



No one should be oppressed



**writing
about our lives
and struggles**



The reflections and writings in this book come out of a process supported by Oxfam in South Africa and Oxfam partners: Justice and Women, Women on Farms Project and Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce as part of their ongoing support to women worker members of the Mthonjaneni Home Based Care Network, Seasonal Farm Worker Structures and Sisonke sex workers movement.

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Print edition published by Oxfam Australia May 2014

Online edition published by Oxfam Australia September 2015

www.oxfam.org.au

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ISBN: 978-0-620-60837-4

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FOREWORD

This book captures a central part of the work undertaken as part of the Organising Marginalised and Vulnerable Women Workers cluster of the Oxfam Women’s Rights Advancement Programme (OWRAP). The journey to this point took over 4 years and involved sense-making for all involved: Oxfam, our partner organisations and the women workers themselves.

Launched in September 2009, OWRAP’s goal is:
to contribute to the capacity of organisations to bring about social, institutional and systemic transformation towards a society that is free from GVB and that promotes women’s right to participation in decision-making and leadership.

The objectives supporting this goal are: to strengthen partner organisations ability to engage in joint advocacy and networking; and to promote joint learning and sharing between partners. These objectives were carried out through two cluster projects: the Organising Marginalised and Vulnerable Women Workers cluster and the Gender Based Violence Cluster.

The Organising Marginalised and Vulnerable Women’s Cluster focuses on developing a deeper understanding of the practical and strategic needs and challenges of organising women workers in the sex trade, farming and home-based care sectors. Oxfam’s partners in this cluster included Justice and Women (JAW), Sex Worker Education and Awareness Taskforce (SWEAT), and Women on Farms Project (WFP). Each of these partners supports women worker organisations: JAW supports Mthonjaneni Home Based Care Network, SWEAT supports Sisonke sex workers movement, and WFP supports Women Seasonal Farm Workers’ Structures.

Phase One of this cluster involved desktop research and the presentation of a draft paper by Vanessa Ludwig in 2011. Phase Two built on this research and was designed and facilitated by Shamim Meer to strengthen organizing, build the 'power within' and promote joint learning among women workers. Between March 2012 and February 2014 three to five women workers from the three organisations came together in a series of gatherings where they shared their life stories and organisational experiences.

This book captures the emotional and inspirational journey of sharing and learning at these gatherings. The reflections and writings by these home based care workers, farm workers and sex workers take us into their very hearts. We feel their pain and joy as they speak of their personal challenges, their understandings of the powers over them, and their strategies to confront power. We hope this book will in some small way spread the inspiration felt in these gatherings so that other women may be touched by these words and build solidarity across divides, to confront patriarchy, dominance and oppression in all its various manifestations.

**The Oxfam in South Africa Team
May 2014**

The Writers



Sisonke Members: Duduzile Dlamini, Angelina De Bruin, Ayanda Denge and Pamela Chakuvinga

Seasonal Farm Worker Structure Members:

Charmaine Fortuin, Bettie Fortuin, Andiswa Ndevana and Jenetta Louw





Mthonjaneni Home Based Care Members:

Zandile Mnguni

Nonhlanhla Shandu, Dudu Majola

Ntombi Sibiya , Thandi Zulu

Mabongi Khanyile, Phumzile Mbatha, Sphiwe Ndlovu



INTRODUCTION

Home based care workers, farm workers and sex workers came together from three organisations to share their life experiences and their strategies to build their power to overcome the difficulties they face.

They came from Mthonjaneni Home Based Care Network (MHBCN) supported by Justice and Women (JAW), Seasonal Farm Worker Structures supported by Women on Farms Project (WFP) and Sisonke supported by Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT).

They met four times in three day gatherings between February 2012 and February 2014 as part of the Oxfam Women's Rights Advancement Programme (OWRAP). Each time they met they learnt from each other, supported each other, and inspired each other. They spent long hours in discussion and equally long hours writing about their experiences in order to enable sharing with members of their organisations and a broader public.

In this book the women workers who were part of this process, share their writings and their discussions in the hope that this will empower other women to learn from their strategies of challenging those in power who oppress them. They say:

We want readers to know that no one should be oppressed. We want women to know they are not alone. We want to encourage women to come out of their situation. We want to make women aware of the strategies

they can use. We want to document what we experience so that our children will know about our lives and our struggles.

Oxfam hoped that the coming together of these members would help them build solidarity with each other across their organisations. The women themselves hoped that their coming together would enable them to strengthen their organising work in their separate organisations and to build solidarity across their organisations.

Sharing their life stories highlighted that they had a lot in common in their struggles to earn a living, to feed and care for families.

We all come from different backgrounds yet we have had to face similar obstacles around the violation of our rights. We can learn from each other to get a way forward.

Sharing their challenges as workers highlighted similarities in their struggles.

At root of the challenges we face is the position we have in society as poor black women. Our work is not seen as proper and legitimate work. In order to get work and do our work we face corruption and we deal with middle men and women daily – people in power who take bribes for health department and public works jobs, labour brokers and the police. We are dealing with a system where those who stand in the way of our rights are benefitting. The system allows them to benefit at our expense. We need to ask at each point who is benefitting? We need to ask how do we stop this? We need to value our work, to give voice to our demands, to find ways of eventually unseating power.

Through sharing their strategies to deal with the powers that oppress them, sex workers, farm workers and home based

care workers learnt from each other. They took back new ideas to their organisations, and they tried out these new ideas. Home based care workers learnt from sex workers and farm workers that it is important to build relationships with government departments, to write to members of parliament and government ministers in order to press their demands. They learnt that if you need to shame government you need to have the right information. Visiting the Sisonke Creative Space inspired seasonal farm workers and home based care workers with new ideas for organizing the members of their organisations. Hearing first hand accounts of the farm workers' strike highlighted what could be achieved through people coming together with one voice, and brought a different understanding of the strike from that presented in the media – where farm workers were shown as violent looters on a senseless rampage.

The women workers touched each other at a very deeply personal level. They celebrated and praised each other's achievements in words, song and dance. They inspired each other and helped to build their power within.

I got love and support from the group. I hope you take my love with you. I will miss you.

I've been through other processes but this one feels like something new has happened to me. I appreciate the trust with which all of us shared our stories.

With love and care and laughing I learnt from you all. Thanks for all the love in this room.

I am proud of myself – I am going back to be a strong woman.

This book includes discussions that took place during the OWRAP process, as well as the writings of the women activists.

They write on their lives as workers, daughters, partners and mothers; on their experiences in challenging the powers that oppress them so that they can create a better life; and on what they learnt from each other during the process.

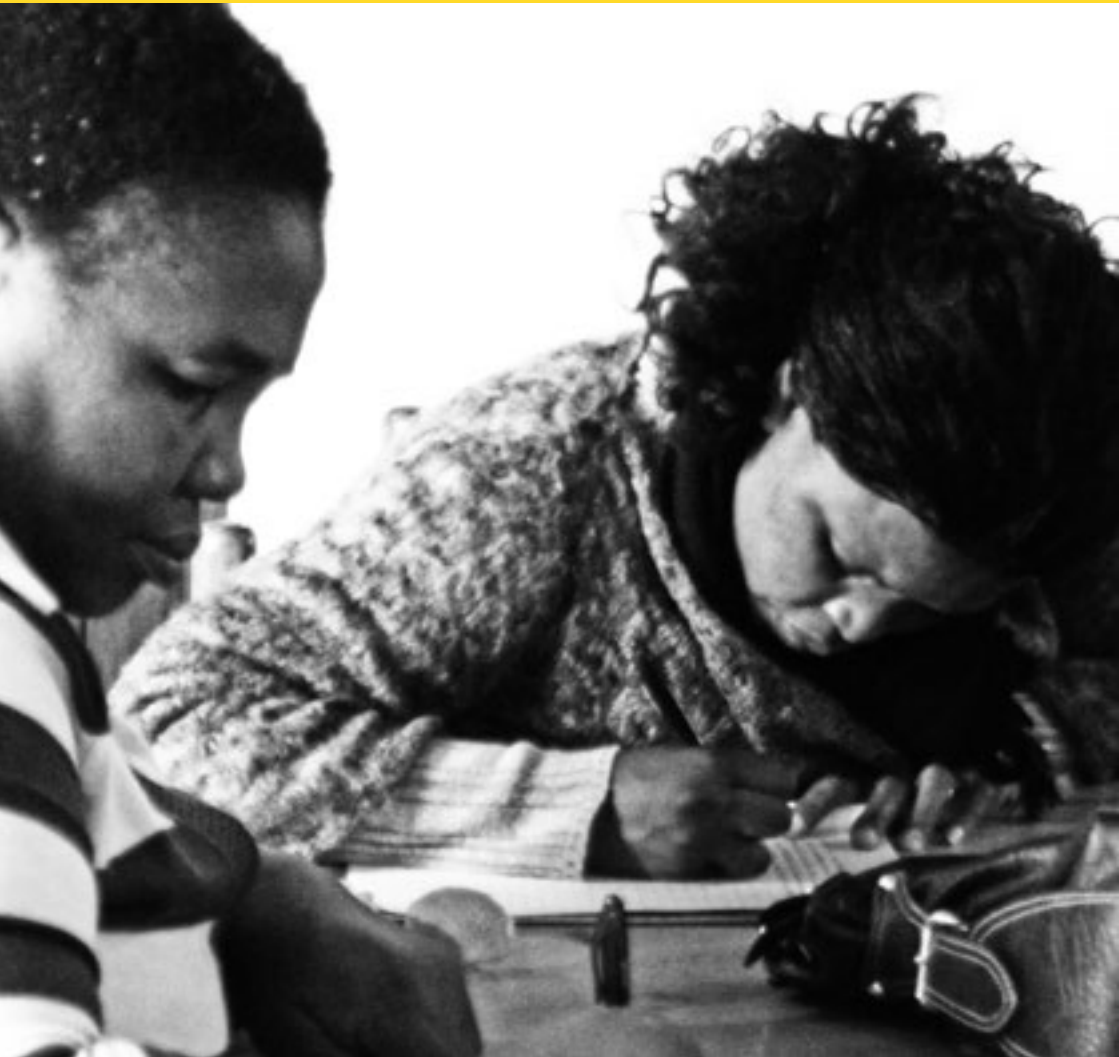
The writers hope that this book will inspire readers to build their own power and take action to overcome the difficulties they experience.

Shamim Meer May 2014

* *



Writing about our lives



Writing About Our Lives

Duduzile Dlamini
Makeleni
Muchaneta
Angelina De Bruin
Charmaine Fortuin
Bettie Fortuin
Andiswa Ndevana
Nonhlanhla Shandu
Phumzile Mbatha
Dudu Majola

Sharing our life stories
helped us to see that
even though we are doing
different work
we have had to face
similar obstacles –
around the violation of our rights
less pay, domestic abuse, corruption.



Duduzile Dlamini

We come from different families, cultures, religions, backgrounds. Sometimes this makes us confused and we can end up grudging each other.

My background was not so poor. Love was all over the house and that love spread to grandchildren, even though things changed over the years after the head of the family passed away. But the love still spread like grass. Although the rock started to break into pieces and the family was split in between – me, my mother, my small sister and brothers took our own way. But the love was still there from our hearts.

There were times we went to sleep without food. When there was no money for clothes or to go to school. But my mother as a Christian always believed that God is there for us, that He was there when we were born, and He will be there even when we have nothing. He loves us and one day He will raise us up to the mountain. She also encouraged us that we need to learn to be patient and not to compare with or copy someone else, because God gave us talent, and chances and spaces where we can use our talent. We have to believe.

In my family no one was educated or having degrees. Between December 1988 and 2008 we were really suffering and poor. We were hungry and sleeping without food. Until I joined the sex industry with my small sister. That was the moment of making choices. We chose the option that was best for us. There was a moment of anger and upset, to scream like a wolf in the big dark bush. But we had no other option.

Even though we chose to be sex workers we did not forget that we are Christians in our faith. We believed God will protect us in the decision we took. We made the promise to God that we will never leave you. Give us your strength and power.

We lived in that sex work where we thought we will die, being killed by clients. But amazingly we met SWEAT. God made a plan. I believe God creates human beings with a purpose and we will always be loved by God no matter what. SWEAT educates us, trains us as peer educators. We volunteer, attending workshops and trainings. We get information, we are empowered and we become human rights defenders.

I learnt that in life you need to have patience and love. I always hear my mother's voice in my ears, like birds singing early in the morning, or like a big waterfall. Her voice is an echo that the key of life is:

- * Do not lose your trust (keep it safely).
- * Love every human being as you love yourself.
- * Be honest to yourself and others.
- * Do not do to other people what you don't like done to you.
- * Be yourself and accept yourself the way God created you and do not copy someone else.
- * Always be proud of yourself even if you do not have anything, and believe in yourself.
- * Be patient, respect yourself and other people will respect you.
- * You have talent.

All these words ring like bells in my ears.

Makeleni

No one ever wants to be oppressed. I left home because things were not going well for me. I decided to do sex work which was the only thing I could do for myself. I joined the industry with other sex workers.

I started working as a sex worker at Observatory. Things were not good at all. Because you have to run from the police and you have to be aware of thugs who rob you at night, of clients who sometimes do not want to use condoms, being sworn at by community members, being beaten by clients. Sometimes you are scared that clients can come pick you and don't pay you. And when you demand your money you will be killed.

And the police will also arrest you if they find you standing on the road. You will spend maybe five months in prison if you don't have money to bail yourself.

In 1999 I was diagnosed HIV positive. I got sick because I was not aware about HIV and treatments. When I found out I was HIV positive I went back home. I never wanted my parents to know about it, especially my mother because she never liked me as her child. So I decided to tell my aunt. My mother continued with hate which made me more sick. I could not sleep at night thinking about everything that can make me better. My mother chased me away telling me she does not have a home, a clinic for HIV. I was very weak and had to pack my bags and leave my home. I went to my friends where I was treated well and equal.

In 2001 I was recruited by MaHadebe and I joined Sisonke in 2003. Sex workers who were also members of Sisonke updated me about the movement. They told me Sisonke is a movement of sex workers, formed by sex workers themselves.

I started to feel better and knew that I have a home with sisters and brothers.

I am back on my feet, taking my medication. Now I am looking forward to encourage those who experience the same thing. I want them to be strong. Now I am happy because I know that there are people to learn from when things are not good for me. I trust Sisonke and I am happy with Sisonke.

So as a sex worker it is important to be a member of Sisonke or to be close to SWEAT. So that you can have assistance from paralegals or the Women's Legal Centre who help us a lot when being harassed by the law.

Muchaneta

It was 3 May 2008. Things were difficult in Zimbabwe. People who had money were in the same boat as people who had no money because there was no food in the shops. That morning I looked at my kids sleeping and I thought how am I going to look after them? Because things were difficult for me as a single mother. I asked myself is it possible for me to take my children into my womb because I am not able to satisfy their needs.

It was on a Thursday that I decided to leave Zimbabwe for the green pastures in South Africa. It was not easy for me to leave my children with my mother. They were so little, they needed a mother's love, but I had no choice. I had to do what I had decided.

I never told my children I am coming to South Africa. It was hard for me even to say goodbye. My tears flowed like water coming out of a tap. I didn't want them to see that it was the last time for me to separate from them.

South Africa is not far from Zimbabwe but my journey took me almost seven days. I did not have a visa in my passport so I was a border jumper. I came through Botswana with three other women. We planned this journey and all of us were single mothers.

We got into the train going to Bulawayo. No one was talking to each other. We were only thinking that we had left our children without anything, how are they going to survive? Without visas are we going to succeed in our journey? A lot of things came in and out of our minds like water boiling on a stove.

One woman had a fake temporary travel document. At the Zimbabwe border they told her she had to go back home. We

did not want to lose her and it was not easy for her to go back home, so we told her to pay the official so that she can pass. Our passports were stamped and all of us were happy that our journey was going to be successful. But it took time for the officials to stamp our passports and the bus left us. We told ourselves that we must be strong and that we must support each other, because our situation was the same.

We walked from the Zimbabwe border to the Botswana border. It is a distance and we were running to catch the bus on the other side so that we will get our bags which were left in the bus. We were like school children running a marathon, breathing very fast.

We took taxis to Francistown. The road was full of road blocks with police asking for passports. But we were praying in our hearts to reach South Africa. We took the train to Gaborone that night. I did not sleep, thinking of my little children. We arrived early morning on a Friday. It was raining. We did not have rain coats or umbrellas and we got wet, walking, looking for the way to cross to South Africa. All the clothes in our bags were wet but we did not lose hope for the journey. We met a Samaritan guy who took us to a man who crosses people from Botswana to South Africa. He told us we must sleep over and rest before we cross to South Africa. He made us feel free at his home but my mind was back home thinking of my children. It was only my body that was present at that moment.

Sunday we woke at three in the morning and prayed so that our journey will be safe. It was a very long walk we did that morning. Others were falling down. They could not see properly in the dark. Some threw their bags and clothes away. I told myself I am not going to throw my bag. Whatever the matter I am going to face my journey.

We arrived in South Africa on a Monday morning. We arrived

at the time of xenophobia when South Africans were beating foreigners and calling us 'Kwere kweres', telling us, 'Go back to your countries, you come here to take our jobs and our wives'. They carried knobkerries, sjamboks, and when you respond to them in English they beat you like a dog who has stolen meat in the house.

With all this going on it was difficult for me to go out and look for a job. One day I was out looking for a job when I met a friend from home at Park Station. I told her I am looking for a job and she told me they need people where she is working. I went with her and she introduced me to sex work. That is when I started being a sex worker. My children never suffered or starved with hunger. I was sending food home.

I am proud of being a sex worker. I am not ashamed of the work I am doing. It makes me who I am today. I am inspired by my fellow sex workers.

Angelina De Bruin

I started doing sex work when I was in my late twenties. I was working to support myself during the apartheid era. I was married at the time but in an abusive marriage. Then I decided enough of this! I thought I could meet other men that know how to treat a woman.

I came on the road and it was as if the police were only waiting for us to arrive before they can pick us all up. It was like they were having fun harassing us. It went on like this for many years. Then came the time for Nelson Mandela to be inaugurated as the new Democratic President. Sex work then became more bearable. Until the cops started to abuse sex workers again.

The abuse and police brutality went on for much too long. That is where we decided this has to stop. They still targeted us. They limited us to Claremont Gardens where we had to meet our clients.

Field workers from Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) came and distributed condoms to us and spoke to us about safer sex. They gave us their address and invited us to come and drop in. SWEAT staff introduced us to the Women's Legal Centre and the ICD (Independent Complaints Directorate to report police abuse). The Women's Legal Centre helped us to sign affidavits about the police abuse.

