa owina ope o yee akili tukule eshiivo laye lopaumwene nolopailongwakulupi, osho a ti. "Ovahakuli vopamufyuu- luluwakalo uamwe onghee ngoo natango tava lomakwatsonghonga onoono ove vehe shi okupopya," osho a ti.


Omhepo yelididimiko netambuleko otaa ka toto po diva omukangha wokutela otema/exuku loshoon- galele olo lidjju: "Omolweveluko lovakwashiwana vetu." Ovakainhu va dja momaongalo asehe, moetu- kulwa yokomikunda nomeedoolopa, ove hokolola omahokololo a faafana, omahokololo omakwatos-

Omolweveluko omahepeko

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Moungudu vanini, omo omwaal u muhap wova kainhu hava mono omukumo wokupopya omaumbada avo nomaudonai avo.


**Okuveluka taku pitile moukumwe wopamhepo**


Opa pita ashike eehani dinini, yo ongudu yovakainhu ovakwaLuther mOvenduka otava longifga exuku loshoongalele opo vo longekide oshoongalele sheteta lefiku modoolopa yavo. MuOktoba wodula ya dyo ka, ovakainhu ve dule pefele ova ongalele pendiki lihoungi yo German Evangelical Church, mokati kodoolopa nelalakano lokukundafana osbo ovakainhu tava dulu okuninga mekwatafano neengeleka, opo va mweneke omahepeko nomamonifo oixuna moyana yavo.

Ria Freeman, omnunailonga wonghalonawa nomudeuli koSister Namibia, oye a ninga etwalemo. Okwa tula omufindo opo kutya nande otu na eeveta di li peenehe, notadi dulu okumona kutya omahepeko oshinima shihe li paveta, eshi inashi eto omohepeko omshilongo shetu pexulilo.

“Eelopota domadipao, omakwatonghonga, omadengo nomamonifo oixuna oomeme nounona okwa ninga omungome wefiku keshe,” osbo a popya. Oveta yOmahepeko Omomaumbo itai dulu nande okutalwa ko ongekandulepo, ashike “oi li ehovelo.”


“Ovakainhu oshoongalele osha dimbukile mOsoondaxa nelongelokalunga olo la holola vo vapa ve pilinga po omikalo dopandjikilile dovalumenhu ovo alushe hava kala ve kwetele omayakulo komesho. Okukala omuumbwa mongonga ya mbwalangadja, to pwilikine nelongelokalunga nehafo, to tukula omungome nomaviniyufi pefimbo louvalile uyuupuki nokuyam-kekafo nxeululile lelongelokalunga osba eta po ongalo youkumwe wopamhepo. “Onda ufifisa nawa kooshongalele eshi,” osbo omukainhu umwe a popya pefimbo

kwa li ta longele okofa yaye e litule molwendo lile a shune keumbo. “Oshoongalele kusho vene osha li nale etameko lomukalo wokwelula. Ondi udite eenghono dipa mwaame moku ka taalela omoatyako da o te a hanga nga keumbo.”

Opa pita ashike eehani dinini, yo ongudu yovakainhu ovakwaLuther mOvenduka otava longifga exuku loshoongalele opo vo longekide oshoongalele sheteta lefiku modoolopa yavo. MuOktoba wodula ya dyo ka, ovakainhu ve dule pefele ova ongalele pendiki lihoungi yo German Evangelical Church, mokati kodoolopa nelalakano lokukundafana osbo ovakainhu tava dulu okuninga mekwatafano neengeleka, opo va mweneke omahepeko nomamonifo oixuna moyana yavo.

Ria Freeman, omnunailonga wonghalonawa nomudeuli koSister Namibia, oye a ninga etwalemo. Okwa tula omufindo opo kutya nande otu na eeveta di li peenehe, notadi dulu okumona kutya omahepeko oshinima shihe li paveta, eshi inashi eto omohepeko omshilongo shetu pexulilo.

