

'Not someone, my sister, us!'

It was a cold, windy winter morning 6.00 am at the Katutura bus stop. The women were standing together in a group, trying to keep each other warm, their coats and jerseys leaning into one another, sheltering from the cruel wind. Their breath, as they told their stories, came out as white mist which was whipped away by the wind. But the sound of their talk was warm and loud.

Maria and Dandagos were listening to Lydia telling them how she could not belong to the Medical Aid Scheme at work since she was a married woman - even though her husband was unemployed. Eva joined the conversation to add that her application for a housing loan was turned down. She was upset because she felt that she and her children had lived for long enough at her Uncle's house.

Behind these women, Selma and Martha heard Loide's story that when she went to open a bank account, she had not realised that to do so she needed her husband's signature.

Anna was complaining about the dangerous area in which she lived. She said

that she and her daughters could not go outside after dark so she had to give up evening classes. Lucia and Elizabeth were talking together about how difficult it was to get maintenance payments from the fathers of their children. Even after they had been to the courts, the fathers were still very unwilling to pay.

There was a sudden silence as the women watched their bus coming up the road. Into the silence a loud voice said: "Women, someone must do something about all these problems of ours, because it seems to me that they are all caused by one thing, and that is that we are women and that the people who cause these problems for us are men."

"Not 'someone,' my sister!" said Dandagos. "Us!" We must be the "someone."

In considering their problems, the women in this story have all connected their personal dilemmas with the public status of women.

In our next issue, we will follow these women as they organise to try to change the public practises that created their individual problems.