As soon as we signed the affidavits someone told one perpetrator cop about it. So the cops came and picked us all up in the Company Gardens and arrested us for soliciting. The cop was still busy writing out the fines when his colleagues came and told him to stop and look out of the window. He looked out of the window and he saw the van from e TV parked outside. We

had asked one of our colleagues who had managed to escape arrest to call SWEAT and SWEAT media liaison had called the television station. The police did not want bad publicity. So the station commander came down and asked if we wanted to make a statement because she does not know what is going on. So me and Roslyn went to lay a charge against those policemen. While we were still busy, the SWEAT coordinator and field worker came to support us and they demanded that the police give us a copy of the statement we had made.

Our complaint went to the High Court. And the verdict after the court case was that those cops were ordered not to come within 100 metres of us sex workers. That was a turning point for me. One cop was suspended, one was transferred. I thought SWEAT is the place of safety, these are people you can trust, people you can feel safe with. I thought one day I am also going to be part of them because I admire them.

I started to volunteer for SWEAT. Then I left to do my courses and then I joined the Creative Spaces. At the Creative Space they told us there are vacancies and we should give in our CVs, which I did. I got a call from SWEAT to come for an interview. I was so excited. I was so early because I did not want to miss the chance. And when the call came that I have been accepted as a SWEAT Peer Educator and Para Legal it was the happiest day of my life. To be part of SWEAT and Sisonke is priceless!

Charmaine Fortuin

I was born in the 1970s in Grassy Park but I was brought up in Clark Estate. I had a happy childhood, growing up in a happy home until I was 11 years old. My parents separated and my world turned upside down. I felt that it was my fault, being the eldest of four children.

At the age of 11 and a half I went to high school. I met some friends and they were older than me. I started to use alcohol and drugs.

My mother got involved with another man and he was very strict. At 17 years old I started a relationship with a boy but I could not bring him home. My stepfather used to beat us when he felt we did something wrong. We were beaten with a sjambok while we were asleep. I could never say how I felt about what was happening in my life. I was filled with hatred and pain.

At 19 years old I decided to start having sex so that I could get pregnant, just to get out of the unhappy situation I was living in. And so I got pregnant and gave birth in the next year to a baby boy. This is when the physical abuse started. My boyfriend started to beat me and decide what I should wear. I felt that I had no one and nowhere to go. So I stayed in spite of the beatings. This went on for more than three years.

Then I met Rose who told me that abusing a woman was wrong and that I could do something about it. I spoke to him and slowly but surely the abuse stopped.

I had three children. One died at the age of 17. This was a time I felt my life ended. But how could it because I had to go on living for my other children? Then my mother died the next year and my whole world came tumbling down. I had to pick myself

up. It was hard but because of everything that had happened in my life it made me strong. Today I am strong because of the support of Women on Farms Project and friends who really cared. I am here and I am here to stay. I was not built to break. I know my own strength.

I gain strength
The sun is shining
But it's winter in my heart
The one that I love is gone
And I feel left alone
I felt hurt, filled with hatred
Blinded by tears
But the creator has given me
17 years to spend with you

I dreamed of you, yet it wasn't you
I was shown what would happen
But did not understand
After a while it all became clear
You became ill, and I didn't notice
When it became worse it was too late
And then you left me
My thought, what have I done
To deserve this?

Seasons have changed
Years have passed
The hurt and the hatred is gone
But the miss is still there with memory
And now I know
That this had to happen
To make me strong for the years to come
Once again there is sunshine
In my heart
And strength in my will to carry on

Bettie Fortuin

My name is Betty Fortuin (maiden name Bargers), born on 28 November 1963 at Marrysburg. I was the fifth of sixteen children. When I was two years old, my parents moved to De Doorns as seasonal workers. Here they settled on the farm Klipfontein in the Hex River Valley.

On a winter's day, when I was three years old, we children stood at the fire screen next to our house. In a strange way, my dress caught fire, and I sustained deep burn wounds. I had to remain in hospital for plus minus seven years. The doctors told me that I would never be able to bear children due to the burns.

When I came home from hospital my father was in prison and my mom had to take care of the home. Because of the scars my mother did not want me to attend school. While my brothers and sisters went to school I took care of my little sisters who were still at home. I took care of the household and because of my age they started calling me 'mammetjie'.

I really wanted to be at school. One day I sneaked out and went to school. That particular day, the principal's wife saw me and asked what I was doing at school. I explained why I was not in school, and she took me with her. I stayed with them and I started going to school until Standard 3.

Thereafter I ran away and started working in the vineyards. That Christmas, the farmer's sister came from Cape Town. She asked my mother whether I could work for her as a maid. My mother agreed and I left to live with her in Simons Town. I was very young and lonely. My wages were given to my mother. I could never spend a cent from what I earned. But because I was a maid, I was a little bit better off than the vineyard girls and I received a lot of things from my employers.

During one of my stays at home I started a relationship with a young man. Once back in Simons Town, it became known that I was pregnant and I had to return home. This was a very difficult time for me. My mother was very strict and she said I must leave home. We could not stay at home when we fell pregnant outside of marriage. I moved in with my brother who treated me very badly. I also broke up with my child's father, because he had many other girlfriends.

When my little girl, Ingrid, was one year old she fell ill. The doctors were not so advanced then. They said her organs were not properly developed and she had to stay in hospital. I went through hell during the last three months of 1984. I was the only one looking after my sick child. The evening before she died, when I left the hospital, I knew I was not going to see her again. They phoned me the next morning at 5am to say that she had passed away. I was like one who lost my mind. I could not even attend the funeral.

Long afterwards I started working in Bellville. I had to housesit for a family who moved to Namibia. I later joined them in Namibia and that is where I met my husband. I told him my life story, and asked that he should never let me experience what my father caused my mother to experience. My father was a womaniser, he had many other 'wives'. When he returned home, my mother just had to play the dutiful wife. She was very humble and submissive. She would wake up in the middle of the night to serve him. He used to physically abuse her and we could not say or do anything about it. At that time the police said if a man assaulted a woman it was household problems. Older people had to live with the abuse.

I am very grateful to all the organisations that came along our path and made us aware of our rights and how to enforce them. Now I can help others.

I know my dream has not been fulfilled yet. I am doing a course to help me assist abused children, with the help of the Heavenly Father and Women on Farms Project.

My foster children

My husband and I and two daughters were a very happy family. We were not rich, but had enough to live on. I was a farm worker in the Ceres district. My husband was a foreman. I worked in the team, the best team on the farm. The farm school was on the farm. There was also after school care, it was very comfortable for workers.

My life changed in an instant when my brother and his wife died one after the other in the same year and left their minor children behind. I was very sad. While my heart was still in pieces, I had to deal with the fact that the children had no one to care for them. The children chose me out of six sisters to look after them.

I discussed it with my husband and we decided to take the kids. I went to the owner of the farm to see if the two children can move in with us. I had a three bedroom house, just big enough for the six of us. The farmer's reply changed my whole lifestyle. He said that his farm is not a crèche and that the children cannot move in with me. I was extremely shocked and sad.

I had no choice but to move to a squatter camp (informal settlement), to give the children a fair chance in life. I moved from the farm to Sandhills in De Doorns. There was no electricity, toilets or water taps. I, as well as my husband, had to start over again as seasonal workers. It was very difficult. My children and I found it hard to adapt. I have since then fought to have mobile toilets installed. There is still no electricity in Sandhills.

I thank the good Father today that my children have matric behind their names. Even though our circumstance changed I did not remain defeated.

Women, even though you go through difficult circumstances, stand up, open your mouths and take a pen and write from your heart what happened. Even if you do not have the same opportunities as I have had, try to put your feelings to paper.

My naam is Bettie Fortuin (Bargers Nooiens Van), gebore op die 28ste November 1963 te Marrysburg. Ek is die vyfde van sestien kinders. Op tweejarige ouderdom het my ouers verhuis na De Doorns as seisoen werkers. Hier het my ouers hulle gevestig op die plaas Klipfontein in Hexrivier.

Op 'n wintersdag, toe ek drie jaar oud was, het ons kinders by 'n vuurskerm langs ons huis gestaan. Op 'n onverklaarbare wyse het my rokkie vlam gevat en ek het diep brandwonde opgedoen en het plus minus sewe jaar in die hospitaal gelê. Die dokters het my meegedeel dat ek nooit eendag sal kan kinders baar nie, as gevolg van die brandwonde.

Toe ek by die huis kom was my vader in die gevangenis en my ma moes toe alleen vir die huis sorg. Omdat ek letsels van die brand gehad het, wou my ma nie dat ek skool toe gaan nie, terwyl my broers en susters skool loop. Ek moes na my klein sisters kyk wat nog nie skool gegaan het nie. Ek moes ook na die huishouding omsien, en omdat ek so jonk was het hulle my "mammatjie" begin noem. Eendag het ek skelmpies skool toe gegaan omdat ek baie graag wou skool gaan. Daardie spesefieke dag het die skoolhoof se vrou my gesien en gevra wat ek by die skool doen. Ek het aan haar verduidelik waarom ek nie in die skool was nie, en sy het my toe by hulle ingeneem. Ek het by hulle gebly. Ek het toe skool begin gaan tot standerd

drie. Daarna het ek weggehardloop en in die wingerde begin werk.

Die einde van die jaar daardie Kersfees het die boer se suster van die Kaap plaas toe gekom. Sy het my ma gevra of ek vir haar as 'n huishulp kan kom werk. My ma het ingestem en ek het saam met haar gegaan om in Simons Town te bly. Ek was baie jonk en eensaam. My salaris was direk na my ma toe gestuur. Ek kon nie die geld waarvoor ek gewerk het gebruik nie. Omdat ek 'n huishulp was, was ek 'n klein bietjie beter af as die wingerd meisies, omdat ek baie by my werkgewers gekry het.

Tydens een van my vakansie tye by die huis, het ek 'n verhouding met 'n jong man begin. Toe ek terug kom in Simons Town, vind ek uit dat ek swanger was. Ek moes na die plaas terugkeer. Dit was 'n baie moeilike tyd vir my. My ma was baie streng en sy het my beveel om die huis te verlaat. Ons kon nie by die huis bly as ons buite die huwelik swanger geword het nie. Ek het by my broer ingetrek wat my nie baie goed behandel het nie. Ek het ook die verhouding met my kind se pa verbreek omdat hy baie ander verhoudings gehad het.

Toe my baba dogterjie, Ingrid, een jaar oud was, het sy siek geraak. Die dokters was nie so gevorderd op daardie stadium nie. Hulle het gesê haar organe is nie ten volle ontwikkel nie, en sy moes in die hospitaal bly. Ek het deur hel gegaan tydens die laaste drie maande van 1983. Ek was die enigste een wat na my siek kind gekyk het. Die aand voor sy sterf, toe ek die hospitaal verlaat, het ek geweet ek gaan haar nie weer sien nie. Hulle het my die volgende oggend om 5 uur gebel om te sê sy het gesterf. Ek was soos een wat my verstand verloor het. Ek kon nie eens die begrafnis bywoon nie.

Agterna het ek in Bellville begin werk. Ek moes 'n huis oppas van 'n familie wat Namibie toe getrek het. Ek het later by hulle in Namibia aangesluit en dit is waar ek my man ontmoet het. Ek

het hom my lewensverhaal vertel, en gevra dat hy my nie moet laat deurmaak wat my pa my ma laat deurmaak het nie. My pa was 'n "womaniser", hy het baie "vroue" gehad. Wanneer hy huis toe gekom het, moes my ma net die rol van die onderdanige vrou ingeneem het. Sy was baie nederig en onderdanig. Sy sou in die middel van die nag opstaan om hom te bedien. Hy het haar aangerand en sy het nooit daarvoor gepraat of enigiets omtrent dit gedoen nie. Daardie tyd het die polisie gesê, as 'n man sy vrou aanrand is dit huishoudelike problem. Ons ouer mense moes met die mishandeling saamleef.

Ek is baie dank verskuldig aan al die organisasies wat ons kom bewus maak het van ons regte en hoe ons dit moet uitoefen. Nou kan ek ook ander help. Ek weet my droom het nog nie waarheid geword nie. Ek doen nou 'n kursus wat my leer om mishandelde kinders te help. Met die hulp van die hemelse Vader en Women on Farms wat ons gehelp het.

My Pleegkinders

Ek en my man en twee dogters was 'n baie gelukkige familie. Ons was nie ryk nie, maar het genoeg gehad om van te lewe. Ek was 'n plaaswerker in die Ceres distrik. My man was 'n voorman ek het in die span gewerk, die beste span op die plaas. Die plaasskooltjie was op die plaas. Daar was ook 'n naskoolsorg; baie gemaklik vir die plaaswerkers.

In 1993 het my lewe met handomkeer verander. My broer en sy vrou sterf in dieselfde jaar en hulle het hulle minderjarige kinders agtergelaat. Ek was baie hartseer omdat my broer en sy vrou kort na mekaar dood is. Terwyl my hart nog stukkend was kom daar nog iets op, die kinders het niemand gehad om na hulle om te sien. Ek was die enigste suster wat die kinders gekies het tussen die ses susters.

Ek het dit met my man bespreek en ons het besluit ons vat die

kinders. Ek gaan toe na die eenaar van die plaas om te hoor of ek die twee kinders by my kan in neem, want ek het in 'n drie slaapkamer huis gewoon groot genoeg vir ons ses. Die boer se antwoord het my hele leefstyl laat verander. Hy se toe dat sy plaas nie 'n cresse is nie en dat ek nie die kinders by my kan neem nie. Ek was baie geskok en hartseer ek het nie 'n ander keuse gehad as om na 'n plakkers kamp te gaan en om die kinders 'n regverdige kans in die lewe te gee nie. Ek is weg van die plaas en het in Sandhills (De Doorns) in die plakkers kamp gaan bly. Moes toe oor begin as seisoenwerkers, ek en my man.

Dank die goeie Vader vandag het al my kinders matriek agter hulle name al het die omstandighede verander, het ek nie bly le nie. Vroue al is jou omstandighede moeilik staan op, maak oop jou mond of vat 'n pen en skryf uit jou hart wat met jou gebeur. Al het jy nie geleentheid gekry soos ek nie probeer om jou gevoelens op papier neersit.

Andiswa Ndevana

Almost every day when I wake up in the morning preparing to go to work I hear the beautiful sounds of birds singing Tswi Tswi Kru Kru Kru!!! The breeze outside blows like never before. But my body feels tired to go to work. I force myself to get ready till the truck comes to fetch us at the bus stop.

We travel for 30 minutes to the farm. It is so cold on the way but we are in that pressure. There is no other way. We need that bread at the end of the day. It is a quarter to 7 when we reach the farm. We take our lunch boxes out and eat breakfast until 7. We then get inside the packing house where we pack punnets – each person is a packer for the day, working like slaves. We get fined for going to the toilet. They check how many minutes we spend there and they deduct this from our R50 wage.

We, the women, work harder than the men on the farms. The whole week we are in the pressure of pains. Other women are pregnant and sometimes get miscarriages. And to them this is not the fault of the boss. Our lives at work are like slavery. We feel the pain of struggling to get success in our lives.

The day I will never forget

It was the last week of November. I was at work. The sun was too hot. My head ached and then I felt bleeding from my nose. My supervisor told me to go to the office where the manager sent me home. I went home and they took me to the pharmacy to get some medication. I bled for four days. I felt cold, I used many blankets while sleeping and, after taking the medication, my whole body was sweating. I had pains in my back, neck, chest. I thought I have TB, maybe I am HIV positive. I was scared and stressed. I wanted to be relieved of these pains. I worried

about my child's clothes on lay-by for Christmas. I thought 'What is he going to wear on Christmas day because I am dying?'

The painful thing is before this I went to the clinic and they told me I have to drink water and eat dry bread. They did not give me tablets even though I was very sick. They do not care about people's health. I asked the assistant nurse for a TB test. She asked me, 'What makes you want this test?' I explained how I am feeling. She said, 'No we don't do that test.'

By that Sunday I felt this is enough – I could not even wash myself. I decided to call the nearest police station where I talked to them to call an ambulance. Maybe after an hour I heard the voice of my aunty, 'Who's going to the hospital in this house?' The paramedic brought me a wheelchair to take me to the ambulance. They started me on treatment.

I slept a deep sleep and in my sleep I heard the noise wana wana na. I began to wake up. There was a church evangelist praying over my head. He asked me, 'Are you stressed?' I answered him, 'Yes.' He began to ask me, 'You want to embrace God as Jesus Christ in your life?' I said yes and we started to pray together. After five minutes I felt better. I went home feeling light.

Nonhlanhla Shandu

I was born in Melmoth at KwaMagwaza Hospital to a poor family. We five children were raised by our mother. We did not know our father. We went to school but were not able to reach high classes because our mother was struggling. She sold clothes to generate some money.

When I grew up I had my first child and everything was fine. I got a house at Skhawini in Empangeni. Life was good because the father of my child was working. He did all the things he was asked to do at home. The problem started when he got sick and after a short time he died. I went back home because the condition was not good.

Shortly after being back home, my brother and my sister passed away in the same week, and they were buried on the same day. They had been sick. Because of their death, my mother became mentally disturbed and ended up also dying. I was the only elder sister left to look after the family. I had to be the mother and the father. That same year, my younger sister also died. She left three children. I don't know where their father is. They get child support grants. This is not a lot of money, but through God's power I have been able to manage.

To be part of JAW's processes helps me a lot. I have the opportunity to share my problems and sometimes I find people who have bigger problems than mine. I am empowered to think that the problems I have will change one day. That life it is not going to be the same all the time.

Ngizalelelwe endaweni yase Melmoth kwaMagwaza esibhedlela emndenini ohluphekayo. Singabantwana abayisihlanu sakhuliswa umama yedwa. Sasingamazi ubaba. Saya esikoleni

kodwa asikwazanga ukufika emabangeni aphezulu ngoba umama wayesokola. Wayedayisa izingubo ukuze athole imali.

Ngakhula ngathola ingane yami yokuqala konke kwahamba kahle. Ngathola umuzi eSikhawini Empangeni. Impilo yaba yinhle ngoba ubaba wezingane wayesebenza. Wayekwenza konke ebabefuna akwenze ekhaya. Inkinga yaqala ngesikhathi egula, emuva kwesikhashashana washona. Ngabuyela ekhaya ngoba isimo sasingasesihle emva kokushona kwakhe.

Emva kwesikhathi ngibuyile, ekhaya ubhuti nosisi wami bashona bobabili ngezinsuku ezilandelanayo evikini baphinda bafihlwa ngosuku olulodwa. Babekade begula. Ukushona kwabo kwaba nomthelela wokuthi umama ahlukumezeke ngokomqondo, naye wagcina eshonile. Kwasala mina omdala, kwamele nginakekele umndeni. Ngaba umama, ngaba ubaba. Kuwo lowo nyaka, usisi wami omncane naye washona. Washiya izingane ezintathu. Angazi ukuthi ubaba wazo ukuphi. Bathola imali yesibonelelo sikahulumeni. Naso futhi akusiyona imali enkulu, kodwa ngamandla kaNkulunkulu ngikwazile ukubakhulisa.