“Eelopota domadipao, omakwatonghonga, omadengo nomamonifo oixuna oomeme nounona okwa ninga omungome wefiku keshe,” osbo a popya. Oveta yOmahepeko Omomaumbo itai dulu nande okutalwa ko ongekandulepo, ashike “oi li ehovelo.”


“Ovakainhu oshoongalele osha dimbukile mOsoondaxa nelongelokalunga olo la holola vo vape ve pilinga po omikalo dopandjikilile dovalumenhu ovo alushe hava kala ve kwetele omayakulo komesho. Okukala omuumbwa mongonga ya mbwalangadja, to pwilikine nelongelokalunga nehafo, to tukula omungome nomaviniyufi pefimbo louvalile uyuupuki nokuyam-kekafo nxeululile lelongelokalunga osba eta po ongalo youkumwe wopamhepo. “Onda ufifisa nawa kooshongalele eshi,” osbo omukainhu umwe a popya pefimbo
Gender, Citizenship and Governance - A Global Sourcebook

This book presents four case studies: from India, Namibia, Pakistan and South Africa, describing civil society initiatives that have intervened in governance and brought about changes in institutional practice, aiming to secure strategic gender interests. The case studies focus on the following issues: Decentralisation process and women: the case of Kerala, India; Engendering institutions in Pakistan; Customary law reform in the new South Africa; A case study of the 50/50 Campaign, in Namibia, focusing on women's grass-roots participation.

This publication aims to incorporate issues of gender equality into the global debates on good governance that arose in the 1990s from the growing realisation that conventional development efforts had failed to eliminate poverty and inequality. The good governance agenda envisaged building accountability of public administration institutions to the public they are supposed to serve. However, the good governance agenda did not automatically address the question of gender equality.

These national case studies are complemented by a global perspective on governance and gender in the form of the 'state of the art' introduction, an annotated bibliography of the international literature on this subject, and a review of relevant web sources.

Beijing + 10: the way forward
An introduction to gender issues in Namibia

The first paper in this publication reviews Namibia's record with international gender conventions and examines national and local gender policies and programmes of non-governmental organisations. It gives considerable attention to legal reforms implemented since the 1995 World Conference on Women held in Beijing. The second paper looks at how international and national policies are interpreted by women and men in various Namibian communities. It reveals a generally negative attitude by men towards law reform promoting gender equality, which remains a major challenge to women's empowerment to enjoy their full and equal human rights in our country.

Justine Hunter (ed), Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung & Namibia Institute for Democracy, Windhoek 2004

Women's Property and Inheritance Rights in Namibia

By Debbie LeBeau, Eunice Leping and Michael Conteh
With legal analysis by Dianne Hubbard and Evelyn Zimba of the Legal Assistance Centre

One of the challenges faced by women in contemporary Namibian society is women's unequal access vis-à-vis men to property, which limits women's ability to strive for gender equality within both their personal and social spheres of life. There has been little systematic, in-depth research and publication relating to women's property and inheritance rights in Namibia, although it is known that there are customary beliefs and practices that discriminate against women. It is against this background that the University of Namibia's Gender Training and Research Programme and the Department of Sociology, in...
collaboration with the Legal Assistance Centre, has undertaken research into the topic, in various regions of the country and involving the major ethnic groups, with the specific purpose of producing a report to be used by government, non-governmental organisations, donors and community based organisations in formulating their policies and information campaigns aimed at improving women’s access to property.

University of Namibia, Multi-Disciplinary Research and Consultancy Centre, Gender Training and Research Programme and Department of Sociology, Windhoek, 2004

Big Mouths, Open Minds

As the last African country to gain independence in 1990, Namibia opted for democratic rule. Twelve years on, how have the abstract concepts of ‘Independence’ and ‘Democracy’ taken root in Namibia’s urban landscape?

