

**WORKING TO END  
SCHOOL RELATED  
GENDER BASED VIOLENCE**

**WRITINGS BY REPRESENTATIVES OF EDUCATION  
UNIONS FROM EASTERN, WEST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA**



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Editing: Shamim Meer

Design and Layout: Naadira Patel - StudioStudioWorkWork

Review: Nina Benjamin, Rex Fyles and Aayushi Aggarwal

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The views, opinions and words written in the article are solely those of the author. The article reflects the author's journey, view point and progress in their own words

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# INTRODUCTION

*School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) is violence that undermines the bodily integrity, human rights, and gender equality of all those involved in the school but primarily that of the school child.*

The Education International<sup>1</sup> (EI) initiative Education Unions take Action to end School Related Gender Based Violence, is part of more than 30 years of international advocacy to advance gender equality in education and in unions. In 2016, 7 teacher unions i.e. SADTU<sup>2</sup> and NAPOSOSA<sup>3</sup> from South Africa, BETUZ<sup>4</sup> and ZNUT<sup>5</sup> from Zambia, UNATU<sup>6</sup> from Uganda, ETA<sup>7</sup> from Ethiopia and KNUT<sup>8</sup> from Kenya and in 2018, SLTU<sup>9</sup> from Sierra Leone, GTU<sup>10</sup> from the Gambia and the staff from the Ghana-based Education International Regional Africa Office - actively engaged in a Gender at Work<sup>11</sup> (G@W) - Gender Action Learning Process (GAL)<sup>12</sup>. The main aim of this specific GAL process was to create a participatory EI pilot program in Southern, East and West Africa focusing on individual teachers' and teacher unions' capacity to address SRGBV. With the support of Gender at Work facilitators, participants strengthened their understanding of gender inequality and gender based violence in the context of the school. Throughout the GAL Process participants spoke from their hearts, sharing inspirational stories of change.

The *Hearing our Stories* Workshops (HOS) at the start of the GAL process created a space for a representative group of union members in each of the participating unions to share their experiences of gender-based violence in their schools and unions. Throughout the 2-day workshops, the stories told brought to life the pain and suffering resulting from SRGBV, but also the commitment and power of the individual teacher and union member as agents of change in ending SRGBV. At the *Hearing our Stories* Workshop, each union chose a group of 4 or 5 union members to form a change team mandated to support the union in taking action to end SRGBV. The imprint of the stories told at the HOS, remained with us as G@W facilitators and with the change team members throughout the 18-month GAL process, becoming part of our own inner narrative, close to our hearts, guiding us as we

navigated our conceptual and practical journey in testing actions for ending SRGBV. The stories helped us to create a community, a community of educators and activists. As Deen from the SLTU writes in his story: Stories are important because every one of us is looking for answers and we connect with appropriate and authentic stories that help us build bonds and bridges to overcome life's challenges.

From 12-15 September 2019, 19 education sector trade union activists and 4 Gender at Work facilitators participated in a Gender at Work Writing Workshop. The writing workshop facilitator, Shamim Meer, guided the participants through a 4-day reflective and creative writing process to produce 23 stories written from the heart, inspirational stories narrating the pain but also the patience, solidarity and joy we find in the work of eradicating social norms that perpetuate gender-based violence in schools.

The idea of a writing workshop was to create a safe space for the change team members and Gender at Work facilitators to be guided by Shamim in using a range of writing techniques to each share one of our many stories – this time in written form. We were introduced to techniques that helped bring out the power of our ideas, techniques to connect with the reader, moments of appreciative feedback to inspire and build writing confidence from our fellow writers and the facilitators. Gender at Work facilitators were both participants and co-facilitators to Shamim, assisting with providing feedback.

Once the writers found their voices, it was like a dam had burst its banks. The safe space soon extended beyond the meeting room and into the gardens. Writers bent over their notebooks, chewing their pens and in deep concentration. As every writer appreciated the stillness, the space for reflection – stories of addressing SRGBV covering a myriad of themes emerged. From individuals discovering their inner power to change both themselves and those around them, to union strategies of using media, research and policy changes, to the much more complex work of chipping away at deep cultural norms.

These are the stories that we are sharing with you. We hope that the sights, sounds, events, tears, joy and triumphs that swirl through these stories will inspire you in the same way it has inspired us as writers to continue creating schools free of SRGBV.