Ukuba yinxenye yenhlangano uJAW kungisizile kakhulu. Ngathola ithuba lokuthi ngikwazi ukuvuleleka ngikhulume ngezinkinga zami. Ngithole ukuthi abanye banezinkinga ezinkulu ngisho kunezami. Sengikhuthazekile ukuthi izinkinga enginazo ziyoshintsha ngelinye ilanga. Nokuthi impilo ngeke ihlale ifana sonke isikhathi.

Phumzile Mbatha

I was born to a family that was not rich and not poor. We were raised by a single mother and we didn't know who our father was. My mother worked as a domestic worker, a 'kitchen girl'. We were eight, three boys and five girls.

I grew up with my uncle's family. He sent me to school until I was in Standard 7. The reason I stopped in Standard 7 was that a teacher wanted to have sex with me and I refused. He started punishing me until I lost control and left school.

I started working as a domestic worker, where I met the father of my children. We had a very good relationship and his mother loved me. Things changed when I had four children. I was not given any money but I persevered thinking and hoping that things will be better one day. Things got worse and my partner became a heavy drinker. When he got drunk, he would fight with me and my children. One day I asked him for money to buy school clothes and shoes for the children. He had R1 500 and he didn't give me a cent.

I take care of my children. I pay for their school fees and I buy them clothes. Everything is my burden. I pray to God to give me a job so that I can build a home with my children. I made a decision that by next year I will leave him. My dream was to get married and be called 'Mrs'. This doesn't matter anymore. I have spent twenty-two years with him but now I am going back home because our relationship is not working out.

Ngazalelwa emdenini ongacebile futhi ongehlwempu.
Sakhuliswa umama yedwa sasingamazi ukuthi ubani ubaba wethu. Umama wayesebenza njengomsizi wasezindlini esilungwini. Sasiyisishangalolunye, abafana abathathu

namantombazane ayisihlanu. Ngakhulela ekhaya komama ngihlala nomalume. Wangisa esikoleni ngagcina ebangeni lesikhombisa. Isizathu sokuthi ngiyeke isikole ukuthi uthisha owayengifundisa wayefuna ukulala nami. Mina ngenqaba, wagcina esengihlukumeza ngaze ngashiya esikoleni.

Ngaqala ngasebenza njengomsizi wasezindlini, lapho engahlangana khona nobaba wezingane zami. Sasinobudlewane obuhle futhi nomawakhe engithanda. Izinto zajika senginezingane ezine. Wayengasangiphi imali kodwa ngabekezela nginethemba lokuthi izinto ziyobangcono ngelinye ilanga. Isimo saqhubeka sabanzima ubaba wezingane waphuza kakhulu. Ngaso sonke isikhathi uma ephuzile wayengishaya nezingane. Ngelinye ilanga ngamcela anginike imali yokuthi ngithenge umfaniswano wesikole wezingane. Wayenemali engango R1500, akaze anginike ngisho isenti.

Manje yimi onakekela izingane zami. Ngiyazikhokhela esikoleni ngithenge nezinto zesikole nayo yonke into, sekuwumthwalo wami. Ngiyathandaza kuNkulunkulu ukuthi angiphe umsebenzi khona ngizokwazi ukwakha umuzi nezingane zami. Manje ngithathe isinqumo sokuthi ngimyeke ngonyaka ozayo. Lphupho lami kwakuwukuthi ngishade ngolunye usuku kutshintshe isibongo sami ngibizwe 'ngonkosikazi'. Lokho akusabalulekile manje. Sengihlale naye iminyaka engamashumi amabili nambili kodwa manje sengibuyela ekhaya ngoba ubudlwelwane bethu abusasebenzi kahle.

Dudu Majola

I was born to a poor family with a single mother and I do not know my father. My mother was a drinker. My grandmother supported us, so I grew up with a difficult situation. At times my aunt would chase me out of the house and say, 'Go to your father, you do not belong to this family'. Growing up I carried anger for a long time.

I was in love at a young age when I was doing Grade 8. That man made me pregnant and I left school. That man hit me a lot, even in front of my babies. When my second baby was one month old he left me. That is when I went to work on a farm, peeling bark off trees in the forest. One day a tree fell on my leg and the farmer chased me away because he said I know the danger zone.

One day I went to a friend's mother to borrow a pot and she said she needs me to work for her organisation as a volunteer. I got a stipend of R70 a day. This is where my life changed and I worked there until I became a Community Care Giver. Now I want to register to write my Grade 12. I will be a teacher in some years' time.

Provide
Shelters
For Farm
Women





**How we
organise
as seasonal
Farmworkers**



The first section of this chapter is compiled from the words shared at OWRAP gatherings by Seasonal Farm Worker Structures members:

**Bettie Fortuin
Charmaine Fortuin
Jenetta Louw
Ayanda Ndevana
Drieka Pawuli**

and Women on Farms Project staff:

**Bongeka Ntshweza
Ida Jacobs
Carmen Louw**

**At the four OWRAP gatherings
held between February 2012 and February 2014**

**seasonal farm workers shared
their ongong struggles
and
how they were taking these up.**



We are vulnerable on the farms. Our labour rights are not recognised. Because we are seasonal workers our work is not considered work, and we are not considered workers. We need to change mind sets regarding who are workers and what is work.

We have to deal with different layers and systems. We need to know who is gaining from the system. It is very important to ask 'who benefits?' We are not benefiting. But who is? If we blame each other we strengthen the system of exploitation. We need to understand the system which allows and continues our exploitation.

We as workers are trying to earn a living. Not everyone can make it in this system because there are more people who need jobs than jobs are available.

The farmer gains because he does not have to pay benefits. He does not have to recognise a seasonal worker as a worker. Farmers do not pay seasonal workers for overtime worked.

We are reliant on labour brokers for jobs, for transport to the farms. Labour brokers take a portion of our salaries – they get R5 per head. The labour broker has all the power because we need them more than they need us – there are so many other workers they can get if you say no, or if they see you as difficult.

Labour brokers use their power to abuse women seasonal workers. The labour brokers are mostly men, but there are also some women. A labour broker can be your neighbour, he or she can be a community member. They can be a former farm worker who has a good relationship with the farmer. Some may not have a truck, and in these cases a farmer will send a truck

for the labour broker to use.

At the OWRAP planning meeting in February 2012 we agreed to take up the protection of seasonal farm workers' labour rights. We wanted to change the sectoral determination so that it includes seasonal workers' demands, including minimum wages for seasonal farm workers and fixed seasonal contracts between farmers and seasonal workers.

To get this change we planned to work at two levels – the grass roots level and the legislative level. We planned to pressure the Department of Labour and to engage with legislative processes. And we planned to train leaders from different communities, to mobilise workers and collect their demands.

We agreed we would organise women seasonal workers through door to door visits, mobilise on farms during season time, and hold meetings and information sessions in community areas and on farms.

By October 2012 we had mobilised seasonal farm workers in different communities through pamphleteering and door to door meetings to make people aware of their rights and of the minimum wage demand. Women facilitated meetings and workshops in their areas. We reached more than 1000 women, and we distributed 6000 pamphlets to farm workers.

We set up structures in some communities, and we took action in some workplaces and communities. We took up cases and held mediation meetings with some farmers. We were challenging farmers about our rights.

Our actions showed that women can organise themselves and can take action when they know their rights. Women's confidence was built. Most were shy at the start and would not speak, but this is changing. Women were more empowered and

supported each other. We know our rights – the farmer cannot just chase us. We are now more aware of contracts and benefits. Knowing our rights means women learn to do things on their own.

We became brave because we have our structures behind us – the five-person committee we elect in each area. And we have Women on Farms Project behind us. Workers know there is someone we can report to.

We spoke to the labour department about the treatment of farm workers and this is now improving. The Portfolio Committee on Labour visited farms and had a speak-out with farm workers.

We realise we have to keep on working to build commitment and trust. It was not always easy to get women to come to meetings. Sometimes husbands are the obstacle – Xhosa men don't want their wives to attend, Coloured men want to attend with their wives.

Farmers divide workers, and farm workers are not treated equally. Xhosa workers earn less than Coloured workers, and foreign workers are treated differently. We try to break the silence around different treatment of different cultures and races through sessions on racism.

From August 2012 we took part in the biggest strike ever to take place on farms in South Africa. As Bettie Fortuin shared at one of our OWRAP gatherings: 'People were fed up with low wages – a few years back we had discussions – we asked ourselves, "Why don't farm people take action? Everybody strikes but not farm people". When the strike started in De Doorns it made me think of this. I felt very good when it started. It spread like wild fire. It was exciting but scary. People were shot. The strike became violent. It was scary standing by the roadside with posters. There was no work no pay so people

went hungry. Even though we won R105 a day this is not enough. We need to continue fighting.’

Farmers tried to bring other workers to take the place of striking workers. As Jenetta Louw told the OWRAP gathering: ‘Our farmer told us to go to help his brother as his brother’s workers were on strike. The truck took us to the brother’s farm. The workers on strike did not let the truck go past. They threw stones at us. They told us they would burn down the truck. I was so nervous. I realised I cannot go there. The road was closed. Everybody was out on strike.’

The strike was for R150 a day. On some farms workers were paid R85 a day, on other farms even less. The farm workers wanted government to set a minimum wage of R150 a day. Government agreed on R105 a day, but they allowed farmers to apply for exemptions if they cannot afford R105 a day.

Workers are angry that government allows the exemption. Many farmers applied for exemptions saying that they cannot afford R105 a day. Farmers use dirty tricks to get farm workers’ signatures to support their application for exemption. They made workers sign an attendance register and then sent this list of signatures to the labour department as proof that the workers have agreed to a wage of R85 a day.

Some farmers use other dirty tricks, like charging workers who stay on farms for services that were previously free. As Andiswa Ndevana told the OWRAP gathering, ‘Some farmers give the R105 but they have taken away other benefits, like the clinic, the transport to take us to the clinic and the shops – they now make us pay for this. We are now in bigger trouble than before the strike. Most fear they will lose their jobs. We fear mass dismissals and evictions.’

Our struggle for a decent wage continues. We want R150 a day,

free electricity, to live rent free, and to have no deductions.

Andiswa Ndevana, Bettie Fortuin, Charmaine Fortuin and Jenetta Louw shared their experiences of the strike at the OWRAP gathering in February 2013:

Andiswa: The strike started on our farm in August 2012. The owner passed away and the farm was taken over by South African Fruit Exporters (SAFE). We were getting R137 a day but the new owner, SAFE decided to pay us R42 a day. Workers decided to strike. We were on strike for two weeks. Over this time we were not getting paid. We decided to find a union to stand with us. We were demanding R150 a day. We knew they would not give us R150, so when the owner decided to give us R100 we took this. We were hungry as we had not been working for three weeks. Then other farms started striking. They were asking R150 a day.

Bettie: We heard of the strike, and we started to sms and talk about the strike. We started to plan a big strike and on 1 November we went on strike. We thought why can't we all get R150 a day? We want something better for the future. At 4am I was up with my whistle. When people around heard the whistle they knew we must come together and start marching. That first day about 10000 workers came out. We stood on a bridge across the N1 freeway. Police came and asked us, 'Where are the leaders?' We said there are no leaders. The police picked people out and said we need a memorandum. We wrote what we wanted on a piece of paper. They said we must

hand in the memorandum to the Table Grapes Association. We handed our memorandum. The Boere said no, we don't want this piece of paper, we want something typewritten. We then went to put what we wanted on a computer, and we came back the next day. Workers were doing this for ourselves – there was no union there. The demands on our memo were:

- * R150 a day
- * lower electricity charges
- * lower rent
- * stopping of evictions
- * no charge for children over 18 years old.

Around this time Ida from Women on Farms Project came with Charmaine to finalise OWRAP stories with us. They then heard there was a huge strike and a huge demonstration demanding the release of youth who had been arrested. Our plan was to block the N1.

Charmaine: I went with Ida to work on the OWRAP stories. We saw tyres burning at Sandhills. People said they are striking. We went to Aunty Bettie. We decided to support the strike. We went in taxis, but the police asked us to leave. We went to Worcester and stood with posters to show our support. Not many workers in Stellenbosch went on strike, but I stayed away from work.

Bettie: On the Monday three farms came to the table at the municipality. At the meeting with the farmers' association the worker representatives demanded R150 a day. The farmers said you have no mandate to speak on behalf of

all farm workers. The farmers were threatened by the large numbers of striking workers. They brought in lawyers and consultants, and the negotiations continued.

COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) and BAWUSA (Building and Allied Workers Union of SA) now came in and high level meetings were held with three unions, three government representatives, and three representatives from the farmers. COSATU called a solidarity strike and the strike spread to other farms. This forced Agri SA (the farmers' association) to meet the union leaders. A final meeting was held between the union and farmers, this time without community representatives.

By January 2013 De Doorns was on strike for one month. There was a deadlock in the negotiations. From mid-December 2012 to 9 January we suspended the strike because it was now high season and labour was needed. Union representatives said the farmers must have farm level negotiations.

The provincial labour department got negotiations going but farm workers were excluded. A week and a half later the strike was back on. Then COSATU called the strike off. The labour department held consultative meetings with farm workers in different areas. Workers decided to boycott these meetings because no transport was provided. In Worcester only five farm workers attended- workers were not happy with the process. To make sure they got labour during the strike the farmers would go to certain far off places at night to bring people to work on the farms in De Doorns.

During the strike I ran away from home for one week. Police were looking for leaders, so we ran away. When things seemed to cool down we came back and planned. I said to my children if I die in this strike I died for something – for your life to be better.

In March 2013 we marched to parliament as part of our campaign for a minimum wage of R150 a day. Sisonke members joined us on the march.

We have not yet won the minimum wage of R150 a day. The minimum wage is R105 and in our monitoring of the implementation of this wage we find not all farms are paying this. We report and record noncompliance and because of our work we face backlashes from farmers.

Some farmers pay more than R150. But others do not want to pay the R105. Seasonal workers have made gains from the minimum wage but workers who live on farms are not benefitting. Workers living on farms pay for electricity, rent and other costs and at times end up with as little as R60 for a whole month. On one farm workers living on the farm get half their salary deducted. Previously workers on this farm paid R30 for rent. Now the farmer makes them pay R300 for rent.

We have been dealing with cases of dismissals. For example, 24 women were dismissed on one farm because the farmer said he could not pay R105. The seasonal farm workers structure in De Doorns said to the farmer you cannot just chase the workers, you have to pay them for three months. So the farmer then took these workers back. A key problem is that poor people cannot easily access the labour laws. If the matter goes to labour court we cannot afford a lawyer.

On International Rural Women's Day we marched from different

seasonal farm worker structures to the municipal offices and disrupted the place. The result of our action was that the family who was evicted got a place to stay. With the Land Campaign we went to the labour office and to the municipality – we lay in the street in protest.

The Minister and Deputy Minister of Social Development focused on farm workers and visited the farms. They wanted to find out why we went on strike. The women workers said because of hunger, that most only work for six months and are malnourished. The result was that food parcels were provided for six months for people who are earning less than R800 a month. Government is offering to assist low income families with school uniforms through SASSA (South African Social Security Agency). One woman farm worker wanted to go early to get the forms for applying for school uniforms. But the farmer said she could not go. So we arranged for her to speak on air about this, on Valley fm radio station in De Doorns, which is training us to use the radio. SASSA heard her on radio and intervened. They phoned the farmer and asked him why he did not allow her to go. The farmer invited SASSA to hand out forms from his farm. This allowed the workers from nearby farms to walk to his farm to get the forms for school uniforms.

We build solidarity and share with other workers. We attended a meeting on Marikana where farm workers and mine workers discussed our strikes and what people can still do after our strikes. We attended the Rural Women’s Assembly, a network of rural women linked by land and income inequality. We attended a Regional Women on Farms Leadership Workshop. The women from different countries who attended were so excited to hear us and Sikhula Sonke speak of the work we are doing – they keep phoning us. And women from Namibia want some of us to come to talk to them.

As women we often have problems with men workers. There

are more women than men on the strike committee, but we are finding that men farm workers feel women can't be in front – the men want to control. But we are strong and we continue our efforts to organise.

It is not always easy to organise farm workers. We have learnt that we have to look for an opening, for an issue to get workers interested. We have to know our rights and be assertive and calm and have our facts straight. Where possible we should know which government officials to contact. We can be strong. We don't need to have matric to be strong. As Aunty Bettie says she went to Standard 3 but she has a degree when it comes to knowing her rights!





Writing about our actions



**Bettie Fortuin
Charmaine Fortuin
Jenetta Louw**





Bettie Fortuin

I live in De Doorns in the Western Cape. De Doorns made the headlines in November 2012 when we embarked on the biggest farm worker strike ever in South Africa.

In February 2013 the strike was at its peak. No one was going to work. There were people everywhere on the N1, on the bridge, and on the roads. Wherever you looked, you could see people.

I was one of the leaders of the strike. I was the one who appeared on TV and in newspapers to explain what we as workers demanded from the farmers. We submitted a memorandum with our demands for a minimum wage, housing, less electricity charges, no boarding fees for our children over 18 years, no assaults on farms, etc.

My friend is a manager on the farm. She wanted the seasonal and full time migrant workers to return to work. She threatened to dismiss them if they failed to return to work. Some of the workers came to talk to me and I, in turn, called her. I named her a child of the farm because she is better off than the ordinary workers, who at that time earned between R69 and R80 per day. She was very angry with me. I lost her because she does not understand what it is to be hungry at night. But in my heart I still love her.

I will always stand up for what is right to help my community.
Viva Strong Women.

Because of the strike the Minister of Social Development focused on our town and promised to help the people. She visited our town in November 2013.

One of the farm women explained to her that women seasonal workers only work for six months. They don't earn enough to buy essential items such as school clothes. After various women had the opportunity to speak the minister responded. She promised to provide school clothes for needy students. They would be provided with school uniform application forms at the local schools and these forms would be processed by SASSA (South African Social Security Agency).

The message of the free clothes spread quickly. People came from the farms and everywhere to apply for the clothes. A woman on Plumstead Farm told the farmer she is leaving very early to stand in the queue for the form. The farmer told her if she leaves she must stay away forever.

When she reached town there were no more forms left. The woman was dismissed and she also did not get the free school uniforms. Somebody told her Aunty Bettie of Women on Farms is here, she will be able to help. They came to call me. I went outside to listen to her story. I report on community issues on Valley fm radio and I thought this was a good story to share.

I called Valley fm and they interviewed this woman telephonically. I also informed Women on Farms Project about this story and they called SASSA who in turn called the farmer. The next day the SASSA manager called me to say they spoke to the farmer. He had availed his premises to SASSA to process the applications of workers from neighbouring farms, and the woman was allowed to return to work.