The documentary video “Big MOUTHS, OPEN MINDS” takes us on an erratic journey through the streets of Windhoek and Katutura, where we listen to the jubilant, confused and provocative voices of Namibians - old, young, rich, poor, ignorant, knowledgeable - speak their minds on the state of Namibian affairs today. In this documentary you will hear some big mouths make frank talk. Are you ready to listen with an open mind?

This documentary video forms part of a comprehensive civic education media project which includes the complimentary soundtrack music CD and the workbook “Hands on”.

Directed by Kelly Kowalski, Mamokobo Video and Research, Windhoek, 2004

Women in War

War and conflict have historically been viewed as a masculine terrain. Traditional discourses position women in the private sphere as victims and community maintainers, while men defend the nation (and their virtue) and pick up the pieces once peace is attained. Yet women’s visibility and presence in the movements and actions which arose in response to the events of 9/11, the invasion of Iraq and the conflicts raging in parts of Africa have defied notions which essentialise women as passive actors with little or no agency. The masculine nature of violent conflict, which appears to be more pervasive in our times, has made it essential that we revisit debates around the impact of war and instability on women. This issue of the South African feminist journal Agenda explores the links between patriarchy, militarism, security and efforts towards gender justice. Articles focusing on women’s experiences as guerrilla fighters, the current war on women in Zimbabwe, and the human rights abuses of women in Sierra Leone are followed by analyses of the globalisation of violence and strategies for peacekeeping based on gender justice.

Agenda No 59, Agenda Feminist Media Company, Durban 2004
have sat with women in crowded factories in Juarez, in crumbling shelters in the back streets of Cairo, in makeshift centres for teenage girls and women in Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Pine Ridge and Watts, in mansions in Hollywood, in burnt-out backyards in Kosovo and Kabul, in a moving van after midnight with sex trafficked girls in Paris. Sometimes these meetings went on for hours; in the case of the 17-year-old Bulgarian sex slave, we had 35 minutes before her pimp came looking for her. I have heard the staggering stories of violence - war rapes, gang rapes, date rapes, licensed rapes, family rapes. I have seen first-hand the scars of brutality - black eyes, cigarette-hole burns in arms and legs, a melted face, bruises, slices and broken bones. I have witnessed women living without what is fundamental - sky, sun, a roof, food, parents, a clitoris, freedom. I have been there when skulls washed up on riverbanks and naked mutilated female bodies were discovered in ditches. I have seen the worst. The worst lives in my body.

I have been there when skulls washed up on riverbanks and naked mutilated female bodies were discovered in ditches. I have seen the worst. The worst lives in my body.

But in each and every case I was escorted, transformed, and transported by a guide, a visionary, an activist, an outrageous fighter and dreamer. I have come to know these women (and sometimes men) as Vagina Warriors.

It was Zoya who first took me to the muddy Afghan camps in Pakistan; Rada who translated the stories of women refugees as we travelled through war-torn Bosnia; Megan who led pro-vagina cheers on a freezing cold Campus in Michigan; Igo who made jokes about land mines as we sped in her jeep through the post-war roads outside Pristina, Kosovo; Esther who took me to the graves marked with pink crosses in Juarez, Mexico; Agnes who walked me up the path with dancing and singing Masai girls dressed in red, celebrating the opening of the first V-Day Safe House for girls fleeing female genital mutilation (FGM).

At first I thought this was just a rare group of individuals, specific women who had been violated or witnessed so much suffering they had no choice but to act. But after five years of travelling, forty countries later, a pattern has emerged, an evolving species. Vagina Warriors are everywhere. In a time of escalating and explosive violence on the planet, these Warriors are fostering a new paradigm.

Vagina Warriors know that compassion is the deepest form of memory. They know that punishment does not make abusive people behave better. They know that it is more important to provide a space where the best can emerge rather than “teaching people a lesson.” I met an extraordinary activist in San Francisco, a former prostitute who had been abused as a child. Working with the
correctional system, she devised a therapeutic workshop where convicted pimps and johns could confront their loneliness, insecurity and sorrow.