For an overview of the broad range of strategies education unions in Africa are using to eliminate SRGBV please refer to 'document : Strategies to End School-related Gender-based Violence: the Experience of Education Unions in Africa

***Nina Benjamin,***

***Gender at Work Associate***

1. Education International is a Global Union Federation that represents organisations of teachers and other education employees. It is the world's largest, most representative global, sectoral organisation of unions with more than 32 million trade union members in 391 organisations in 179 countries and territories.
2. South Africa Democratic Teachers' Union.
3. National Professional Teachers' Association of South Africa.
4. Basic Education Teachers' Union of Zambia.
5. Zambia National Union of Teachers.
6. Uganda National Teachers' Union.
7. Ethiopia Teachers' Association.
8. Kenya National Union of Teachers.
9. Sierra Leone Teachers' Union.
10. Gambia Teachers' Union.
11. Gender at Work is an international feminist knowledge network of Associates who have supported more than 100 organisations to address gender inequality and discriminatory social norms. In this programme, Gender at Work is responsible for designing and facilitating Gender Action Learning (GAL) processes with participating unions, as well as coordinating programme implementation.
12. The *Education Unions Take Action to End SRGBV* was a four-year joint EI/UNGEI (UN Girls' Education Initiative) programme that supported EI member organisations and their members in their efforts to end SRGBV through empowering teachers as active agents of change in seven African countries. The programme was funded by Global Affairs Canada, with supplementary support from EI member organisations: Canadian Teachers' Federation, Lararforbundet/Sweden, and the National Education Association/USA.

## Thoughts from some of the representatives of teacher's unions and facilitators on the last day of the writing workshop

**Alice** – *This has been a wonderful experience. I have made new friends. I never knew I could write and I have learnt a lot.*

**Destaye** – *It is a wonderful time for me. I have written my story, thanks to all the coordinators*

**Kakunta** – *This has been a good experience as the writing process gives us a chance to reflect back on what we have done. I am looking forward to the final product*

**Winnie** – *I feel great and empowered and I feel that I can write beyond this story. I will use the free writing to keep it going*

**Richard** – *I came in a bit late which caused me some anxiety. I also came in as a substitution and I was not sure that I could live up to the expectations of the workshop. I surprised myself. I was not very sure what I was writing about but as I read my story it makes a lot of sense, I have seen a lot of links, but also gaps in what we are doing. In trying to write this story I have explored how great the challenge is. My story is an imaginary one but the more I wrote the more real it felt to me. I am going to continue writing.*

**Leah** – *When I was coming from home I was asking myself: "What will I write about in this workshop?" When you told me about free writing I really enjoyed the free writing. I wrote my story about a little girl – then Nosipho came with some guidance and I realized that it was not done. I have been wondering what will happen at the end of this project on SRGBV and how others will take it up. Now by putting it on paper others will read it and have some ideas for going forward.*

**Filbert** – *Thank you very much it has been an experience indeed! When we started I was not clear of the direction that we would be taking. As we went on I started reflecting on what I first wrote – I was reporting but then I went back to the real experience and started really writing for others to read. I have come to know how writing comes together. With the HOS we were given books and encouraged to read them without understanding how they were put together. You live and do many things but it is not written and nobody can read them. I will be one of the happiest people if we can have hard copies of this book we are writing so that other people can read it. If it means contributing financially to make hard copies then we will do so. I can now appreciate the efforts and challenges people go through when they are writing. Teachers have what it takes to be writers but they feel handicapped on how to move forward.*

**Aubrey** – I always remember when we met in Ethiopia for the Learning event – we challenged EI and G@W about the need to produce a book on this project. Happy that you were strategic and that the stories came from us, we are the authors. If members of our unions have challenges they will have something to refer to. What is documented will be with us forever and others will come later to add to this. The true story of an African child will be told.

**Tshwanelo** – My reflection is that our voices will not end – once you put it on paper it will be part of history. We came together with different degrees of experience in writing. I am grateful and I will continue with the free writing as it is important to document – if you do not, you forget what is important. This book will not be a statistic, written by a NGO but by teachers who are prepared to be part of the change. As teachers we are not only perpetrators but there are teachers who want to be part of the change

**Dorcas** – I want to start with when we were asked to submit names for this workshop. At first I looked at my schedule; Congress as well as my exams and thought that perhaps I should give somebody else an opportunity but for some reason I submitted my name to join this workshop. I do not regret being part of the workshop. I prefer to deal with figures, and going to the point – not writing. I was struggling to do my assignments because it requires of me to write, but after this workshop I have energy to write again. As I write this story I wish I could go back to school. On writing the story I realized the many wrong things we are doing as educators consciously or unconsciously. I thought we could do this writing in one day – little did I know what the process would mean.