I felt good because I could help the woman get her job back and through the process other women heard on the radio about the

free school clothes. I felt I had achieved a lot. If I had not phoned Valley fm the woman would have just been ignored. I want to urge women not to remain quiet about their issues. No matter how small, speak out. It can make a difference in your life and in the lives of others who hear about it.

As more people heard about the free uniforms more came to apply. SASSA assisted people at the People's Centre. The queues were very long. That morning I was in the queue just after 5am. Many farm workers came in their work overalls, planning to go to work after they completed the process. Many were in a hurry and some of the women said they will wait as long as it takes because this was their only chance to get school clothes. People were excited at the prospect of getting free school clothes. They came hungry, and whilst they were waiting, asked me to go home to prepare them some sandwiches.

Around 10am. fifteen women in blue overalls and white head scarves came into the centre. They had been chased away from the farm. A fellow structure member introduced the women to me as someone who could help them. They were despondent and angry. The farmer had dismissed them because they had left work to apply for the school clothes. When they saw me they were grateful for the opportunity to share their problem. I knew that if I called Women on Farms Project offices and the radio station I would get an immediate response. The office will never disappoint me. Many people know I am a community worker who will do my best to help others. I can do it because I have the support of the organisation.

When their issue went on air some of the women listened to the broadcast via their phones. The women could not believe that their matter went on air immediately. They said, 'Thank you Aunty Bettie. Thank you Aunty Bettie. Now the farmer will hear that we have people behind us.'

When I saw the women's expressions and their smiles I could see their joy and their sense of achievement. This was so different from how downcast, sad and hopeless they had looked when I first spoke to them.

I felt so proud of myself. I, as an ordinary farm woman, could achieve such a lot in a small space of time. I could tell them about Women on Farms Project and how important it is to know your rights. One young woman said, 'Now we know the farmers are not all powerful.' An older woman came to kiss me and said, 'Ai Aunty Bettie what will we do without you!' I felt excited. Many people heard about my achievement.

It was a very hot day. I left the hall at 3.30pm. When I got home I ate for the first time after leaving the house at 5am. Strangely enough I did not feel hungry. When I am busy with other people's matters I don't get hungry.

Dit was in Februarie 2013. Die strike was oproerig. Niemand kon gaan werk het nie. Daar was oral mense op die N1 op die brug in die paaie, waar jy kyk was daar mense.

Ek was een van die voorlopers van die strike. Ek was ook die een vir die TV en koerante om te se wat ons as plaaswerkers van die boere verlang. Ons het reeds die memorandum ingehandig met ons vereistes. Loon, huis, minder krag, geen losies gelde vir ons kinders ouer as 18jaar aanrandings op plase ens.

My vriendin is 'n bestuurder op die plaas. Sy wou he dat die seisoen en vaste migranate werkers moet kom werk. Sy dreig toe die mense en sê as hul nie kom werk nie sal sy hulle afdank. Van die mens kom praat toe met my en ek op my beurt bel haar en noem haar die plaas se kind, want sy is beter af as die gewone plaaswerkers, wat op daardie stadium R69 – R80 per

dag verdien het. Sy was baie kwaad vir my. Ek het haar verloor omdat sy nie kan verstaan wat dit is om honger te gaan slaap nie. Maar in my hart is ek nog net so lief vir haar. Ek sal altyd staan vir wat reg is om my gemeenskap te help. Viva Sterk Vroue!

As gevolg van die staking het die Minister van Maatskaplike Ontwikkeling op ons dorp gefokus en belowe om ons mense te help. Sy het ons dorp besoek in November 2013.

Een van die plaasvroue het verduidelik dat vroue seisoenwerkers werk net vir ses maande. Hulle verdien nie genoeg geld om noodsaaklike items soos skoolklere te koop nie. Na verskeie vroue die geleentheid gegun was om te praat het die Minister gereageer. Sy het beloop om skoolklere aan behoeftige studente te voorsien. Behoeftige studente moes 'n skoolklere aansoekvorm by hulle plaaslike skool kry en die vorms moet deur SASSA (Suid Afrikaanse Agentskap vir Maatskaplike Sekerheid) geprosesseer word.

Die boodskap van die verniet klere het vinnig versprei. Mense het van die plase en oral gekom om aansoek te doen vir die klere. 'n Vrou op Plumsteadplaas het aan die boer gese, sy sal baie vroeg die plaas verlaat om in die lyn te staan vir die vorm. Die boer het vir haar gesê as sy die plaas verlaat moet sy verewig weg bly. Toe sy in die dorp aankom was daar nie meer vorms vir haar nie. Die vrou het gesê sy is afgedank en nou sal sy ook nie eers die verniet skoolklere kry nie. Iemand het vir haar gesê Aunty Bettie van Women on Farms is hier en dat sy haar sal kan help. Hulle het my kom roep. Ek het buiten toe gegaan om na die probleem te luister . Ek doen verslag rondom gemeenskap sake op Valley FM ('n plaaslike radiostasie), en ek het gedink dit was 'n goeie storie om te deel.

Ek het Valley FM gebel, waarna hulle 'n telefoniese onderhoud met die vrou gedoen het. Ek het ook Women on Farms Project

ingelig omtrent die storie en hulle het op hulle beurt vir SASSA gebel. Die volgende dag het die SASSA bestuurder my gebel om te sê hulle het met die boer gepraat. Hy het sy perseel vir SASSA beskikbaar gestel om die aansoekvorms van sy werkers en die van naburige plase te prosessee, en die vrou is toegelaat om terug te keer na haar werk.

Ek het goed gevoel, want ek kon help dat die vrou haar werk terug kry en deur die proses het baie ander vroue van die gratis skoolklere gehoor. Ek het gevoel ek het baie bereik. As ek nie vir Valley FM gebel het nie sou die vrou net geïgnoreer gewees het. Ek wil vroue aanmoedig om nie stil te bly oor hul probleme nie. Maak nie saak hoe klein dit is nie, praat daarvoor. Dit kan 'n verskil maak in jou lewe en in die lewe van ander mense wat daarvan hoor.

Meer mense het gekom om aansoek te doen vir die gratis skoolklere, soos hulle daarvan gehoor het. SASSA het mense gehelp by die People's Centre. Die lyn was baie lank. Daardie oggend was ek reeds om 5vm in die lyn. Baie van die werkers het in hul oorpakke gekom, want hulle het beblan om nog weer werk toe te gaan. Baie was haastig, maar ander vroue het gese hulle sal wag so lank as wat dit neem, want dit is die enigste kans wat hulle het om gratis skoolklere te kry. Mense was opgewonde oor die gratis skoolklere. Hulle was honger, en terwyl ons gewag het, het hulle gevra ek moet huis toe gaan om toebroodjies te maak.

Rondom 10:00vm het vyftien vroue in blou oorpakke en witkopdoeke by die sentrum ingekom. Hulle was ook van die plaas af weggejaag. 'n Mede lid van ons struktuur het my aan die vroue voorgestel en gesê ek behoort hulle te kan help. Hulle was baie moedeloos en kwaad. Die boer het hulle afgedank omdat hulle die werk verlaat het om vir die skoolklere aansoek te doen. Hulle was baie dankbaar toe hulle my sien, want toe kon hulle die probleem met my deel. Ek het goed gevoel omdat

ek die vroue kon help. Ek weet dat wanneer ek Women on Farms en die radio stasie bel, kry ek 'n onmiddellike respons. Die kantoor sal my nooit teleurstel nie. Baie mense weet dat ek 'n gemeenskapswerker is wat my beste sal doen om ander te help. Ek kan dit doen want ek het die ondersteuning van my organisasie.

Toe hulle probleem uitgesaai word, het van die vroue na die uitsending geluister via hul selfone. Die vroue kon nie glo dat hul saak op die radio uitgesaai word nie. Hulle het gesê: 'Dankie Aunty Bettie. Dankie Aunty Bettie.' Nou kan die boer hoor ons het mense agter ons. Toe ek die vroue se uitdrukkings sien, kon ek hulle blydschap sien oor die feit dat hulle iets bereik het. Dit was verskillend van die teneergedrukte, hartseer, hopelose uitdrukkings wat ek gesien het, toe ek die eerste keer met hulle gepraat het.

Ek voel so trots op myself. Ek as 'n gewone vrou kan so baie bereik in 'n klein tydjie. Ek kon hulle van WFP vertel en hoe belangrik dit is om jou regte te ken. Een jong vrou het gesê nou weet ons die boere is nie almagtig nie. 'n Ouer vrou het my kom soen en gesê: "Ai aunty Bettie wat sal ons sonder jou doen!" Ek het opgewonde gevoel. Baie mense het gehoor van my prestasie. Ek moes met hulle kwessies ook help.

Dit was 'n baie warm dag. Ek het die saal op 15:30 verlaat. Toe ek by die huis kom het ek vir die eerste keer geëet nadat ek voor 05:00 die oogend die huis verlaat het. Wanneer ek besig is met ander mense se sake kry ek nie honger.

Charmaine Fortuin

This happened in October 2013. I remember it was Rural Women's Day. Women from different areas came together in Stellenbosch to celebrate this day. This was one of the events that makes it possible for us women to connect again because we don't see each other that often.

Arriving at the hall the women were all in colourful T-shirts which showed the name of the organisation – Women on Farms Project. Some wore blue T-shirts, some wore pink. There were women who wore shocking green T-shirts and these were the ones that stood out.

There was singing and rejoicing. Women were informed that Rural Women's Day is a day when rural women get together to celebrate, not only in Western Cape, but all over the country and all over the world. After an hour or so we were told that we were going to the Drakenstein Municipality in Paarl because of an eviction on a farm in Paarl. I felt very excited because this would be the second time that I would be part of a march.

As we got out of the hall I saw Colette from Women on Farms Project running from one taxi to another. You can't miss Colette because she is this thin woman with hair in long braids and on the end of the braids there hang these beads. That is how everyone knows Colette. She was telling all the women in the taxis that the march was illegal and she wanted to know if women wanted to still go even though it was illegal.

My excitement turned into fear when I heard this. But when I saw all the other women standing together I thought what am I scared of? We women are united and if you strike a woman you strike a rock. So I decided I want to stand together with these women.

We got to the municipality and the women who arrived there first stormed forward and kept the doors open for the rest of us. As we ran forward the security guards tried to keep us out but we pushed back and the majority of us entered the building.

The municipal building is a big building with glass doors. Inside are a lot of rooms for different purposes. The people inside the building were very well dressed. Men in suits and ladies in all kinds of fabulous dresses. The way they were dressed looked very high class.

The person we were supposed to speak to was not in the building, or so we were told. We started to sing and we made a lot of noise with our pots and pans. We made it impossible for the officials to continue their work. We invaded both the first and second floors. We were told that if we did not leave they will call the police. Some of us were starting to panic but we continued to take part because an injury to one is an injury to all.

Then the police came and all you could see was men in blue uniforms entering the building. They asked us to leave the building. We told them, 'Not until we speak to the mayor'. We were surrounded by police inside and outside the building. We did not know what the mayor looks like, and he was standing there without us knowing. I think when he saw that we were serious he approached us. A few women were given a chance to speak, and also the family that was evicted told their story.

Jenetta Louw

It was a bloody hot Thursday. The black tar roads were filled with many women. Some of the women stood under green oak trees. The policemen and policewomen clothed in blue stood shaking their heads and looked at the women who took over the streets.

I still remember how I said to Aunty Ursula and Aunty Charmaine that I'm going to stand further away because I'm afraid. But then Aunty Elsie came to fetch me and said I should not be afraid because I am a strong woman.

When I moved closer, black double cam bakkies with CJ registration numbers approached the crowd. Inside were big well-built men. One of them was rude to some women. Some of the women shouted back at him. Aunty Elsie and I started to walk back to the taxi.

A white Nissan pickup pulled up next to us. The white man lowered his window and asked the reason for the protest. I told him Florina was evicted from her house. He said we are a group of strong women who support each other. When he drove away he sounded his hooter and shouted Amandla!

Washing line across the street

A year ago there was a march in Worcester. We came from different areas by buses and taxis. We all met at one point. We decided to storm the municipal buildings. A group of women inside the buildings saw us and decided to close the doors, but that did not bother us. We stood still, and the people who worked inside called the police. I felt scared. There was a lot of

noise. It felt as if there was war. There were many people and police. They called for reinforcements. I was afraid and had a strange feeling, but I stood united with the other women.

We moved to the main road and decided to block it. The women decided to string a washing line over the road. We started hanging clothes on the washing line. The cars stood in long lines, the people in the cars sounded their hooters. The police then took off the washing lines. We then went singing to the court building and the police station. We waited for the mayor but she ran out on the other side, away from us. Then we all sat down in front of the police station and ate, whilst the policemen and policewomen watched us.

Just before 4pm the police told us to leave otherwise they will arrest us. We as women decided to stand. The Paarl's flying squad then arrived and they were very rude. I walked away because I felt the nerves in my stomach.

After 4pm the women returned to the taxis and we went home because the mayor in any case ran away. I'm glad we have such strong women who stand together. These things only make women stronger. On that day the sun shone brightly. It was hot. I was so scared that I felt the heat the most.

Dit was 'n bloedige warme Donderdag. Die swart teer paaië was gevul met klomp vroue. Van die vroue het onder groen akker bome gestaan. Die polisie manne en vroue met blou kleure het hulle koppe vir ons gestaan en skut wat so die strate op horings geneem het.

Ek onthou nog hoe ek vir anti Ursula en anti Charmaine gesê het, ek gaan daar ver staan want ek is bang. Maar toe kom haal

anti Elsi my en sê ek moet nie bang wees nie want ek is 'n sterk vrou.

Ek het toe nader gestaan toe trek daar swart dubbel cap bakkies op. Binne in was groot geboude manne met CJ nommer plate. Een van die groot geboude manne het onbeskof begin raak met van die vroue. Van die vroue het met hom begin skêl.

Ek en anti Elsie loop toe terug na die taxi toe en daar hou toe 'n wit Nissan bakkie langs ons stil. Die wit man laat sak sy venster en vra hoekom ons betoog. Toe vertel ek hom van Floriena wat uit haar huis uit gesit is en die man in die wit bakkie se ons is regtig 'n klomp serk vroue wat mekaar by staan en hy ry weg van ons af en peep met sy hoeter en skree vir die vroue Amandla!

Wasgoedlyn oor die strate

Ek het bang gevoel. Daar was baie geraas. Dit het gevoel of daar oorlog was. Daar was baie mense en polisie. Hulle het vir versterking geroep. 'n Jaar gelede was daar 'n optog in Worcester. Ons het van verskillende areas afgekome met busse, en taxis. Ons het mekaar almal op 'n punt ontmoet. Ons het besluit ons gaan die munisipale geboue binne storm waar die mense in die geboue werk. 'n Groep vroue het gesien en die deure gesluit maar steeds was ons nie bekommerd nie. Ons het daar bly staan en die mense wat binne gewerk het, het die polisie gebel. Ek het bang geword en het 'n snaakse gevoel gekry, maar ek het saam met die ander vroue gestaan.

Ons het oor die hoof pad beweeg en daar het die vroue besluit om die pad toe te staan en het 'n wasgoedlyn in die pad gespan. Ons het begin kleure ophang toe trek 'n klomp polisie op en haal die wasgoed lyne af. Die motors het in lang lyne gestaan, die mense wat in die motors gesit het, het hulle hooters geblaas. Toe loop ons sing, sing die pad af en gaan staan voor die hof en

die polisiestasie.

Ons wag toe vir die mayor en toe hardloop sy anderkant uit. Sy hardloop toe weg van ons af. Toe sit ons almal plat voor die polisiestasie en eet met die polisie manne en vroue wat vir ons staan en kyk. Toe dit voor vier raak toe se die polisie as ons nie nou gaan loop nie gaan ons almal opgesluit word. Ons vroue het besluit om te bly staan. Toe kom die Paarl se flying squad en hulle was baie onbeskof. Ek stap toe weg want toe begin my maag senuwees.

Na vier uur toe kom klim almal in die taxi en toe ry ons huis toe, want die mayor het weggehardloop. Ek is bly ons vroue het so sterk saamgestaan. Om deur sulke goed te gaan as vrou maak jou nog net 'n sterker mens end dardie dag het die son kliphard geskyn. Dit was warm ek was so benoud geskrik dat ek die warmste gekry het van al die mense.



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How we organise as Sex Workers



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The first section of this chapter is compiled from the words shared at OWRAP gatherings by Sisonke members and SWEAT staff:

- Duduzile Dlamini**
- Angelina De Bruin**
- Kholi Buthelezi**
- Chico Mbwana**
- Sally Jean Shackleton**

**At the four OWRAP gatherings
between February 2012 and February 2014**

**sex worker members of Sisonke
shared their ongoing struggles
and how they were
taking these up.**



The rights sex workers are trying to defend are our right to earn a living, to support our families, and to keep poverty away, the right to use our bodies the way we want to, the right to be free.

Our human rights are being violated by the police who say we are loitering and who beat us. The police use their power over us. The police abuse their power. Neither the police nor the community respect our right to earn a living. We have to hide from the community as well as from the police. Our daily life is about hiding from everyone and when we get robbed we cannot report being robbed. We are vulnerable. Often sex workers survive by bribing the police.

All of these things are symptoms of a bigger problem. We are oppressed because we are women, because we are poor, and because we are black.

We want to be recognised as workers. We want equal access to rights – rights to work, to choice, to dignity, to respect, and to freedom from stigma

We need to uncover the hidden attitudes and beliefs that enable our inequality. We want to reduce the number of human rights abuses and arrests experienced by sex workers. We want to change perceptions and attitudes of communities and the public. We want parliamentarians to understand that it is difficult to exit sex work.

We want to be valued as workers. We are defining our work, shaping our jobs. We are saying we should be allowed to work: don't arrest us, don't criminalise us.

We have led marches through the streets, lobbied parliamentarians and worked with many other organisations to improve the lives of sex workers, to deal with abuse by police, and to campaign for decriminalisation of sex work.

We put out a collection of stories of sex workers to highlight the realities of sex workers lives as women, bread winners, and mothers.

We conducted research on police abuse and released a report in August 2012. We conducted research using cell phones – answers were punched in and sent to a database. One thousand one hundred and forty sex workers were interviewed. We were trained on stats. We want to fight back with factual information and this is why we do research.

We sent letters to, lobbied, and met with parliamentarians and government ministers. We met with eight members of parliament and got a positive response. Sisonke lobbyists attend meetings in parliament. We need to make sure members of parliament will speak out in parliament on decriminalisation.

The Deputy Minister of Police in the Western Cape came to SWEAT. We got face to face with her and told her about our experiences and she listened to our stories. She is now recorded as saying police abuse of sex workers is unacceptable. She told police to get trained. So working at the top level with the Deputy Minister of Police opened up access to ordinary police. So far eighty police officers were trained. In trainings we found they are hateful of women, hateful of sex workers.