Vagina Warriors are done being victims. They know no one is coming to rescue them. They would not want to be rescued. They have experienced their rage, depression, desire for revenge and they have transformed them through grieving and service. They have confronted the depth of their darkness. They live in their bodies. They are community makers. They bring everyone in.

Vagina Warriors have a keen ability to live with ambiguity. They can hold two existing, opposite thoughts at the same time. I first recognised this quality during the Bosnian war. I was interviewing a Muslim woman activist in a refugee camp whose husband had been decapitated by a Serb. I asked her if she hated Serbs. She looked at me as if I were crazy. “No, no, I do not hate Serbs,” she said, “If I were to hate Serbs, then the Serbs would have won.”

Vagina Warriors know that the process of healing from violence is long and happens in stages. They give what they need the most, and by giving this they heal and activate the wounded part inside. Many Vagina Warriors work primarily on a grassroots level. Because what is done to women is often done in isolation and remains unreported, Vagina Warriors work to make the invisible seen. Mary in Chicago fights for the rights of Women of Colour so that they are not disregarded or abused; Nighat risked stoning and public shaming in Pakistan by producing “The Vagina Monologues” in Islamabad so that the stories and passions of women would not go unheard; Esther insists that the hundreds of disappeared girls in Juarez are honoured and not forgotten.

For native people, a warrior is one whose basic responsibility is to protect and preserve life. The struggle to end violence on this planet is a battle. Emotional, intellectual, spiritual, physical. It requires every bit of our strength, our courage, our fierceness. It means speaking out when everyone says to be quiet. It means going the distance to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. It means honouring the truth even if it means losing family, country, and friends. It means developing the spiritual muscle to enter and surive the grief that violence brings and, in that dangerous space of stunned unknowing, inviting the deeper wisdom.

Like Vaginas, Warriors are central to human existence, but they still remain largely unvalued and unseen. This year V-Day celebrates Vagina Warriors around the world, and by doing so we acknowledge these women and men and their work. In every community there are humble activists working every day, beat by beat to undo suffering. They sit by hospital beds, pass new laws, chant taboo words, write boring proposals, beg for money, demonstrate and hold vigils in the streets. They are our mothers, our daughters, our sisters, our aunts, our grandmothers, and our best friends.

Every woman has a warrior inside waiting to be born. In order to guarantee a world without violence, in a time of danger and escalating madness, we urge them to come out.

CELEBRATE VAGINA WARRIORS. LET THEM BE HONOURED AND SEEN. LET MORE BE BORN.

(Eve Ensler is author of the play “The Vagina Monologues”, and Founder/Artistic Director of V-Day, an annual celebration of women’s sexual rights and power.)

Although Vagina Warriors are highly original, they possess some general defining characteristics:

- They are fierce, obsessed, can’t be stopped, driven.
- They are no longer beholden to social customs or inhibited by taboos.
- They are not afraid to be alone, not afraid to be ridiculed or attacked.
- They are often willing to face anything for the safety and freedom of others.
- They love to dance.
- They are directed by vision, not ruled by ideology.
- They are citizens of the world. They cherish humanity over nationhood.
- They have a wicked sense of humour. A Palestinian activist told jokes to an Israeli soldier who pointed a machine gun at her as she tried to pass the checkpoints. She literally disarmed him with her humour.
Afghanistan human rights activist wins Mann Award

An international symbol of the steadfast courage required to demand basic human rights for girls and women in Afghanistan, Dr. Sima Samar was named the recipient of the 2004 Jonathan Mann Award for Health and Human Rights. Dr. Samar founded and directs the Shuhada Organization, the oldest Afghan and the largest woman-led non-governmental organization operating in the region. Currently Chair of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, she is also internationally known as Afghanistan's first Minister of Women's Affairs.