**Deen** – For me this process is like a religious revival. Each time with Peer Learning 1, 2 and 3, working in different countries working towards the same goal. When we meet together it is a revival, kindling of spirit and confidence. Even when you think you are fine as a writer you learn new insights. Whenever I participate in any of the SRGBV programs I never go back the same – I have a renewed fire, energy and spirit

**Ebrima** – I was worried how I am going to write. I questioned the free writing. I never thought I could come with my own story openly. It was very personal to me and I cried to myself wanting to protect and not expose my family. As men we are in the forefront of circumcision. The free writing has helped me to go back to my colleagues and the learners and to encourage them to come out, to free write and write their own stories and put it into a safe box. Those who are fortunate to read the stories will know that they are not the only ones who have been traumatized. Thank you for the opportunity to speak out

**Saffie** – As Gambians we struggle to say goodbye. The process has been very great and I feel empowered. When I was coming I was wondering what we would be doing. At the airport even the S.A immigration officer who checked my invitation letter asked me what I was going to write about. This free writing will help me to write my reports

*quickly and on time. We will be sharing with colleagues. I am going back to the General Secretary with the idea of “each one reach one and teach one” and I will write with my colleagues together as we have so much to share*

**Victor** – *Gradually I got confidence to draft my story*

**Salimatu** – *I feel fortunate to be here even with all the hurdles we experienced with the visa issues. The day we came here it felt like we had arrived in America but now I can feel it is Africa. Hope that this will not be last word on the process.*

**Yohannes** – *I was questioning what to write and I was feeling so proud to be here. I celebrated my birthday and Ethiopian New Year with everyone in this writing workshop. I spent time writing my thesis so I know the challenge of writing. The questions we are faced with as teachers are “how have we been doing justice to our students?” “how are our members doing justice to our fellow teachers?”*

**Nosipho** – *This week was very exciting and I appreciate the fact that I felt safe and that we were all open to share our stories. This process is similar to birthing – something new is being created. This week was filled with many things, we created and we connected with nature and with our Gods. The stories really touched me and are engraved in my heart. Everything centered on our experience. At first we struggled to find our voices but through trust, letting go of control, humbleness and openness we found our voices. Thank you everyone for trusting the process.*

**Michel** – *I am grateful to have been able to be part of a different and alternative perspective on how to put our ideas into the media. Here we are working with words, talking the walk and these are not empty words. Usually things are very flat, it is about victim or perpetrator. Here we are showing a reality that is not so flat. We do though have to keep in mind that the politics of knowledge seems only to be valued when it is English.*

**Mahlet** – *I feel so grateful to be with you all and what we have achieved all together. Thanks for giving us the chance to facilitate*

**Shamim** – *The stories we read on violence in the media are usually only stories about hate. Here I have seen how the teachers and men can be part of the solution – we are together and we are a family.*



Image credit: EML Events Ethiopia



Image credit : EML Events Ethiopia



# THE TRADE UNIONS AND SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS

## CONTINENT-WIDE

Education International Africa  
Regional Office



## EASTERN AFRICA PEER LEARNING GROUP

### ETHIOPIA

ETA (Ethiopia Teachers  
Association)

### UGANDA

UNATU (Uganda National  
Teachers' Union)

### KENYA

KNUT (Kenya National Union  
of Teachers)

## WEST AFRICA PEER LEARNING GROUP

### GAMBIA

GTU (Gambia Teachers Union)

### SIERRA LEONE

SLTU (Sierra Leone Teachers'  
Union)

## SOUTHERN AFRICA PEER LEARNING GROUP

### SOUTH AFRICA

NAPTOSA (National Professional  
Teachers' Organisation of South  
Africa)

SADTU (South African Democratic  
Teachers' Union)

### ZAMBIA

BETUZ (Basic Education Teacher's  
Union Of Zambia)

ZNUT (Zambia National Union  
Of Teachers)