As Angelina told the OWRAP gathering, one of the ways we expose police brutality is through the media:

Mama Joyce and I decided to do an interview on Special Assignment for the whole world and parliamentarians to see how police treat us. I wore a very short see through dress and high heels. I prayed for a cop to come – I did not want the journalists and photographer to wait for nothing. The cops came. He said ‘Bitch.’ I reversed back,

the photographer got the shot. This brutalisation and harassment is so serious, you have to keep your eyes on the cops.

We realise we can change the behaviour of police so that there is less brutality and more understanding. The police now take us seriously and even fear us at times! There is more pressure on police to respond.

At the same time, as we create visibility and pressure there is more backlash against sex workers. After marches there are a lot of arrests. We face police action the very evening of a march. We have to be prepared. The killings of the mine workers in Marikana by the police made the public more aware of police abuse and they now believe us more.

We have linked our call for decriminalisation to police abuse of power and we are making progress with decriminalisation of sex work. Because of our lobbying COSATU and the ANC Women's League are supporting decriminalisation. Two Sisonke members went to Sydney, Australia to see how decriminalisation is working there.

We are trying to market ourselves within the women's movement and the Multiparty Women's Caucus in parliament. We approach them as women so that they can understand and support our struggles as sex workers. We attended meetings of the Progressive Women's Movement, the Multiparty Women's Caucus, the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) and UNAIDS (the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS). We educated the Progressive Women's Movement on decriminalisation, trafficking, and the exploitation of young women. We are members of the Progressive Women's Movement, and a Sisonke member was chosen to be on the peace and security committee of this movement.

We were invited to the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) Conference. They asked so many questions to understand about sex workers' lives. Duduzile told them, 'I want my children to live a better life, I am a mother just like many of you.'

We held a national sex work symposium. Of the 200 people who attended 80 were sex workers. In alliance with Health-e we have exposed clinics and hospitals for turning sex workers away. In our Creative Spaces, which are held once a month for our members, we ask them, 'Are clinics sex worker friendly?' Sex workers should not be treated differently from other patients. Sisonke peer educators go to clinics and borders to monitor.

Through alliances with other organisations we have also taken up the rights of transgender sex workers. At a seminar on police brutality and harassment attended by the Deputy Police Minister we raised the issue of arrest of transgenders – should they be with men in transportation and in men's cells? The police insist they are males, but they prefer to be searched by women. An advocate from the office of the Deputy Police Minister trained police on standard operating procedure for transgenders. These were published towards end of 2012.

We are involved as Sisonke in the Shukumisa Campaign which monitors the police. We went to meetings of the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) women's sector to prepare for the march on no violence against women. In that march we got space to talk, and they recognised Sisonke.

Sisonke activists experience difficulty in recruiting because women do not acknowledge they are sex workers. We spend time brainstorming, planning and mapping – we look at where the hot spots are where we will find sex workers. And we plan how we will go about approaching them. Peer educators recruit at the hotspot. If sex workers are working for pimps, and have

not made much money we need to be quick. It is very difficult. We have a lot of challenges from sex workers, and from people trafficked. It is difficult for them to trust a stranger. To build trust we use other sex workers. We wear name tags, and T-shirts to identify ourselves. A peer is on the same level as the sex worker we are recruiting.

In our recruiting we use flyers, invitations and press releases. We sms service users. We have a helpline number for advice and counselling; and a Please Call Me service. We use social media, twitter, and facebook to reach our members.

The Sisonke Task Team meets once a week or more. We draft our own agenda, organise registers for participants and evaluate progress. As Dudu told the OWRAP gathering, we are able to do this because of the support of SWEAT:

We need skills. If SWEAT was not around I would not be able to stand. We get grooming and support from SWEAT. We are all marginalised. We are all vulnerable. Our Creative Space is a safe space for us. We tell stories, understand our rights, we discuss the challenges of building a movement.

Our organisation is growing across the country and we have recruited more members. We have had marches since 2011 in Cape Town, Johannesburg, East London, Limpopo, Durban, Cape Town, East London. In our marches in all provinces the gay and lesbian organisations joined us. Most sex workers who come to the marches wear masks to protect their identity – so that the police cannot identify them and because many of their families do not know they are sex workers.

We strengthened the organisational structure of Sisonke in the Western Cape; we set up a Sisonke Committee in Gauteng. We started a presence in the Eastern Cape. In Limpopo we have

coordinators, a media liaison officer, an outreach coordinator, and two peer educators. We had struggled to find a host organisation in Durban. People were not willing to talk about sex, it was difficult for them to mention the word. We finally got a host organisation in Durban – Project Empower – through Justice and Women (JAW). We established a Durban office with a provincial coordinator and a paralegal. The Sisonke National Organiser now works in seven provinces.

Sex workers are coming forward to say with confidence, 'I am a sex worker'. We empower sex workers to raise their voices. Ours is a feminist project. Sex workers are seeing themselves as feminists.

We did a river of life with new sex worker members. This reminds you of your background, why you are here, why you are a sex worker. We look at years and dates and how long since sex workers have known Sisonke and SWEAT. We found that it takes four years for a sex worker to meet SWEAT and to see our outreach workers. Many are violated and abused before they know their rights. We are trying to reach sex workers as early as possible – before there is a lot of violation. We are worried about the effects of criminalisation and domestic violence on children. We are pushing projects to raise funds for children – for an education fund for sex workers' children.

We are starting to think about older sex workers' needs and about benefits for sex workers. Older women in the sex industry can no longer stand on the road. Old and young sex workers have no maternity leave, no sick leave, no provident fund. We are encouraging young sex workers to budget.

Through funding from a group of sex workers in Europe we empowered sex workers and we have Red Umbrella groups in five provinces. After empowerment we try to build smaller groups and we lobby the media. The sex workers are very

intelligent, they know what they are doing. When they have the platform they have brilliant ideas.

Ayanda told the 2014 OWRAP gathering her story. She had been a sex worker on the streets for 13 years, since 2000:

I was in Joburg and I wanted to come to Cape Town. I wanted to find what the future has in store for me. I did not want the community to know me as a sex worker – I was afraid of the stigma. When I attended the Sisonke Creative Space I was introduced to different groups. I then joined Sisonke. I showcased my talents in writing. My story – the joys and pain of what I go through, and the stigma is in ‘In Her Heels’ a book of stories by sex workers. The book was launched on Women’s Day last year. After joining Sisonke I could stand up and say I am a sex worker. I got empowered in Sisonke. We are fighting for the decriminalisation of sex work. We feel the power of being someone. We are seen as nobody when we stand on the street. We have been invited to spaces where the ‘who’s who’ of society is there. Sisonke gave me the platform to recognise who I am. We exist as a community and we showed this to all. We stand up and fight for our rights. We build our movement and we move forward. At the demonstration on the Zwelethu Mthethwa case, 40 sex workers demonstrated without their masks. More sex workers are reporting their cases, more are going out to protest. There are benefits to joining Sisonke.

As a result of our actions our struggles are more visible. Our actions have led to increased public awareness and sympathy As Angelina told the OWRAP gathering:

Dudu and I attended the Cape Town march – this was very successful. There was no police brutality, we had

support from the community. We handed out goody bags. Passing cars hooted in support of the march.

Our actions and our successes have increased our trust in ourselves. We now feel more powerful. We feel more confident that we can change things. We have made our struggle as sex workers more visible.

However we are still worried about a backlash against us. Through the work we have done we have learnt

- * we must be persistent
- * it is an important strategy not to trust politicians
- * to document and expose all the time
- * to record what we do and reflect at the same time
- * we must keep our own promises.

‘Nothing about us without us’ is more than our slogan. It is a successful strategy.

Writing about our actions



**Dudzile Dlamini
Pamela Chakuyinga
Ayanda Denge**



Duduzile Dlamini

A River of Life

Fifteen sex workers sitting in one room on black chairs around a table. On the table were sheets of flip chart paper and colour pencils, crayons and pens. It was a moment to start thinking about myself, my background, where I come from, the hard times and good times.

I felt ashamed and scared of thinking back to the times when I was young and growing up. Those times were hard but they were also times of happiness, times of enjoyment of being with my family who loved me. It was a time for me to recall what happened in my life. And as I took responsibility to do this, I felt the fears run away and I told myself I am going to draw. Hey! I drew a mountain, and I felt proud and all the memories came back, like I was born again, and could feel that love from my mother.

All of us in the room were now drawing and writing about our lives. The colour of the room changed. I remembered my mother had told me when she was discharged from the hospital I was wearing all white. I was now in the space where the room was all white. In that white space I am in the inside of a big cloud in the air. Yoh! It smelt like Fresh Mint. A small wind pushed me up and the cloud goes to the east, west, north and puts me down south. The smell changed when I am down on the ground, no longer flying. Now I smell the dust and soil.

And there I find myself with all the disappointment and difficulties of growing up. There is no nice mint air, no clouds lifting me up. I hear the sound of tears and fears. I am ten years old when things change.

I hear wind, rain and thunderstorms because of the difficulties we experience in life as sex workers. There are wounds and aches and big holes that need to be filled because the pain will not easily go away. I was touched in my heart – like the claw of the lion king had scratched me and my heart stopped beating for a while, and then it started beating again.

Our voices were shaky and vibrating as we shared our lives that day. The sounds of our backgrounds as sex workers are similar to each other. The room was full of crying and tears. There was the taste of dirty slimy water.

The more we shared I started to think how can we help each other, support each other? And the moment we finished sharing our stories and talked about supporting each other there was the smell of sunshine, shining stars giving light, showing the way forward to stand up in solidarity and in one voice. The sweet one voice of being activists and feminists. It tasted like sweets from heaven!

Sex work and parenting

I think of the moment I was lying in my mother's womb. In that warm place where nobody can do whatever they like to me, where nothing can touch me, abuse me and take what I have, like breathing, eating, growing. That space where no one can disturb me, judge me, as I sleep. That space I am not forgetting.

It is time to come out and everybody is moving. The group of nurses around my mother are wearing white, the bedding covering my mother as she lies down is white like ice. This room

is full of pieces of ice, cool and light to make sure I am coming safely. What makes me feel I am special is that everybody was there, carrying silver scissors, surrounding my mother's bed. It was a moment of joy and happiness because they are waiting for the prince or princess who is on the way.

When I compare this with now, where there is no happiness to be a sex worker and a parent, where I get abuse from the police and clients. Where they take the money that I work hard for. I work in dark places where there is no light. Under trees where you cannot even see the shining stars. My voice is crying like a wailing dog, that people hear and chase away, swearing at it without caring. My voice sounds like that when a client rapes me or the police brutalises me. After being abused I feel myself small in a big hole, darkness surrounding me. I feel lonely. No one waiting to help me. Like I belong in the dark with animals.

But being a parent always reminds me that I have the smell of roses and beautiful plants which make me sacrifice my life to find the water to give to the flowers and plants to grow. And I realise that I have to protect them. I love my children even though it is difficult to be a sex worker and a parent. But I know that there is a day when my red, pink rose, my flowers and plants will grow big with love.

Pamela Chakuvinga

What a dream of my life that one day I just want to be live on air for the whole country to hear my voice, sharing my experience. It was two years ago – my first day in the studio on air with my friend Snowy. That night the topic was why many men like to use sex workers’ services. That was an interesting topic for me because I just want to hear the side of our clients about why they use our services.

Most of the people always think that us sex workers, we only do sex all the time when our clients buy us but that is not true. We provide other services to our clients like massage, counselling, business trips, stripping, accompanying them to dinner and drinking or being there as someone to talk to.

The producer of that show got interested and opened the lines for men to comment on that. I was very impressed with their comments which were so supportive.

One client said ‘sex workers they saved my marriage because my wife was sick and I met this sex worker who helped me to love and support my wife no matter what. So I used her service and went back home.’ He wants sex work to be decriminalised because it’s where these women are getting money to look after their families.

One woman phoned to say it is better for my husband to use sex workers’ services because he will come back home. Rather this than a girlfriend who will destroy my marriage.

After the show I was so happy and empowered that there are people out there who love us and think that we have good services for them. Since then I love to be on air, to have my voice be heard as a sex worker activist. Nothing about us without us!

Our First March

It was on Thursday 3 March 2011 when we had the first march in history in two provinces, Gauteng and Western Cape.

I woke up early that morning around 5. I was so excited that this march was happening. That sex workers would be marching to the police station to demand their rights and the end of abuse, harassment and rape by the police.

Me and my coordinator we were busy doing all the logistics of the march. It was hot that day. We wore our orange T-shirts – orange is our Sisonke colour. Instead of taking a taxi we started jogging to the Putco Bus company to pay for the buses we were hiring. Everybody stared at us, and when we got there we were sweating as if we had just come out of the shower. The cashier asked us why we were sweating. The only answer we could give her was we are behind time, we want an orange bus to transport the sex workers to the spot where we are going to meet for the march.

When we got back we were shocked to see three hundred sex workers gathering. They were singing and dancing while waiting for the bus. The police were also there, and also other people who had heard of the march and wanted to see is this true or false.

All the sex workers were wearing masks, but for myself. I told them there is no time for me to hide, it is time for me to come out and face reality as an activist. We had spoken to the sex workers that the media will be there and we are going to be live on TV, so make sure you cover yourself so that no one will see you and recognise you.

Camera men and TV producers were there like bees wanting

to interview the sex workers, but we told them our time for interviews will be after the march, not now.

Those sex workers who did not come were afraid of getting arrested. But that day, that's when we made peace, friendship and solidarity to work with the police in Gauteng. This helped a lot because most police officers stopped harassing us that day. We named them on our placards to stop what they are doing.

When my time of interview came, the journalists were pushing each other to talk to me. I was so nervous and my heart was beating so fast, as if it wanted to burst. But I followed my heart that today was my day to stand for my rights and make my voice heard by the whole world on TV. I had waited for this day to happen.

I was so proud of myself to speak on behalf of all sex workers across South Africa, who were being unlawfully abused, harassed, raped and arrested. I was not ashamed of what I was doing, or of being a sex worker because I am feeding my family and paying their school fees.

What a dream of my life that day to be live on TV and to speak out about sex workers' rights and to tell them all, 'Nothing about us without us'. It changed my life to speak out to the media that sex workers are human beings like anyone else. They are not animals. They are smart and intelligent.

Ayanda Denge

It is a cold winter's night on the streets of busy Cape Town CBD. I am standing on the street corner looking for a client to provide a service to. Cars pass by, looking at me as if I am a strange, rare creature. Others have the audacity of screaming, 'Bitch, you whore'. I just stand patiently. Waiting for a miracle. After three hours of standing I finally get a client for a blow job. He asks how much? I reply, desperately, 'R150'. And he says, 'Jump in'. After doing business with him he gives me R200 and lets me know he is pleased with the service.

The following day I wake up early and go to join Sisonke, the movement for sex workers. Sisonke is mothered by SWEAT (Sex Worker Education Advocacy Taskforce). At first I don't feel comfortable to be in the space surrounded by sex workers. But after a while I try to fit into the space – the faces of my partners in crime put me at ease.

At Sisonke we learn different skills. Opportunities and doors open for us and capacity building kicks in. We are introduced to lobbying which I volunteer myself to take part in. We got trained to excel in lobbying over six consecutive Saturdays. We started by calling stakeholders and parliamentarians and setting up meetings with them to get their support with our call for the decriminalisation of sex work.

When I first spoke to the Minister of Health on the telephone my heart started beating so fast. It was as if I had taken the inhalant 'poppers'. As nervous as I was the entire conversation went as smooth as velvet. Addressing the minister as Honourable was a first for me.

After that conversation I felt as if I had the world on my finger tips. I felt empowered. I felt good that this organisation was

a good platform for me to let my voice be heard and receive recognition for the person I am.

As a sex worker society does not acknowledge you as a person. They stigmatise you and they don't have an ear to listen to you. But the minister had time to listen to me. That made me want to show the world who I am. I really felt empowered.

Two weeks later we got invited by the minister to parliament and it was a dream come true for me to sit with high profile people of the Republic of South Africa. It was awesome! This was the launch of HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT). I pinched myself. To make sure I was awake and it was not a dream. Indeed I was not dreaming. It was reality. Amongst the dignitaries present were Deputy President Kgalema Motlante. I was going to make this a moment to remember. I required permission to take photos and I was allowed to take pictures of the ministers and of the deputy president. Wow, I shook hands! I felt like I never want to wash my hands. I felt very much like a celebrity that day. When I got home I was boasting about my experience. As much as I was not respected by society, those very same people suddenly showed me some respect.

I was determined to give my full support to the movement as I could see that it was indeed a good platform for me to establish a name for myself as I really want to be an activist for sex workers.

We then got an offer as sex workers within the movement of Sisonke to be volunteers in hosting the 17th International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA) at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. As sex workers we were overwhelmed by the invitation and we took this opportunity to network and showcase our talents.

We signed forms to be volunteers, and we had to undergo

training. It was estimated that ten thousand people would be attending the conference, among them dignitaries, heads of state and members of parliament from different countries, celebrities and civil society. As much as we were nervous as sex workers to be part of this huge conference, we were looking forward to the event and we were determined to give our best. People were not aware that us sex workers have potential and skills, that we were not only limited to engaging in sexual activities. We showed we were unique people indeed.

The conference lasted for 10 days, opening on the 7 December until the 11 December. From the 3 December we worked really hard, unpacking boxes, setting up the ICC in line with what the directors wanted the place to look like. It was quite hectic.

However tragedy fell upon the children of South Africa and the world when our beloved icon Utata Nelson Mandela passed on (may his soul rest in peace) on the 5 December 2013. This disturbed a vast number of people expected to attend ICASA. We were ready to carry on as Tata Mandela was himself an AIDS activist. His life was celebrated rather than mourned.

The 7 December opening of the conference and the ceremony was to take place in the main hall of the Convention Centre. Our Deputy President Mr Kgalema Motlante was present, police were all over the place, heads of state from Nigeria, Kenya and many other African countries were there. The place was jam packed but I was not fortunate enough to attend the opening as I was allocated to work in the Positive Lounge. This was a tranquil space where one could go to relax and take a breather, take a nap, have a snack, take your meds. Every volunteer at ICASA envied those of us working at the Positive Lounge as it was the best space. At the lounge we were a team of six people who managed the space.

Other colleagues were allocated to other points. Some were

greeters, welcoming people to ICASA, others were helping at the bag counters, or with the distribution of bags in the exhibition hall.

On the 9 December Sisonke hosted the first Miss Transgendered pageant. This was held at the ICASA networking zone's platform. I was delighted to take part in the pageant. I borrowed a stunning dress from a friend and I had hopes of claiming the crown. Frankly I did not even make it to the top three, but I appreciated the exposure we got as transgendered sex workers. And that we were recognised and could showcase our beauty at such an event. I felt honoured to have taken the initiative of dressing up, making myself look glamorous, and modelling for my movement.