Since 1989, Shuhada has implemented unprecedented programs in the areas of health, education, construction, relief and income generation to improve the lives of Afghan women and girls.

Often working undercover in defiance of the Taliban, the country's ruling military and political force from 1994 to 2001, Dr. Samar opened hospitals, health clinics, a housing scheme for poor widows, shelters and numerous schools that serve the women and children in Afghanistan.

"Dr. Samar's courage helped force open the doors to improved health care, education, and better lives for women throughout her country," said Dr. Nils Daulaire, president and CEO of the Global Health Council.

"Advancements enjoyed by the women of Afghanistan are largely the result of her courageous work over the last decade, in the face of overwhelming personal danger under Taliban oppression. She speaks for the freedom of all women." Today, more than 36,700 girls and boys study in Shuhada schools. The clinics and hospitals provide services to some 750 patients per day. With more than 1,000 staff, the organization employs more workers than almost any other local or international NGO in Afghanistan.

"I accept this award on behalf of the millions of women and girls in Afghanistan working to have ambition, freedom and economic independence. These are the women who need support from the international health community. These are women for whom we must fight for a better future," said Dr. Samar.

The Mann Award is bestowed annually in honor of the late Dr. Jonathan Mann to an active practitioner carrying out a commitment to health and human rights, often at great personal danger. Zackie Achmat of Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa and Dr. Frenk Guni, former executive director of the Zimbabwe Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS were awarded the prize last year for their tireless activism in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Global Health Council, 20 May 2004

Number of women in new SA parliament up by ten percent

The number of women in the new South African parliament increased by ten percent, from 120 to 131, in the April elections. With a national assembly of 400 seats, this has resulted in an overall proportion of 32.8 percent women in parliament compared to 30 percent in 1997.

South Africa will now move up in the global ranking of women in parliament from 15th to 11th place, coming after Austria and slightly ahead of Germany. Rwanda, with 49 percent women in parliament, is in the lead position in the global league.

South Africa will also now move to first position in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) ranking of women in parliament, with Mozambique and Seychelles close behind at 30 percent and 29.4 percent respectively.

The main reason for the increase in women's representation in the 2004 South African elections is the ANC's higher majority, with the number of ANC women up from 96 in 1999, to 104 in the new parliament. The ANC is the only political party with a quota for women. Although the proportion of women on its combined lists in 2004 remained constant at 35 percent (the same as in 1999) the fact that women are evenly distributed in the ANC lists and that the number of ANC seats increased in this election delivered eight of the eleven more women in the new parliament.

ANC women will account for 79 percent of women in parliament, virtually the same proportion as in the last parliament.

Although women made a much stronger showing on the lists of opposition parties this year, the total number of women opposition MPs is only set to increase from 24 in 1994 to 27 in the new parliament. This reflects the fact that women in opposition parties are often not strategically placed on lists, a critical factor for parties that only gained a few seats.

"For this reason we are disappointed that the ANC did not make a bolder move during these elections to raise the stakes from thirty to fifty percent, and that other political parties continue to shy away from taking special measures for ensuring greater representation by women.

Gender Links, 16 April 2004
African women tired of conflicts

African women say they are tired of bearing the brunt of war and endless conflicts on the continent and now seek to be midwives to lasting peace in the region. The continent's women made an urgent call to African leaders to start taking the plight of women more seriously.

They argued that their involvement in the peaceful conflict resolution would save Africa millions of dollars in refugee maintenance, medical treatment to women, children and soldiers injured during war. The authorities would also save money incurred by law enforcement agencies and judiciary services that respond to claims of injury as well as losses resulting in the unproductiveness of the population that spend time at the battlefield rather than at work.

Scores of women activists from across the continent made these remarks during a two-day meeting on their role in conflict management peace and security at the African Union headquarters in the Ethiopian capital recently. They are expected to adopt an action plan that will be submitted to African leaders set to meet there in early July to discuss, among others, the devastating conflicts in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi.

