

TransFeminista

Quarterly Newsletter

"S.H.E acknowledges diversity, advocates equality and pursues dignity and non-sexism"

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Through the lens: Southern African Media Makers Training

By Anda Nqonji

Two of the Social, Health and Empowerment staff members, recently embarked on a very capacitating Journey, as they visited the City of Gold, Johannesburg, for a five long day workshop, which ran under the theme "Southern African Media Makers Training." Phiwe Masiko and Phiwe Ngcengi represented S.H.E in a workshop consisting of a number of LGBTIQ representatives. This workshop saw to it that all those who had attended were well equipped and taught everything they needed to know about media making and that they had enough information to take back and present to their respective workplaces. According to Masiko, the Southern African Media Training was a platform for LGBTIQ organizations to engage on the importance and issues related to using media, documentation and digital security. "This was also about how the Southern African Media makers use media tools to enhance their organizations appearance on social media, blogs, and websites as well as



Photo by Ryan Fortune

a way of documenting our own stories and owning them, a training strategy on for LGBTIQ Africa Media and Documentation network", said Masiko. She added that this was a platform for Southern Africa media makers to improve their skills on media tools and platforms as well as in digital security. Ngcengi, who has been from time to time conducting interviews as part of her duties says, she was very impressed with what she has learnt and admits to have been much groomed and that she has taken a lot from the workshop.

"I learnt how to conduct interviews using a maranza (a sound recording system), the things you should be on the lookout for and how to properly conduct questions using what the other person says rather than what you have drafted or prepared," said Ngcengi. She further said that she related strongly on the interviews and online media usage, as this has always been a part of her interests. She anticipates a lot of change in terms of how she has been doing so far.

Masiko gave a brief insight on one of the lessons she took interest on as how the trainers interacted with the members: "In a video session with filmmaker Bev Ditsie, She said in order to be stable with your camera you need to hold it like your dance partner. The most interesting part for me was getting to know what to do when you document a story, the structure of your story and being able to identify your characters," said Masiko.

Both S.H.E employees agreed on how informative the workshop was, saying it really fulfilled its purposes as they were well informed, entertained and educated. "I have learnt a lot of things I know anything about, and since the workshop was about informing us, it has done a pretty good job," concluded Ngcengi.

Do you want to make a contribution to the TransFeminista?

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Trans women's engagement with United Nations human rights mechanisms

By Leigh Ann Van Der Merwe

Human rights mechanisms of the United Nations sound very complicated and overly academic, but not when we talk about advocating for the human rights of minority groups. The United Nations is upheld as a champion and watchdog for the human rights of all. After all, it is considered the global parliament. Minority rights is a hot topic on the African continent at the moment with African states, including Nigeria and Uganda passing anti-homosexuality laws, one after the other. The question on everybody's lips should be: "what does this mean for trans people, more so, for trans women?" Moments after the anti-homosexuality bill was passed in Uganda, a trans woman, Beyonce Tushabe was arrested while taking a walk.

This is not surprising at all, given that trans women's gender transition is often so visible, giving way to harassment and violence. We live in a very patriarchal society where trans women are often seen as lesser human for wanting to be a woman. This is further complicated by the religious and cultural framing of debates on issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity. Reporting from a very cold Istanbul in Turkey where we came to discuss a sexual orientation and gender identity strategy, to engage with the United Nations, the activists from almost all over the world, strategize with a strong sense of determination.

The workshop takes off on a Wednesday afternoon in February with an introductory session on the different UN human rights instruments. The full participation of trans women in this space is imperative. Over the next few days, towards the end of February 2014, activists work in small groups debating and deliberating on issues related to the rights of sexual and gender minorities. One of the activists present, Khartini Slamah, who is a trans woman from Malaysia, and a well known activist from Asia Pacific, is a part of this vibrant conversation. Mama Tini, as she is affectionately known to the activists whom she mentors,

is determined in her plea to secure transgender rights. Mama Tini is no stranger to the United Nations or the human rights mechanisms thereof. She also serves as a member of the Programme Coordinating Board of UNAids, the United Nations agency for HIV and Aids. UNAids Asia Pacific recently issued a public video capturing the voices of many Asia Pacific trans women in their call for the attainment of human rights for all. Themed "transgender rights are human rights", the activists are unified in their message to be treated like human beings. "We are not asking for special rights, we only want to enjoy our human rights", says Khartini in the touching video.

Upcoming elections: Renewed hope for Trans* women

By Anda Nqonji

Election is nearing and everyone has either expectations for the future, disappointments or approvals for the previous governing party. This includes Trans* women experienced oppression and had no say on their rights, which meant they were forced to remain in the sex they were born in, despite their preferred gender roles. S.H.E, recently conducted an online public participation campaign, to evaluate the views of Trans* women on issues regarding elections, their expectations, their confidence in democracy and disappointments so far.

Ayanda Kwinana, a Trans* woman, who is also a sex worker, says she will vote despite the circumstances she's been through, living as both a Trans* woman and a sex worker: "I have been through a lot as a trans* woman, but I will vote, cause I still have a vision of a better tomorrow, Nelson Mandela fought and died for freedom and I will vote to give tribute to him, he is our hero," said Kwinana. She credited Nelson Mandela for the freedom of marriage amongst same sex, saying it is because of him and what he believed in that men can now marry men, and that she is who she wants to be today regardless of what suits the society.