The following day I hosted a panel at the women's zone. We had an open dialogue for transgender and intersex people and the general public were allowed to voice their opinions. As the host of that panel I felt empowered and recognised. I was very nervous but everything went smoothly. There were two other transgendered female sex workers and an intersex person on the panel. People were shocked to see that we were in fact the so-called lady boys.

I can now without any hesitation, wear a T-shirt with 'This Is What a Sex Worker Looks Like' written on it, because I am part of the movement who strives and is determined to decriminalise sex work.

Sisonke, 'Nothing About Us Without Us'.

How We Organise as Home Based Care Workers





The first section of this chapter is compiled from the words shared at OWRAP gatherings by Network members:

**Phumzile Mbatha
Thandi Zulu
Nonhlanhla Shandu
Dudu Majola
Zandile Mnguni
Ntombi Sibiya
Beauty Skakane
Mabongi Khanyile**

Justice and Women staff member:

Grace Ngema



At the four OWRAP gatherings between February 2012 and February 2014

**Mthonjaneni Home Based Care
Network members shared their ongong
struggles and how they were taking
these up.**

The Mthonjaneni Home Based Care Network (MHBCN) was formed to advocate for our rights as care givers together in one voice.

The organisation came out of our experience in a meeting with the Gender Commissioner. The Department of Health used to employ home based care workers through the Project Support Association of South Africa (PSASA). But this had stopped and most of us were no longer being paid for our work. Some were being paid but not regularly. Phumzile, for example, worked for PSASA earning R250 a month. The payment was not monthly – at times she would get R500 for two months.

At the meeting with the gender commissioner, home based care workers were angry – we talked about doing work for which we were not paid. We talked about people who came into our areas from the Department of Health in big cars while we got nothing.

We decided to form an organisation, with membership for groups of home based care workers. So the Network was formed out of unhappiness and trauma.

Justice and Women (JAW) staff were at this meeting and we home based care workers were expecting big things from JAW. As Grace from JAW explains:

The home based care workers saw white people and thought they are coming with big things. JAW said we are coming with nothing but knowledge. We said we are not driving big cars. We want to help you. We want to understand the situation you are in. The home based care workers thought JAW would provide funding and work. But JAW wanted to build them to be strong so they would advocate for their own rights as women who are doing work. JAW said let's form a network to speak in one voice. At the time, homebased care workers

were fighting over scarce resources – for example if the district was giving out food parcels they won't tell each other, they would just go on their own. JAW wanted them to form a big strong group. The members then began to realise how JAW could help them through training.

People felt abandoned and found it very hard to get to a point of speaking transparently, to get involved in a proposal and a meeting with a funder.

But people started to come to Network meetings because when we are in the space we are motivated, we get knowledge, we share ideas, we feel better, and we get hope that we can one day get a job.

The Network has a 10-person task team. Our main gains are proposal writing and doing proposals together, funding from Lotto, trainings on ARVs, HIV and AIDS. The trainings will help with getting employment. People coming from JAW training know more than the home based care workers employed by the Department of Health.

Through JAW and the Network we also get knowledge to deal with things like the bribery.

Our right to get fair employment is abused. We face bribery and corruption, just in trying to get a job. People in charge, people in power abuse their power. For example, a supervisor of the Home Based Care Programme employed by the Department of Health wants bribes before she can even hand out an application form for a home based care job.

Home based care jobs are offered by the government, but are being 'sold' or captured by clinic sisters and other middle people. The inkosi, indunas and ward councillors who get information about the jobs do not share the information with

the people. Instead they make sure their relatives and friends benefit. People who are doing this work, and those who need the jobs the most, are denied opportunities even though they have the qualifications.

Some people who need jobs are prepared to pay bribes of between R500 to R1000. Others are not prepared to pay bribes and this divides us. Women who pay bribes do not want to talk about it. They are afraid to lose their jobs. They are afraid of husbands and families.

To pay bribes women borrow money from loan sharks, from neighbours, or from their housekeeping money. Their husbands and families do not know they have borrowed money. The women who pay bribes don't want husbands and families to know that they took this money – they are afraid that their husbands will take action against them. And they are afraid of the consequences on the family.

People such as clinic sisters, the inkosi, indunas and ward councillors and the loan sharks all benefit from this situation. The women who get jobs end up paying a large part of their earnings to the loan shark. Others who do not get jobs use their children's grants to pay the loans. We see similarities to the situation of sex workers who are bribed by police.

As black women living in poverty we are exploited by the system. People like the home based care supervisors use their power to overpower the women. The women who want home based care jobs can use their power to speak about these issues. Refusing to pay bribes is one way to use power. This is power that comes with knowledge and to say 'no' to corruption. Women can come together to find a solution. Trust is broken among the women. We are divided. There should be unity among us.

The main players are the women and we need to see how we can build their power. Those who use their power to abuse us, to put us down and undermine our work, make us believe that our work is not important. They don't want us to know that our work is important. What government pays home based care workers is called a stipend and not a salary and this undermines our work. The community does not recognise and value us. All of this makes us lose our passion and confidence. We don't value our work, we are undermined, we become ashamed and embarrassed of our work. We must believe in the value of our own work – it starts with us.

We worked together to define our work as home based care workers and build agreements on how we work. We wanted to show how much we are doing with limited resources. We tried to get access to information on how government is recruiting, advertising, and their criteria, so as to ensure that this is a fair and equal process. We wanted to hold the Department of Health accountable. We wanted the Department of Health to set a new clear transparent and accountable process for recruitment of home based care workers. So our plan was to expose our secret, expose government's secret, and to define our work.

During 2012 we exposed our secret that often members speak with two tongues – that the chairperson of our Network and Network members who agreed we do not want bribery paid and took bribes. The Network disciplined these members, demoted the chairperson and dismissed members.

This was painful but we had to do it. Exposing secrets was not easy – this can destroy overnight what we have built over a long time. This affected the level of trust and divided the group. Some stopped attending meetings and the Network nearly fell apart.

We realised that when people are desperate they can get

involved in bribery, and will pay a R500 bribe to get a job. We tried to get people to talk about this. It was very difficult for people to talk – they feared being expelled from the Network if they admitted to paying a bribe. We took members back because not a single member has not been involved in bribery. We gave them a second chance so we can rebuild the Network. They value the space to connect with members. We trust they will not do this again. We had to work hard to rebuild trust among members of the Network. We had to start over again.

We exposed the health department's secret. We sent a letter to the CEO of the hospital requesting a meeting. The CEO did not meet with us. The hospital appointed a private investigator and took disciplinary action. We met with the investigator and we attended the hospital hearing. A JAW staff member was implicated in the bribery and JAW took the action of firing her. The clinic sister was suspended. That was the way we exposed the secret.

Because of the bribery involving our members and the JAW staff member energy in Melmoth was not as high as in Sisonke and the Seasonal Farm Worker Structures. It takes long to build trust again. The Network took back their power and are doing things for themselves. We are recruiting more members to the task team. We developed a code of conduct and brought all members back into the Network.

To define our work we drew up a report form to capture our care work, and we worked out the hours and the rate of pay. The Lotto funding enabled us to pay stipends to Network members for their care work. We had to think through who is in who is out with the stipends. We agreed that those members already employed by the health department as Community Care Givers (CCGs) are out. We agreed on paying for 10 hours of care work a month for those who have been members for a long time. Each month we submit reports to the Network task

team on the challenges with patients and on our hours worked. Only when we submit reports do we get stipends. Because we now keep statistics we know that Network members saw 813 families in 2013.

Funding from the Sugar Association enabled us to buy airtime and material such as diapers, linen savers, gloves and masks to do our work. We bought T-shirts for members so that we are known in the community as belonging to the Network. We did not have these materials before. Having this helped us do our work more professionally, increased our confidence in ourselves, and increased the level of trust from the community.

We wrote a letter requesting information on recruitment from the hospital CEO. We gave them five days to respond. We got a reply in one day that the district municipality is recruiting. We went to the mayor requesting information on recruitment. The mayor replied that her office is not involved in recruitment, and we should contact the Pietermaritzburg office. Till now they have not come back to us.

We are concerned that the health department took a decision to employ 18 to 35 year-olds as CCGs. This will leave out many Network members because they are older. We need to take up the age issue. Whose rule is this? Is this not discriminatory?

Soon after our discussion with the mayor we saw a post advertised on taxis. Before that no one was employed. Posts had been frozen. People were saying JAW and the Network has impacted on recruitment. There were 17 posts advertised but these have now been stopped. The councillor was appointing who he wanted and the CEO stopped this. Hospital officials are known for corruption. But when the CEO hired a private investigator we realised he was not involved.

Justice and Women (JAW) has a presence in the War Rooms

set up by government with the intention of fighting poverty and diseases, in particular HIV and AIDS, and TB, crime, and to empower women and youth. The idea with War Rooms is to bring government closer to the people. Government departments and community representatives are supposed to attend the War Rooms and our Network is invited to team structure meetings.

JAW attended the War Rooms but no department representatives were there. Or they will come 10 minutes before closure. JAW has posed questions. Now we want the hospital to answer. We asked how many CCGs are there in the area? They say 26, we know only two. We wanted to know who these are, where do they work? The hospital said they cannot attend the War Rooms as these are NGO meetings.

In our research we found women who are HIV positive are being forced to undergo sterilisation so as not to have any more children. We exposed this. The hospital CEO went to the women who had done the research and asked who got them to do the research. The women said it was JAW. The hospital now hates JAW and wants to get rid of JAW.

The Department of Health tried to divide the Network by offering a strong Network member a CCG job. She told us about this and together we asked why is this offer being made? We realised it was an attempt to divide and weaken the Network and to prevent us from pushing the hospital for accountability and more transparent employment processes. To prevent dividing and weakening the Network this member made the decision to refuse the job.

From this experience we realised that we need to have a way of intervening so that we are not divided – this can make us focus on each other rather than on those in power over us.

CREATE in Pietermatitzburg trained us on disability – on how to work with disabled children and elderly people. Following this training we did a survey to find disabled people.

Some of us have been working with a new JAW initiative called ‘Who Owns My Body’ (WOMB). We work with home groups. Community mobilisers work on issues we want to change. The mobiliser calls five or ten women to talk about women’s issues. We challenge custom – for example that women must not speak. We make women aware of their right to speak. We start with a story. For example, about a woman who is HIV positive who is forced by a doctor to be sterilised so that she will not have children. After reading the story we ask: How do people feel about this? What would they do in a similar situation? What are the rights of a woman who is HIV positive?’ In these discussions we challenge power, for example the power of men to demand sex when women are sick. Women feel they cannot say no even when they do not want sex. We composed a song:

This is my body
I have a right over it
You won’t touch it without my permission.

Through adopting the Serenity Prayer we are taking matters into our own hands rather than waiting for things to drop into our hands. The prayer says:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

This has meant a shift from waiting to be recruited as Community Care Givers to taking actions to see how we can live what we want to do.

Writing about our actions



**Zandile Mnguni
Ntombi Sibiya**



Zandile Mnguni

Who am I? I am a person. If I am a person what do I have? I have a body. How am I supposed to think about my body? Who owns my body? These are kinds of questions we ask ourselves as women when we are doing ‘home groups’.

One day I invited women to come because I wanted to talk to them about something. I also told them that I was going to bring biscuits and juice while we are talking and they were happy for that.

That day came, and I noticed that the women are living in difficult conditions and they don’t know what to do. We discussed that sometimes cultural practices have a negative impact on us as women because they are oppressive practices. When we ask why there is this culture and who started it, we find answers that are not satisfying. People just say we grew up like this and things are just happening in this way.

We discussed the issue of daughters-in-law being asked or expected to wake up early in the morning to prepare food for the family. Some women agreed that daughters-in-law should wake up early in the morning before everyone else and prepare food for the family because it is their job. Others –the young ones – said that this is oppressing them as women. The question was: do all families practice that? It was said that this differs for different families and that it is not culture but it is just something done by people who believe in it.

People shared that when their children get married, they are treated badly and differently from other family members. Even if they are not feeling well, or if they are tired, they cannot stay in bed. They agreed that if a person is sick or tired she should be given a choice to stay in bed until she wants to wake up.

They have a right as daughters-in-law to make decisions, or be included when decisions are taken.

At the end of our discussion people were very happy. They asked me to come back and open their eyes on other issues as I had opened their eyes on things that they did not think about before.

Ngingubani? Ngingumuntu. Uma ngingumuntu nginani? Umzimba. Kumele ngicabange kanjani ngomzimba wami? Lena eminye yemibuzo esizibuza yona njengabantu besifazane uma “sihlangene emakhaya”.

Ngelinye ilanga ngamema abesifazane ngoba ngangifuna ukukhuluma nabo ngokuthile. Ngabatshela ukuthi ngizoza namakhekhe netiye kanye nojuzi siphuze ngenkathi sixoxa futhi bakujabulela lokho.

Lwafika ke lolosuku, into engayibona ukuthi baphila ngaphansi kwezimo ezinzima futhi abazi ukuthi benzeni. Saxoxa ukuthi ngesinye isikhathi amasiko anemithelela emibi kithi thina bantu besifazane ayasicindezela. Uma sibuzo ukuthi kungani, isiko leli laqalwa ubani, eliqalelani? Sathola izimpendulo kodwa ezingagculisi. Abantu babethi sonke sakhula kunje kwenziwa kanje, futhi zonke izinto zenzeka kanje ngalendlela.

Saphinda saxoxa ukuthi kungani umakoti acelwe, noma alindeleke ukuthi avuke ekuseni ngovivi kusempondozankomo alungise ukudla komndeni wonke na? Abanye bavuma bathi vele kufanele ukuthi avuke kuqala kunawo wonke umuntu, ngoba vele into okumele yenziwe umakoti. Abanye abasebancane bona bathi kuyabacindezela bona njengabantu besifazane. Umbuzo waba sekutheni ngabe yonke imindeni iyakholelwa kulokho na? Kwabe sekushiwo ukuthi kuyahluka ngemindeni ngemimndeni

futhi lokho kusho ukuthi isiko lenziwa abantu abakholelwa kulo.

Abantu bagcina sebebona izinto ngenye indlela yokuthi uma izingane zabo zishada ziphathwa kabi futhi ngendlela ehlukile emindenini yalapho abashadele khona. Noma bezizwa ukuthi abaphilile noma bakhathele abakwazi ukulala embhedeni ilanga lonke. Bavumelana ngokuthi uma umuntu ezizwa ukuthi akaphathekile kahle, kumele avunyelwe ukulala aze avuke uma esezizwa esengcono. Omakoti banalo ilungelo lokuthatha isinqumo noma bambandakanywe ekuthatheni isinqumo ngezinto ezibathintayo.

Ekupheleni kwengxoxo yethu, abantu babejabule baze bangicela ukuthi ngiphinde ngibameme futhi. Ngizobavula amehlo ngezinye izinto njengoba ngenzile ngabavula amehlo ngezinto ebebengazicabangi ngaphambilini.

Ntombi Sibiya

That was a bright day, the sun was shining beautifully and the sky was blue with no clouds. Everyone was happy and shouting with joy because the day had come for us to feel empowered. This was the day we received the material for our home based care work: diapers, gloves, masks, linen savers and purple T-shirts as our uniform.

This was a great moment because we were worried that we were helping sick people without protecting ourselves or giving any material to the community. We were also concerned that without uniforms we had no identity as compared to paid Community Care Givers. As we received our purple shirts, everyone was smiling like a beautiful sun in the sky.

The material we received increased our confidence and self-esteem because people we were helping in the community were happy to get diapers and other material. They appreciated us and made us feel that we can bring change to their lives. Even families who had asked us not to come back if we didn't have any materials to give were happy and allowed us in their homes.

Kwakuwusuku olugqamile. Ilanga lithe bha, libalele kahle nesibhakabhaka siluhlaza kamnandi, kungekho ngisho amafu. Wonke umuntu ejabule, kumenyezwa ngenjabulo ngoba usuku lwaselufikile lapho sasizizwa sinamandla khona. Lelo langa kwakuwusuku lapho sasizothola khona izinsiza kusebenza esasizozisebenzisa njengoba sasinakekela umphakathi. Kwakukhona amanabukeni, izifonyo amaglavi, kanye nezikibha

zethu zomfaniswano ezibukhwebezane.

Kwakuwumzuzu omnandi kithi ngoba sasikade sikhathazekile. Sasisiza abantu ngaphandle kwezinsiza kusebenza, sinakekela abagulayo, futhi singenakho okunye esingakunika umphakathi noma umndeni womuntu ogulayo. Nanokuthi sasingenawo umfaniswano wethu esibonakala ngawo njengoba kukhona abanye abasebenza nomphakathi bona bayahola futhi bona benawo. Ngalokho uma sesithola lemifaniswano sasijabule, wonke umuntu wayemamatheka njengelanga esibhakabhakeni.

Izinsiza kusebenza esazithola, zakhuphula izinga lethu lokuzithemba. Nathi sagqama sabonakala. Abantu esasibasiza emphakathini babejabule besenza sizizwe ukuthi singaluletha ushintsho ezimpilweni zabo. Nasemphakathini ngoba kwakukhona imindeni eyayisithe singabuyi ngoba asibasizi ngalutho, emva kwalokho bajabula basimukela futhi ukuthi siqhubeke nomsebenzi wethu emizini yabo.

Learning From Each Other



The first section of this chapter is compiled from the words shared at OWRAP gatherings by members of Sisonke, Mthonjaneni Home Based Care Network and Seasonal Farm Worker Structures:

**Bettie Fortuin
Charmaine Fortuin
Jenetta Louw
Drieka Pawuli
Dudu Majola
Thandi Zulu
Nonhlanhla Shandu
Phumzile Mbatha
Angelina De Bruin
Duduzile Dlamini**

Women on Farms Project staff:

**Ida Jacobs
Bongeka Ntshweza
Carmen Louw**

Justice and Women staff member:

Grace Ngema



At each gathering the women spoke of what they were learning from each other and how they were inspiring each other.

Meeting together in OWRAP over these two years we learnt a lot from each other, we got to know each other, and we got the opportunity to share. The process encouraged us to put into action what we had planned. We knew we must organise all the time as sex workers, home based care workers and seasonal farm workers.

There were a lot of exchanges on our challenges, we were able to network with each other. This was a space for reflecting on what we planned, on our successes, and the gaps we need to fill.

Even in our own organisations we often don't get time to share with colleagues. We were able to take ideas from OWRAP back to our organisations. Some ideas worked for us.

Over two years we got to know each other and our organisations better. Before this we all did our own thing. Now farm workers invite us – like on their march. Sisonke invited us to their Creative Space. We are one family. We get encouraged by seeing what each of us has done. We are able to help each other.

All three of our organisations are not recognised by government, but we were empowered to be strong activists who fight for our rights. We were able to bring more members into our organisations, to improve our members' understanding, to increase membership, and build solidarity.

From KwaZulu–Natal we travelled by plane to Cape Town for the first time and saw Table Mountain. We took information back to the members in our network on the farm workers' strike, and on Sisonke. We learnt from other organisations on their strategies – for example, how Sisonke deals with the police. How they were able to get the Deputy Minister of Police to visit them.