Source: BuaNews, 28 June 2004

Property ‘grabbing’ from widows continues

Many widows and their children in Namibia and elsewhere in Africa continue to be victims of the practice of ‘property grabbing’ by some of their husband’s relatives. This was acknowledged by traditional and community leaders during a three-day seminar on property, inheritance rights, gender and livelihood strategies in Namibia conducted in Ondangwa in June.

Participants at the seminar said there was ample evidence that HIV/AIDS, land and property grabbing, eviction from homesteads and gender inequality were closely linked and deprived women and children of access to shelter, food and other means of making a livelihood.

Facilitators revealed to seminar participants that an HIV and Aids impact study by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), conducted in the Ohangwena Region in 2002, found that widows and orphans had lost vast amounts of livestock, farm equipment and other movable property to the deceased husband’s family. It was learnt that there was a general lack of awareness of the Married Person’s Equality Act of 1996.

According to the FAO Representative in Namibia, Mokeetsi Mokati, “Deliberations clearly indicated the need to review customary practices vis-à-vis the supreme law of Namibia in relation to inheritance of property.”

Source: The Namibian, 16 June 2004

1000 Peace Women to receive Noble Peace Prizes in the year 2005

Observing that women do wonderful and important work in this world that is not recognised in their communities and societies, a group of 14 women throughout the world endorsed the idea initiated in Bern, Switzerland by one of the senior members of the Swiss parliament, Ruth-Gaby Vermot.

The objective of this initiative is to do research throughout the world and identify one thousand peace women who are at the moment invisible and their work also invisible. So far there are fifteen co-ordinators who have now met twice in Bern. Dr. Vera M. Chirwa represents the Southern Region of Africa.

Women to be identified are those that have done unique work in their communities and countries in both rural and urban areas. For instance there are some women who have been looking after HIV/AIDS patients for more than 5 years.

This requires the spirit of love and dedication. Some women are agriculturists who feed the whole nation or a community. There are women with different skills, expertise in various ways who are not known to the world; doctors, teachers, traditional healers, economists, socialists, veteran politicians (not modern politicians who are still in office) for example, those who fought colonialists, name them.

As leaders of women organisations, we can use chiefs, churches and governments to identify such women. They must have been doing their work for more than five years. Please let us know as soon as possible if you think this idea is a good one so that we can arrange for interviews for those who can qualify.

Write to the following email address: malawicarer@sdnp.org.mw

Source: BuaNews, 28 June 2004
Sex trafficking stretches across Southern Africa

Young South African women are being given false job offers to lure them into prostitution in Macau, a former Portuguese colony now under Chinese control. Women from rural China, many of them poorly educated, are being brought to South Africa for the same purpose. These were some of the issues raised by the meeting 'Next Steps to Path Breaking Strategies in the Global Fight Against Sex Trafficking in South Africa', held in Johannesburg in June. Addressing delegates, Linda Smith - founder of the War Against Trafficking Alliance - described the ways in which the trafficking of women has become a global phenomenon. "We found girls from South Africa working in brothels in the Netherlands. We also found girls from Thailand in South Africa. The traffickers don't care. What they care about is money." The International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol) estimates that trafficking earns as much as 19 billion dollars annually.

Women from other countries are flown to Johannesburg, and then taken to Swaziland, Lesotho or Mozambique. They then cross the border back into South Africa - all this in a bid to avoid airport immigration controls. Upon arrival, their passports are taken away and they are informed that they must pay off a debt of between 12,000 and 15,000 dollars. Threats of physical violence are frequently translated into action against those who disobey their captors. According to the Pretoria-based Institute for Security Studies, as many as 500 organised crime groups operate in South Africa. These include Nigerian gangs that operate mainly in Malawi, Zambia and South Africa.

Such gangs also traffic Mozambican women to South Africa, where they are sold as "wives" to people who work on the mines near Johannesburg. Effectively, the women become sex slaves for those who buy them, also providing unpaid domestic labour.