Juanita Van Zyl, who passionately took part in the online campaign hesitantly said, "I will have to say "Maybe". I never make an effort, but eventually I will be in that line to vote at 99. I just feel a vote doesn't count much in South Africa." She further compared S.A with the United States and the United Kingdom, saying if government doesn't perform, the opposition eventually wins because competition itself is what makes people want to win. Lesley Ann Foster, who also participated in the online public campaign, confidently said she would vote, as the right to vote was hard won.

Kwinana said that she feels that the government still has a very long way to go, because there's very negative reactions from people especially toward Trans* women, who are also sex workers: "It is very disturbing having to go about my daily duties being called ugly names and be told that I am a man then stoned by students who regularly mock me. I think the governing party should be very careful about what messages they pass regarding transgender people," said Kwinana.

Global solidarity amongst transgender women of colour



By Leigh Ann Van Der Merwe

Conversations of solidarity among transgender women are a rare phenomenon, especially in the African context. That is why I am so overjoyed reporting on the solidarity among transgender women of colour, from the WPATH symposium, Bangkok, Thailand, February 2014. The WPATH (World Professional Association of Transgender Health) symposium kicked off with great excitement on the evening of Friday, 14 February 2014, in Bangkok, Thailand. The symposium was officially opened with a ceremonial showcase of Thai culture, dance, song, and off course, great

indigenous dishes. I felt honoured to be part of this spectacular event. More than the symposium itself, the culture, the food and the learning experience was the privilege of meeting and conversing with transgender women of colour from all over the globe. It was a truly humbling experience for me to see the great work being done. It was even more humbling seeing the on-going mobilisation and growing work of transgender women activists working in very hostile contexts. Many transgender women made use of the

“It was a truly humbling experience for me to see the great work being done all over the world. It was even more humbling seeing the on-going mobilisation and growing work of transgender women activists working in very hostile contexts”

opportunity to get together and talk about global solidarity and the ways in which we can support each other’s work. For the most part, conversations on networking and solidarity were conducted by the Transgender Law Centre’s, Cecilia Chung. Otherwise also known as CC. Miss Chung is a transgender immigrant living openly with HIV. She is currently a senior strategist for the Transgender Law Centre,

based in San Francisco, California, USA. Says Cecilia: “There must be increased conversation between transgender women in all regions to ensure that we cultivate a spirit of global solidarity”. Abheena Aher from the India HIV Alliance and Program Manager for the PECHAN program of transgender people supported this sentiment. Aher committed to being a part of this conversation. “We do not necessarily want to see a network or global alliance, but just a space where transgender women can converse and provide a country context

to the issues that they are facing” said Aher. Many presenters offered models of health and well-being with their presentations. These models on transgender health and well-being are implemented all over the globe and they are certainly nothing less of innovating and interesting. The real models of health and well-being for transgender women, however, surfaced in the formal conversations and

discussions between presentations and workshop, and even at social occasions in the evenings. This was the true essence of attending the symposium, with conversations offering real insight into the different issues affecting transgender women all over the globe. Moreover, these conversations also created a safe space to transgender women dialogue away from the presence of academics, scholars, researchers, and even allies. The symposium was a true learning experience and it has been an honour to be in attendance. It is my hope that the conversation on solidarity among transgender women will continue in our strive to create spaces for transgender women all over the globe. The issues affecting transgender women are unique all over the world. Transgender women are without a doubt one population that experience most forms of violence, and this will continue until such a time we unify as women, all over the world to address these problems. Often, the violence and other issues we experience is deeply rooted in trans misogyny, patriarchy, traditional and normative understandings of gender. These issues we can address with a stronger voice throughout the world.

S.H.E launches outreach program for Trans* women

By Anda Nqonji

For almost one year now, S.H.E has been on its toes about the issue of Trans* women rights. Every week, time is dedicated to Trans* women in a form of an outreach. This is to ensure that trans in the East London area are reached in the comfort of their homes. The outreach provides an opportunity to speak out about their challenges, and provided some safe sex materials. According to an outreach officer and free talk support co-coordinator at S.H.E, Phiwe Ngcengi, Since the outreach has been established in October last year, there has been a positive response, and it has grown tremendously as the sites are increasing to areas in and around the Amathole district. The main aim of the outreach is to reduce the possibility of HIV infection amongst Trans* women; listen to their challenges and views; engaging with them on the use and importance of condoms and lubricants, and also provide support. This program has been implemented successfully up to now.



Picture by Anda Nqonji

Ngcengi says that trans* women were not fond of using protection, claiming that it irritated them, but now they have heard different testimonies from people who are now familiar and proud of using condoms.

“The greatest achievement is that the number of trans women reached is growing and people are willing to learn. They engage with us and are always eager to see what is next. That gives us strength to keep going,” said Ngcengi.

The distribution of condoms and lubricants is a key activity in this program to ensure the health and wellbeing of trans women in the district. S.H.E also distributes communication materials to ensure that trans*

women are well informed regarding the issues and

do not feel left out of the HIV response. In addition to the outreach program, S.H.E also offers support in court and referrals. “Ngcengi narrated an incidents of trans woman who was attacked by police, “I managed to go to the IPID (independent police investigative directorate) where they contacted the station commander, who then called me for an appointment. I am still looking at that and will not rest until action is taken,” Said Ngcengi. On these weekly outreach meetings, trans women are also advised to visit the office for the psychosocial support session with other trans women. The support groups provides the opportunity to interact with other people facing the same challenges.

In the next edition of TransFeminista:

What does the anti-homosexuality hold for trans women in Uganda?
Transilience.....a project on violence against trans women in South Africa
Expectations for the 2nd Trans Health and Research conference.
And many more.....

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