As farm workers we took the idea of Sisonke's pocket booklet on rights. We were telling farm workers, 'Know your rights. You must always have the pamphlet with you.' From the Mthonjaneni Home Based Care Network we took the strategy of solidarity in fighting corruption.

As sex worker members of Sisonke we learnt of solidarity from the farm workers' strike and from the refusal of the home based care worker from the Network to be bought off by the Department of Health.

We also saw differences in how we organised – like the farm workers' march which they did on the spur of the moment without getting permission. While the sex workers' marches took time to plan and they had to ask for permission. We saw also how sex workers have to hide behind masks on their marches because their work is illegal and often their families do not know they are sex workers. These things also made it more difficult to organise sex workers.

We also shared that as women we face additional challenges that men workers do not face. Women are discriminated against in unions, in organisations, and in our homes. Women are expected to inform men and get men's permission for anything we do. Women have to work on endless duties in our homes and around our children, while men are free to move about. These things affect women's organising.

We shared the following experiences at one of the OWRAP gatherings:

Grace: I married into a patriarchal family where men in the family had many wives. I told my husband if you want another wife you must divorce me. I said to him I want to go to work. His sister asked me to take her position at SPAR as she was retiring. He said no. I came to a point where I realised I am not happy.

How many years do I have to spend to please others and make them happy? I said I am going to study. He said over my dead body. I came across the Justice and Women advert, I applied. I started enjoying my life. I did a community development course at University of KwaZulu-Natal. My husband changed. Now he is proud of me. He invites me to meetings and says I want to hear your view, speak your mind.

Betty: When I came to Sandhills there was no councillor. I started working on the ground with women. People elected me and these two guys were in my way. It was difficult to fight the men dominating and pressing you down. I won the Ward but most nights I was crying because of this man pressing me down.

Ida: I divorced my husband – he was cheating, abusing me physically and emotionally. Before I divorced I found someone else. The community spoke about me, my mother did not speak to me for a year. I was called a slut. My husband was not called names. I am now a strong woman who speaks in front of cameras. I am not shy. I told people in my community I was raped. I dealt with it. The perpetrator went to jail. I can empower others to stand up for themselves. I can recruit other women by using my personal story.

Charmaine: How can we start changing that men are head of house and that women must obey men? I am teaching my son you are equal – the new generation should break old norms. They can grow up equal. Men hear about gender equality yet they still want to dominate women – they practice patriarchy, they want to be the boss, they want to dominate.

Phumzile: My partner told our children that the boy is responsible for outside work, the girls for cooking, dishes, etc. I changed that –we are all equal – my son does dishes.

Bongeka: If we can try to do that with our children. I have a

baby girl. I will buy her a car. When I am asked why did I buy her a car, I say it is us, we have to change our culture. A family member who is not married, she was living together with the guy. He hit her, he took her money and ran off. These are crimes against women and children.

Ida: Sikhula Sonke is a women-led trade union – a man has to sign a code of conduct if he wants to join. It is a women's organisation and it set the terms. This is one example of empowering women workers

Phumzile: With home based care, when it was being paid, men were getting the jobs. Then when there is no funding only one man was left. Women usually elect men into positions. It is very hard for a woman to believe in yourself. It is difficult for men to let go of power.

Writing on Learning From Each Other



**Charmaine Fortuin
Jenetta Louw
Bettie Fortuin
Andiswa Ndevana
Angelina De Bruin
Sphiwe Ndlovu
Mabongi Khanyile
Phumzile Mbatha
Thandi Zulu**

At the February 2013 OWRAP gathering participants wrote about what they had learnt from each other. They wrote of how they were inspired by each other, how they learnt new strategies, and how they are convinced of the importance of standing together as women workers. The farm workers' strike moved everyone and highlighted solidarity even in the face of police brutality.

Charmaine Fortuin

Each group shared what is happening in their organisation. We the farm workers spoke about our strike that happened in November 2012. There was brutality from police. We spoke about the people who were injured and died. Those who died are heroes but their names will not be remembered and their families will not get support. Sisonke had marches but these were different. Sex workers had to march with masks to hide themselves from the police, and from family members who do not know they are sex workers. The point that shocked me was that if they would strike who will they strike against? Because they are their own bosses. Whereas we have the farmer as boss. The home based care workers are very strong women. They are now doing things on their own without Justice and Women. We are all fighting for one thing – we all want changes, especially for women.

Jenetta Louw

As farm workers we shared our experiences of the strike. We never thought we would be part of something like that. We learned from the women in our organisation. That they mobilised other women by waking them early in the morning. We supported one another during the strike and we are all strong women. I feel sad about the families who lost loved ones.

Bettie Fortuin

I felt very proud to be part of the farm workers' strike and I felt glad that I am able to explain to others what really happened during the strike. I felt good to portray how we enforce our rights on the farm. I realised again that women must stand up, and unite. For too long women were oppressed by men and the world. When I get back to De Doorns I will listen to the women more regarding their problems and what they want to do about them. I will always be humble and respectful towards members. I will share my knowledge with others. I will put the interest of others before mine. I will convince them to join a good organisation. There must be women leaders at all levels. I heard about transgender from Sisonke. I understand more what this is about and I will discuss with my fellow farm workers.

Andiswa Ndevana

Different organisations came together to look at how we work in our different areas. Farm workers had their chance to express themselves by telling their stories and experiences on farms where the farmers treat them as slaves and pay them very little. Even though we had the strike at the end of the day we did not benefit in anything because we are still earning the same amount and others even got less than they usually got. From the group of Mthonjaneni Home Based Care Network members I learned that they are working together as a team and they trust each other, they care for each other, and there is connection between them. The sex workers, when they have issues, are able to sit down and look at their issues and also solve them. I learned that in our women's group we must stand up and work together. Fighting for our rights we can do a lot.

Angelina De Bruin

What stood out for me was the number of people who participated in the farm worker march – 10 000 to be correct. It never happened before. We learnt that we have to empower and support one another in our struggles. I also learnt that this country is still male dominated. The people who make decisions about our lives are still 80% men. The leaders include very few women. What amazed me of the home based carers was that they had the guts to expose corruption in the health sector, and one of them refused to be bribed. That to me is pure solidarity. She proved that she can't be bought and will not leave her colleagues to fight for themselves. I think this should be an example to all of us. We can learn from all organisations how they empower themselves. We motivate each other to stand up for our rights.

Sphiwe Ndlovu

It was good to meet with the different organisations. From sex workers, I learned that they are passionate about their work and they are not ashamed of their work. They are proud of who they are. They work together and stand for the truth they believe in. They are able to share their experiences with other people. I learned from farm workers that you need to fight for your rights, work in solidarity with fellow workers, and take responsibility for what you are doing. I felt sad to hear that other people died in the process of their fight. Even though people died, they showed solidarity and supported each other. They didn't give up, they continued with their strike. I learned from this that it is important to work together and fight for what you believe.

Kwakumnandi ukuhlangana nezihlangano ezahlukeni. Kuma

sex worker ngafunda ukuthi bayawuthanda umsebenzi wabo futhi abazenyazi ngawo. Bayaziqhenya ngokuthi bangobani. Basebenza ngokubambisana ndawonye futhi bayalimela iqiniso lalokho ababakholelwa kukho. Bayakwazi futhi ukuxoxa ngezimo abadlule kuzo nabanye abantu.

Ngafunda kubasebenzi basemapulazini ukuthi kufuneka ulwe ulwele amalungelo akho usebenze ngokubambisana nabanye ozakwenu. Ngezwa ubuhlungu ukuthi abanye abantu bashona kade belwela amaholo angcono. Noma kukhona abashona kulesosimo, kodwa basaqhubeka nokukhombisa ukuzwelana nokwesekana. Ngakho ke ngafunda ukuthi kubalulekile ukusebenzisana nilwele lokho enikholelwa kukho.

Mabongi Khanyile

From farm workers I learned that nothing can stand in the way of women if women want to do something. In small group discussions with SWEAT, Seasonal Farm Workers, and Mthonjaneni Home Based Care Network, I learned that when women are prepared to do something nothing can separate them. I also realised that we need to clearly understand our rights as women. We need to make relationships with individual government department workers so that if we have problems we can approach them for immediate assistance. It is important to have contact numbers for different departments. I learned that we need to stand up and speak for what we want because no one will speak for you when you are sitting down.

Lastly, I learned that it is very difficult for women to move away from being abused if they are socialised in particular ways. For instance, if a woman believes that a man is superior she will always take his orders because she believes that a man is the one who makes decisions. It is still a challenge to get used to the idea that we are equal and we need to do things equally.

Kubasebenzi basemapulazini ngafunda ukuthi akukho lutho

olungama endleni yabantu besifazane uma befuna ukwenza into. Ekusebenzisaneni ngamaqeqebana amancane phakathi kuka SWEAT, Seasonal Farm Worker Structures, no MHBCN, ngafunda ukuthi uma abantu besifazane bezimisele ukwenza into, akukho okungama endleleni yabo. Ngabona ukuthi kubalulekile ukwazi amalungelo ethu njengabathu besifazane. Sidinga ukwakha ubudlelwane nabasebenzi beminyango kahulumeni yikhona siyokwazi ukuxhumana nabo uma sinezinkinga sidinga usizo oluphuthumayo. Kubalulekile ukuthi sibe nezinombolo zokuxhumana nabeminyango kahulumeni. Ngafunda nokuthi kumele sisukume sizikhulumele lokho esikufunanyo ngoba uma sihlezi akekho ozosukuma asikhulumele. Okokugcina engakufunda ukuthi kunzima kithina bantu besifazane ukuphuma ekuhlukunyezweni abantu besilisa ngoba yindlela esikhuliswe ngayo. Njengokuthi uma umuntu wesifazane ekholelwa ekutheni indoda inkulu kunaye, uyohlala enza lokho ethi akakwenze ngoba ukholelwa ekutheni yindoda enamandla okuthatha izinqumo. Kusenzima ukujwayela ukuthi siyalingana ngakho kumele senze izinto ngokulinganayo.

Phumzile Mbatha

It was very exciting and interesting to meet other women and share ideas. We gained a lot that we are going to use to help us to strengthen our Network. It was very painful when our partners were telling us about their strike on the farms as we've been hearing about it over the radio and watching on TVs. It was very hard but if you are a woman and you know what you want, you fight with all your strength for what you want. You even choose to die as there were lives of people lost during the strike because of fighting for what they want. I liked the way they demonstrated to us how they deal with their employers. They showed how they support each other. Even though they didn't get all they needed, they at least got something from working together and from the strength of speaking with one

voice. I wish for us to be like the farm workers one day. Not to be intimidated by what people say about what we are doing. To believe what we are saying will help our group. I am wondering what will stop us because even Justice and Women (JAW) used to tell us to be independent. Sisonke and SWEAT encouraged us to write to the Minister of Health and even to parliament because our work is important and people in our community need us.

Kwakungeve kujabulisa ukuhlangana nabanye abantu besifazane sikwazi ukukhuluma nathi ngezinkinga zethu ezahlukenene. Safunda okuningi futhi ngicabanga ukuthi sizokusebenzisa kuzosisiza ukuqinisa inhlangotho yethu. Kwakubuhlungu ukuzwa abalingani bethu besitshela ngokuteleka kwabo njengoba sase sizwile ngakho emsakazweni nakumabonakude. Kwakunzima kakhulu kodwa uma ungumuntu wesifazane futhi wazi ukuthi ufunani, ulwa ngawo wonke amandla onawo ukuthola lokho okufunayo. Uncamela nokufa, njengalabo abalahlekelwa izimpilo zabo belwela lokho abakufunayo.

Ngathanda indlela ababenza ngayo ukusikhombisa ukuthi babenze kanjani ukulwisana nabaqashi babo. Nokuthi babesekana kanjani bonke. Noma bengakutholanga konke ababekufuna, kodwa kukhona abakuthola ngokusebenzisana ndawonye namandla okukhuluma ngezwi elilodwa. Ngifisa sengathi nathi besingafana nabasebenzi basemapulazini ngolunye usuku. Singasatshiswa ukuthi abantu bathini ngalokho esikwenzayo. Senze lokho esikholelwa kukhona ukuthi kuzosisiza thina. Ngiyacabanga nje ukuthi yini engasivimba ukuba sizimele, ngisho uJustice And Women uhlale esitshela ukuthi kumele sikwazi ukuzimela. Nabehlangano ka SWEAT basiququzela ukuthi sibhalele ungqongqoshe wezempilo nasephalamende imbala ngoba umsebenzi wethu ubalulekile futhi abantu emphakathini bayasidinga.

Thandi Zulu

We were here to fight with one voice. We learnt a lot – like the story of the farm workers in the strike we saw on TV. They told us so many people died in that strike and one of the members of that strike – Auntie Bettie – was on the front line. I learnt that if you are proud of yourself you can do whatever you want. You need to trust yourself and know what you are doing. The sex workers told us about their experiences and about strategies we need. You need to do research and get knowledge about the thing you need to take action around. If you need to do a strike you need information on how to do a strike. If you need to shame government you need to have the right information. They told us of the unity between SWEAT and Sisonke. Like the farm workers they face the police. All the groups are very strong and supportive and are fighting for their own rights.



A HEALING SPACE





Writing Our Pain to Heal

**Charmaine Fortuin
Zandile Mnguni
Phumzile Mbatha
Ntombi Sibiya
Jenetta Louw
Duduzile Dlamini**

At the last OWRAP gathering in February 2014, Women on Farms Project and the seasonal farm workers led a ‘centering’ to remember loved ones. Charmaine writes about the centering, and she, Zandile, Phumzile and Ntombi write about the memories brought back to them that morning about the loss of a child and the loss of parents. Jenetta Louw in her rap, and Duduzile Dlamini in her poem, celebrate what OWRAP meant for them and the group.

Charmaine Fortuin

It's morning. In a few hours I will be going home. I look through the window. The sky is blue and there are no white clouds. I feel happy because the sun is shining. I'm still in bed but I can see there is a breeze because of the leaves moving in the big trees.

Our session of the day started with a centering. For the centering we needed flowers. Me and two of the women went up the mountain to pick some flowers. There were red, purple, white, pink and orange flowers. We arranged the flowers in a heart form and we lit some candles. It looked beautiful.

In the centering we each had to pick a flower and say what the flower meant to us. It was explained that it was the month of love and we can share anything. Maybe the loss of a loved one or something good that happened in your life. We listened to a song of Celine Dion and it brought back many memories for me and all the other women in the group. We could feel each other's pain, joy and achievements. I remembered my son who died four years ago. Not that I have forgotten him, but you don't always get the chance to talk about things like this.

This space made it possible for us to share the feelings we keep locked away. Thanks OWRAP for making it possible. Thank you women for being there to listen. Thank you facilitator for allowing the space. These sessions really give you the strength to reach for the higher skies!

Zandile Mnguni

The Unexpected Loss of My Mother

It was in 2012, when I was attending the Mthonjaneni Home Based Care Network monthly meeting. I left my mother at home as healthy and strong as the ten cent coin we used to have.

When I was in the car going home, I received a phone call telling me to come home quickly because my mother is very sick. That she had severe abdominal pain. I felt cold and was shivering. I wished the car could fill up quickly so that I could rush home, but all was against my will and beyond my control. The car was only going to leave if it was full. I waited and waited in the car and finally it got full and left.

On the way I received a text message asking me to call an ambulance to take my mother to the hospital. I wished I could make the car fly but it was only made to ride on the road. Someone called me again and asked me to rush home. It was raining and the road was slippery and there was no way to drive faster even if I was strong enough to ask the driver to do so. Finally I came to my bus stop and jumped off. I was wearing a long skirt and it got wet from the rain and was tight in a way that I could not walk fast. So I lifted it with my hands so that I could walk faster. The path towards my home was steep, wet and slippery. It was very difficult to walk without falling if you were fast. I was walking like a crazy person.

When I was at a distance where I could see my homestead, I met my other sibling. With curiosity I asked what has happened? She answered with very low energy that nothing has happened. I asked if they had taken my mom to the hospital. I was speaking as if I was going crazy. She responded softly that they were

waiting for me. I got angry and asked why they were waiting for me, that they should have taken her to the hospital. We were talking and hurrying together to get home and I did not realise that she was hiding something from me.

When we were getting closer home there were many people coming in and out of the house. We got in the house and all the women inside were looking down and sad. I yelled at everyone in the room and asked where my mother was. One woman said they were sorry, she had passed away. I screamed with sadness and anger when I saw my mother's body covered. I put myself down against the wall. I threw down the packet of nails that I had bought to finish building my house.

I went outside, screaming, not knowing what I was doing. Neighbours were drawn by the noise and came running to find out what was happening. With confusion I went back into the house and phoned my older brother who was working in Durban, asking what I was supposed to do. He told me to take her to the mortuary and they were going to come home. I was alone at home with my children. I was deeply hurt and depressed. Sometimes people talked to me and I couldn't hear and I was scared.

So the neighbours helped me to take the body to the mortuary because I did not know what to do. I learned that it is good to have healthy relationships with neighbours. As the Zulu saying goes 'the path goes past your neighbour'.

After the death of my mother my life never came right. Things didn't work out between me and my brothers. My brothers didn't want me and my children to live together with their children and their partners. I am not working and I am living with my children on the child support grant of one child as the other one is over age now.

Kwakuwunyaka ka2012 ngenkathi ngisemhlanganweni we MHBCN wezinyanga zonke. Ngangishiye umama ekhaya, wayephilile futhi esaqinile ephila nje impela njengosheleni.

Uma sengisendleni ebuyela ekhaya ngathola ucingo oluthi angiphuthume ekhaya ngokushesha. Kwathiwa umama uyagula usezinhlungwini ezinkulu. Ngavele ngazizwa ngigodola ngavevezela. Ngafisa sengathi nemoto ingagcwala masinyane khona ngizokwazi kusheshe ngifike ekhaya. Konke kwakungaphezu kwamandla ami. Imoto yayizophuma isigcwele. Ngahlala, ngahlala emotweni ekugcineni yaze yagcwala yahamba.

Ngisasendleni ngathola umlayezo othi angishaye le iambulanse ezomthatha imuse esibhedlela. Ngangifisa sengathi ingadiza imoto, kodwa vele ke ikhandelwe ukuhamba emgqaqweni. Omunye wangifonela futhiwathi angiphuthume ekhaya. Izulu lalina, futhi ke kuhambeka kabi emgwaqeni futhi usushelela. Yayingekho indlela yokuthuthi imoto ihambengokushesha. Noma ngangingacela kumshayeli ukuthi agijime, kwakungeke kwenzeke lokho ngoba sasisibi isimo sezulu. Ekugcineni ngafika esitobhini. Ngaphuma ngokushesha. Ngangigqoke isiketi eside. Savele sashesha samanzi yimvula. Ngavele ngasikhuphula ngezandla ngasibamba khona ngizokwazi ukuhamba ngisheshe. Indlela eya ekhaya iyadonsela, imanzi futhi kushelelela. Kwakunzima ukuhamba usheshe ngaphandle kokuwa. Ngagcina sengihambisa okohlanya.