In addition, children find themselves caught up in the trade. Children's rights groups like the Cape Town-based Molo Songolo estimate that 28,000 children engage in prostitution in South Africa - and that 25 percent of prostitutes in Cape Town are children. About 5,000 young boys and girls are said to cater to foreign tourists in the city alone.

Source: Inter Press Service, 23 June 2004

Malawi: inching towards that 30 percent target

Slowly but surely, Malawi's women are making their presence felt in the country's traditionally male-dominated political arena. Twenty-seven women secured seats in the 193-member legislature during the recent general elections, held May 20. This may not appear a considerable figure, but it marks an important increase over the achievements of the 1999 poll - in which only 17 women were elected. In the 1994 vote, 10 women became legislators.

For Gertrude Mkandawire, a new opposition member of parliament (MP) for Mzimba Solola, a constituency in the far north of Malawi, winning the May 20 election was a triumph over customs that militate against women. The single mother of two belongs to the Ngoni tribe, which she describes as having little tolerance for women who aspire to leadership positions.

"It took a lot of courage because although I was accepted to contest, the men did not leave me to go it alone until I beat them at their own game in the actual poll," Mkandawire said.

But, as undeniable as the accomplishments of Mkandawire and other female MPs are, they haven't helped Malawi achieve the critical target of having 30 percent of parliamentary seats occupied by women, by 2005. This target was set by the 14-member Southern African Development Community (SADC) during a 1997 summit held in the Malawian commercial capital, Blantyre. "As individuals, it feels good to have won, but deep inside our hearts we feel women who contested could have done better," said Angela Zachepa, 22, and the youngest woman MP in the country's history. In the SADC region, only South Africa, Mauritius and Mozambique have reached the target.

Source: Inter Press Service, 26 June 2004

UNICEF launches Child-to-Child Survey to Get All Children in School

In honour of the Day of the African Child on 16 June, UNICEF launched a child-powered, global project to account for children not in school in order to accelerate the enrolment of all girls as well as all boys. For the project, called the Child-to-Child Survey, teams of school children interview out-of-school children to find out the reasons why they are not enrolled. An estimated 121 million children are out of school worldwide. The majority of these are girls.

As children report the results of their findings, they will call on their communities and governments to take action and place education at the top of their agendas. The effort is part of UNICEF's multi-partner strategy to reach the goal of Education For All.

"We want this project to start a chain reaction, whereby the children and their teachers will not only identify those out of school but will also commit to getting them enrolled and helping them succeed," UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy said. "The chain reaction will go on to involve communities, parents, government ministries and external partners in local and national drives to achieve education for all."

Source, UNICEF, 16 June 2004
ALIVE AND FREE — THE WOMAN IN ME

By Daphne M.

And had I not
Risen above the pain and anger of your poisoned tongue
I would have remained
The carpet of the dust
Of your wandering feet

And had I not
Appreciated the roundness
Of my African build
I would have remained
Your fat and sloppy maid

And had I not
Raised my head
With my dignity still intact
I would have remained
Your emotional slave of words
Which made me bleed inside

And had I not
Accepted the fullness of my lips,
The curve in my behind, the flatness of my nose
And the extra curl in my hair,
I would have remained
Enslaved to your picture perfect woman of lust

And had I not
Lived to be me
I would have given you the chance
To imprison me and rip me
Into pieces, with nothing left for myself

And had I not
Empowered myself
And strived in my womanhood
I would have remained
Dependent and chained for life
To you

And now, I am free
A free spirit
A free soul
A free mind
Alive and Free, the Woman In Me!
Goreangab Dam squatter area. This little boy’s mother recently had a stroke. He lives in a tent provided by the Red Cross and eats a meal provided by the Catholic church. The Windhoek Municipality recently cut off water supply to this area.  *Photo by Tanja Bause*