Uma ngisendleleni, ngisekude nje kodwa sengikwazi ukubona ekhaya. Ngahlangana nomunye wasemndenini ngabuza ngifisa ukwazi ukuthi kwenzekalani. Wangiphendula ngomoya ophansi nje wathi akwenzakali lutho. Ngabuza ukuthi sebemhambisile yini umama esibhedlela. Ngangikhuluma ngengomuntu ongaphili ekhanda. Waphendula wathi bebelinde mina. Ngathukuthela kakhulu. Ngabuza ukuthi yini balinde mina.

Bangilinde nani, ngoba bekufanele bemhambise esibhedlela. Sasikhuluma sishesha sihamba sijahe ekhaya. Angibonanga ukuthi khona akufihlayo.

Kwakukhona abantu abaningi bephuma bengena endlini ngesikhathi sesiseduze nasekhaya. Bonke omama ababesendlini babebukeka bedangele, bebheke phansi bebukeka bebuhlungu. Ngafika ngathethisa wonke umuntu owayesendlini. Ngabuza ukuthi uphi umama. Omunye umama wangiphendula wathi bayaxolisa, akasekho usedlule emhlabeni. Ngamemeza kakhulu. Ngakhala kabuhlungu ngentukuthelo, uma ngibona umzimha kamama umboziwe phansi emseleni. Ngawa phansi eduze kwakhe duze nodonga. Ngalahla phansi isijumbule sezipikili engangizithengile ngithi ngizoqubezela ngazo indlu yami.

Ngaphuma phandle ngingazi ngenzani, ngikhala. Ukukhala kwami kwaze kwezwiwa omakhelwane. Beza ngokushesha ukuzozwa ukuthi kwenzenjani kwenzakalani. Ngisadidekile nginjalo, ngathinta umfowethu omdala owayese Thekwini. Ngabuza ukuthi ngenzenjani ngalesimo. Wathi asimuse emakhazeni, bayeza. Ngangingedwa ekhaya nezingane. Omakhelwane yibo abangisiza ukuthatha umzimba kamama ngoba ngangingazi ukuthi ngenzenjani. Futhi ngabona ukuthi kuhle ukuba nobudlelwane obuhle nomakhelwane. Siyasho isiZulu sithi, indlela idlula kwamakhelwane. Ngangibuhlungu ngikhathazekile, noma kukhona okhuluma nami ngangingamuzwa. Ngangingekho esimeni esihle, nganginokwesaba.

Emva kokushona kukamama impilo ayizange isafana. Izinto azihambanga kahle phakathi kwami nobhuti wami. Abazange besangifuna ekhaya kanye nezingane zami. Babengafuni izingane zami nezingane zabo ukuthi zihlale ndawonye. Mina angisebenzi. Ngiphila nezingane zami ngemali yesibonelelo sikahulumeni. Ngithola imali yengane eyodwa ngoba enye isikhulile ayisekho ezingeni lokuthola isibonelelo.

Phumzile Mbatha

My mother passing away, young as I was

It was October 2008 when my mother got sick and ended up in hospital. I was working at Empangeni as a domestic worker. I got phoned that my mother was very sick and was admitted to hospital. I asked permission to go home from where I was working in order to go and check my mother. It was Sunday, so I was able to visit her during the afternoon visiting hours.

I entered the ward at three in the afternoon. As I got in she saw me coming and smiled. She said she was very happy to see me but she was waiting for my uncle and my brother. She asked me to put her scarf nicely on her head and lift her up so that she could lie in a good position. We had a good chat and I asked if she would like anything. She said 'nothing'. She said my young sister Zonke had been visiting her and brought her a braai pack. We laughed because she did not mean braai pack, she meant Kentucky Fried chicken. The visitors' hour was then over and I had to leave. She was happy and I wished her a speedy recovery and she wished me good luck on my way back to work.

The following day was Monday. I was doing washing in the bathroom at work. I received a phone call telling me that my mother passed away after I left yesterday. I never had pain in my life as I felt on that day. I cried because my mother was everything to me. She was a mother, a father, a brother, a sister and everything. I cried until my eyes were totally closed and I could not see at all. I called my employer and told her and she said she was on her way. When she arrived I explained to her about the loss of my mother. Luckily she was a very sensitive

and caring person. She allowed me to leave and she organised a car to take me home to KwaNongoma for the funeral arrangements.

I woke up early and waited for the car that was taking me home. While I was sitting, thoughts came by that I was going home because my mother had died. I couldn't hold myself. Tears kept falling down even if my eyes were swollen. I felt a deep hole inside and did not know how it was going to be filled. I met my young sister at the hospital so that we could apply for the death certificate and organise her insurance.

We went home afterwards and we found many people there. I failed to accept and I cried very loud. People tried to console me which was very hard but finally I calmed down. We went to collect the body. I washed my mother's body, combed her hair and dressed her up. I was happy to be involved in this, her last time with us. We took the body home and the funeral was the following day. During the funeral I was in a better space. Even though I was still hurt I had accepted. I was very happy when my employer came to my mother's funeral.

My mother's death opened a big hole in me and in my life. When things happen in my life, I think if my mother were still alive things would be different. Rest in peace my beloved mother.

Kwakungu October ngonyaka ka2008 ngenkathi umama egula, waze wagcina esibhedlela. Ngaleso sikhathi ngangisebenza Empangeni njengomsizi wasendlini. Ngathola ucingo oluvela ekhaya ngatshelwa ukuthi umama uyagula kakhulu futhi usesibhedlela. Ngacela imvume yokuya ekhaya lapho engangisebenza khona. Ngizokwazi ukubona umama. Kwakulisonto, ngakwazi ukuyombona ngesikhathi sokubona iziguli.

Ngangena emini. Ngisathi ngiyangena nje wavele wangibona wahleka ejabula. Wathi ave ejabula ukungibona, kodwa umuntu alinde ukumbona kakhulu kwakungumalume nobhuti wami. Wangicela ukuthi ngifake kahle isikhafu ekhanda lakhe, bese ngimvusa ngimlalise kahle ngendlela azokwazi ngayo ukulala kahle. Ngakwenza lokho, sasizixoxela kamnandi naye futhi ngambuza ukuthi uthandani. Wathi lutho wathi, usisi wami omncane uZonke kade ekhona uzombona wamphathela ibraai pack. Sahleka ngoba wayeqonde ukusho ukuthi KFC. Ngahlala saze saphela isikhathi sokubonwa kwabagulayo. Kwakumele ngihambe. Ngamfisela ukululama okuhle. Wathi ngihambe kahle sengibuyela ekhaya.

Ngosuku olulandelayo, ngoMsombuluko ngangiwasha endlini yangasese emsebenzini. Ngathola ucingo olusho ukuthi umama useshonile, ushone emva kwami nje kade ngimbona ngayizolo. Ubuhlungu engabuzwa ngalelo langa angikaze ngibuzwe empilweni yami. Ngakhala kakhulu ngoba umama waye yikho konke kimi. Wayengumama, engubaba, engusisi eyikho konke. Ngakhala kwaze kwavaleka amehlo ngingasaboni nhlobo ukukhala. Ngathinta umqashi wami ngamazisa ngokwenzekile. Ngendlela owayenzwelo nobuntu ngakhona, wabanesiceke wangivumela ukuthi ngithathe izinsuku ngiye ekhaya. Wangilungisela imoto eyayizongisa ekhaya KwaNongoma ukuthi ngiyolungisela ukufihla umama.

Ngavuka ekuseni ngalinda imoto eyayizongisa ekhaya. Ngesikhathi ngisahlezi ngilindile, imicabango yabuya kimi ukuthi konje ngiyekhaya nje yingoba kushone umama. Angikwazanga ukuzibamba. Izinyembezi zehla noma amehlo ami ayesevuvukele. Ngezwa imbobo enkulu ngaphakathi kimi futhi engangingayazi ukuthi izovalwa yini. Ngangizohlangana nodadewethu omncane esibhedlela khona sizokwazi ukufaka isicelo sencwadi yokushona futhi sikwazi ukuhlela no masingcwabisane wakhe. Sasizana ukwenza lokho saqeda.

Saya ekhaya emva kwalokho. Sathola abantu bebaningi ekhaya. Ngahluleka ukwamukela, ngakhala kakhulu. Abantu bazama ukungiduduza noma kwakunzima ngaze ngathula ngehlisa umoya. Sahamba sayolanda umzimba wakhe. Ngamgeza ngamkama ekhanda ngamgqokisa, ngajabula ukuba yinxenye yokumlungisa okugcina. Sasesithatha umzimba sesiya ekhaya. Ukufihlwa kwakhe kwakuzoba ngakusasa. Ngesikhathi sokufihlwa kwakhe ngaba sendaweni ekahle emphefumulweni noma ngangibuzwa ubuhlungu ngasengamukelile. Kwangijabulisa kakhulu ukubona umqashi wami efika ezongifihlisa umama.

Ukushona kukamama kwavula imbobo enkulu kimi nase mpilweni yami. Noma izinto zenzeka empilweni yami bengihlale ngicabange ukuthi ukuba umama usaphila ngabe izinto azifani. Lala ngoxolo mama wami engimthandayo.

Ntombi Sibiya

Unfound father

My father had a car. It was sunny on that day in 1979, when he drove to Empangeni where he was working. He did not have enough petrol and the car stopped on the way next to a township near our home. He took the bus to Empangeni.

Time passed and my father did not come home. After months when there was no food at home, my mother decided to go to Empangeni and check why he was not coming home or giving us money or food.

It was raining on the day. She came to his work and asked people there, 'Where is Sibiya?' They told her he had been taken by his employer to Ngwelezane Hospital because he was sick.

My mother had asked my aunt to accompany her, so they went together to Ngwelezane. They were very wet from the rain when they reached Ngwelezane. They asked where my father was. People in the hospital said they did not know him. My mother and aunt then went back to his work and reported that he was not in the hospital. The employer said he took him to the hospital. My mother asked what was wrong with my father that he was taken to the hospital. They said he had a bruise from a stone and his leg was swollen. The employer asked her to go back to the hospital to check again. She went back and asked the hospital to check their books. They checked and said that man was taken to Nkandla. The following day my mother went to Nkandla and asked them to check their records if her husband was there. They did not find anything that reflected his name and asked her to go back to Ngwelezane.

She went back to Ngwelezane and stood in the men's ward and screamed because she was not getting any help and she was tired of going up and down. They finally said that man was buried by the state because he had stayed for a long time. She asked if they could bring his body back so that he could be properly buried by his family. They said that is not easy unless she had money because that costs money. She said she didn't have money and they said then they could not help her.

She went back home and reported to the family that her husband died and was buried by the state. The family was sad and angry. So we ended up burying his clothes instead of his body. This was very sore to all of us, his children and his family.

This thing which happened when I was eighteen always stays in my mind because I always think maybe he didn't die. It would be better if we had a chance to see his body and a chance to bury his body with respect and dignity. I always think about him and feel a hole inside. I wonder how it will be filled and who can fill it. I always ask God to help me accept this because it is always fresh in my mind.

Ubaba wami ongatholakalanga

Ubaba wami wayenemoto, lalibalele ilanga ngalolo suku. Kungu nyaka ka 1979, ngenkathi eshayela eya Empangeni lapho owayesebenza khona. Wayenganawo upethiloli owanele emotweni yakhe. Yama imoto endleleni eduze nelokishi eliseduze kwasekhaya. Wagibela ibhasi eliya Empangeni.

Isikhathi sahamba ubaba engabuyi ekhaya. Emuva kwezinyanga sasingenakudla ekhaya. Umama wathatha isinqumo sokuya Empangeni lapho ayesebenza khona, eyomcinga ukuthi kungani

engasabuyi ekhaya, noma asiphe imali yokudla. Lalina ngalelo langa mhla eya lapho ayesebenza khona. Wafika wabuza ukuthi usebenzela kuphi. 'Uphi iSibiya?' Bamtshela ukuthi uthathwe umqashi wakhe wamusa esibhedlela saseNgwelezane ngoba egula. Umama wacela uanti ukuthi amphelezele baye esibhedlela eNgwelezane.

Lalina ngalelo langa base sebemanzi te imvula ngenkathi befika khona. Babuza ukuthi ngabe ungaphi uSibiya, abantu basesibhedlela bathi abamazi. Umama noAnti bahamba babuyela emuva lapho ayesebenza khona beyosho ukuthi akekho esibhedlela. Umqashi wathi yena umthathile wamusa esibhedlela. Umama wayesebuza ukuthi ingabe ubephethwe yini aze athathwe ayiswe esibhedlela nje. Bathi wabanomhuzuko wetshe wase evuvukala umlenze wase eyiswa esibhedlela. Wase umqashi wakhe ethi ababuyele esibhedlela baphinde beyobheka futhi khona. Babuyela futhi esibhedlela beyobheka ezincwadini zabo. Babheka bathola ukuthi wathathwa wasiwa Enkandla Hospital.

Ngelanga elilandelayo umama waya khona Enkandla. Wafike wabuza khona ecela bambhekele emabhukwini abo ukuthi umyeni wakhe ukhona yini. Abatholanga lutho ekhombisa igama lakhe. Base bethi kuye akabuyele emuva Engwelezane Hospital. Nangempela abuyele khona. Wafika wama egumbini labesilisa, ememeza ngoba engatholi sizo futhi esekhathele ukwehla enyuka. Baze basho bathi lowo baba wangcwatshwa uhulumeni ngoba esehlale isikhathi eside. Wabuza ukuthi engakwazi yini ukumbiwa kubuyiswe umzimba wakhe, khona ezokwazi ukungcwatshwa kahle ngesizotha umndeni wakhe. Bathi lokho kunzima kungcono uma enemali ngoba lokho kuthatha imali eningi. Washo wathi akanamali, bathi ke angeke bekwazi ukumsiza.

Wabuyela ekhaya, wabikela umndeni ukuthi umyeni wakhe washona waze wafihlwa uhulumeni. Umndeni wathukuthela

uphatheke kabi. Baze bagcina sebengcwabe izingubo zakhe esikhundleni somzimba wakhe. Lokho kwababuhlungu kithi sonke thina zingane zakhe nomndeni wonke. Lento yenzeka ngineminyaka eyishumi nesishangalombili. Kwahlala lokho emqondweni wami ngicabanga ukuthi mhlampe akafanga ubaba usaphila. Ingabe kwabangcono ukuba ngawubona umzimba wakhe. Nethuba nje lokuwubona size siwuncgwabe ngenhlonipho nangesithunzi. Ngangihlezi ngicabanga ngaye ngizwa umgodi omkhulu ngaphakathi kimi. Ngizibuza ukuthi uyovalwa yini, uvalwe ubani. Ngihlezi ngicela kuNkulunkulu ukuthi angisize ngamukele lokhu ngoba kusekusha kimi nasemqondweni wami.

Jenetta Louw

In my heart I know
This ain't gonna be our last time
It's too big
We just can't go quiet
What do you think this is?
It's a miracle
O listen to me girl
So stop trying
And we all know
Something is happening
in this space
O this feeling
Is so good to us
This ain't never gonna be our last
And I know we sisters in spirit
And I'm glad
I have you guys in life
Leaving you behind hurts
But knowing you my sisters makes me happy.

Duduzile Dlamini

OWRAP you are the best
No one can change it
You were born the best

Where were you all this time
When we were hungry?
Where were you all this time
When we thirsted and needed water to drink?
All these years we suffering
Years of tears and struggling
Losing hope feeling weak
Our belief and trust gone
Despair of strength and power
Despair of passion

Many women they left on the way
Because of weakness and powerlessness
Shifting of years we fail to be successful
We become cowards

But you OWRAP the first day I met you
That moment every woman who was like me
Got a platform to be born again
You gave us and pumped us with powerful oxygen to breathe
The first day we breathed your strong oxygen in and out
All of us were walking in the air
This was different oxygen in our body
Running softly like the light of a thunderstorm
Miracle work in our body and brain

OWRAP you came into our lives
When we were in a compromising position
Lonely, desperate feeling like losers and failures

You recognised that we are human beings
Gave us space to learn
The space of love and care
To be born again
Space to empower us
To learn and develop
Gives us power and energy
Progress and way forward together
Supporting each other

My trauma and my challenges
I share I this space
Gives me more trust and belief
Grooming us to be real activists
Not for us only but for all women
All over the country

The special space to reflect on our work
In our different organisations
To build strong relationships between us
Supporting each other

OWRAP you are our hero
You are everything
You are springbok
You are the star and the light for our organisations
You are the way for us
Our big tree of shade
You recognise us when no one sees us
You care about us when no one cares about us
You show us the street light
Today we are strong and powerful
We see where we are going
We are like the sun in the morning
The sun that comes after the darkness.

A Note on the OWRAP Action Learning Process

The *Oxfam Womens Rights Advancement Programme* (OWRAP) process ran from March 2012 to February 2014. The purpose was to to strengthen organising, efforts to build power within, and to promote joint learning and action among:

- * home based care workers of the MHBCN supported by JAW
- * sex worker members of Sisonke supported by SWEAT
- * seasonal farm workers supported by WFP

Preplanning Workshops were held in February and March 2012 by each organisation to discuss interest in a joint action learning project; key issues they would bring to the process; and to nominate representatives who would attend the process.

A joint Planning Meeting was held in March 2012 where representatives teased out the key issues and the actions they would take up. They agreed to reflect on their actions at three gatherings over a two year period. Key issues for sex workers were police harassment and decriminalising sex work; for home based care workers the key issue was exposing the 'secrets' of corruption which affected their ability to get work; and for seasonal farm workers the key issue was to ensure they would be covered by labour laws.

It was agreed that representatives who attended the process would report to their members to help build their power to take up these issues. Writing by participants was built into the plan to enable sharing with members and a broader public.

Three OWRAP gatherings were held – in October 2012, March 2013 and February 2014. At these gatherings Home based care worker, sex worker and seasonal farm worker representatives shared their life stories, the actions they were taking to hold those in power to account, and how they were building the power of their members in their organisations.



Grassroots women worker activists write on their lives and organising strategies to challenge the powers that oppress them. These activists are home based care workers, seasonal farm workers and sex workers. They hope their writings will inspire other women to build their own power to take action.

The activists are members of Mthonjaneni Home Based Care Network, Seasonal Farm Worker Structures and Sisonke sex workers' movement.

The process of writing and reflection was supported by Oxfam in South Africa and by Oxfam partners: Justice and Women, Women on Farms Project and Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce as part of the Oxfam Women's Rights Advancement Programme (OWRAP).



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ISBN: 978-0-620-60837-4