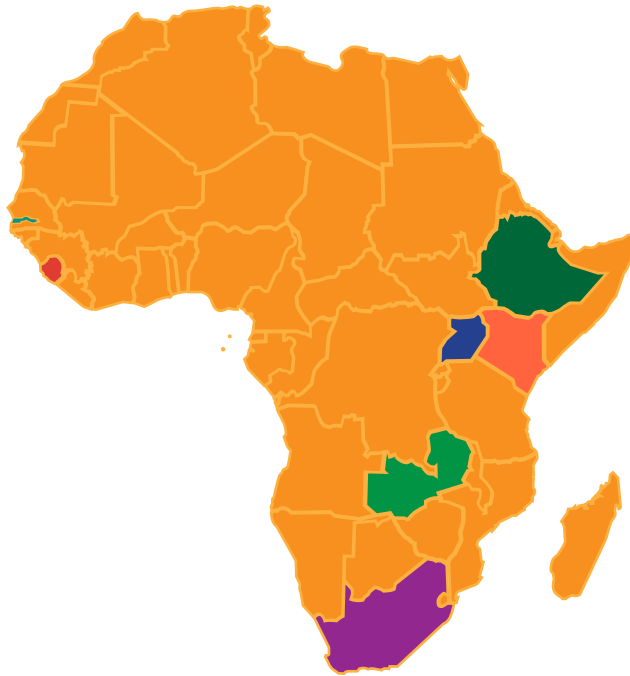
# SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) is a partnership of organisations committed to gender equality in education and the empowerment of girls and young women. Established in 2000, UNGEI is a global authority on gender and education and provides a platform for partners to exchange experience and speak with one voice to accelerate progress. UNGEI's role as convener and knowledge manager has been key in bringing multiple actors together and securing the resources to support the Education Unions Take Action to End SRGBV programme. UNGEI provides the platform for sharing the lessons emerging from the programme. In 2013, UNGEI set SRGBV as a policy and advocacy priority and since then UNGEI has supported initiatives that demonstrate the critical role teachers and unions play to end SRGBV. In 2014, UNGEI convened a Global Working Group to End SRGBV for joint advocacy, research, and global guidance on SRGBV. UNGEI also hosts the e-resource centre on SRGBV documentation. The UNGEI Secretariat is hosted by UNICEF.

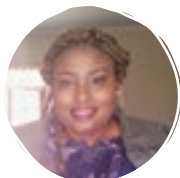
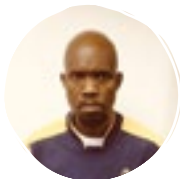
Education International (EI) represents organisations of teachers and other education employees across the globe. It is the world's largest federation of unions, representing 32 million education employees in 400 organisations in 170 countries and territories. Since it was founded in 1993, EI has worked to achieve gender equality within trade unions and in education as a key policy and programmatic priority. EI adopted a Resolution on SRGBV at the 7th EI World Congress in 2015, creating an institutional framework to work on SRGBV as a priority across its membership. In this programme, EI is responsible for liaising and coordinating with participating education unions (all of which are EI member organisations) and other collaborators, providing technical support through the Africa Regional Office in Accra, Ghana and the EI Secretariat in Brussels, Belgium.

Gender at Work is an international feminist knowledge network that works to end discrimination against women and build cultures of inclusion. Since its establishment in 2003, Gender at Work associates have supported more than 100 organisations to tackle gender inequality and discriminatory social norms. In this programme, Gender at Work is responsible for designing and facilitating Gender Action Learning (GAL) processes with participating unions, as well as coordinating programme implementation.

The programme is made possible by the generous financial support of Global Affairs Canada.



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AFRICA





## FROM GRASS TO GRACE

Salimatu Sinneh Koroma

SLTU (*Sierra Leone Teachers Union*)

My story is about Isatu who is my contemporary. She was also born in the same town and the same street. This girl was very clever in school and everybody in the community wanted to be her parents.

At age fourteen Isatu became pregnant and this surprised everyone in our community. Most of her companions (age mates) advised her to mix some herbs which would terminate the pregnancy but she refused. Even her aunts, one was a sister and the other a nurse, both working at the Government hospital wanted her to have an abortion. One day they took her to the hospital to terminate the pregnancy. Isatu ran away from the hospital because she was afraid to lose her life.

She was stigmatized and provoked by people she passed by on the street when going to the hospital for treatment. She was ashamed, especially when she saw her class mates with their uniforms, going to school. She was encouraged by some friends, not to lose hope. Months passed by and she fell ill and was admitted to the hospital. Isatu was a sickle cells patient. So, the doctor advised she should be in the hospital until her baby was born.

On hearing that Isatu had been admitted to the hospital, people from the community and some students, especially her form three mates, visited the hospital frequently. Their visits were not in a form of sympathising but to provoke her.

As God could have it, she gave birth to a beautiful and bouncing baby girl. When they heard the news of her delivery, so many people came to the hospital to see her, but the doctor had already instructed the nurses not to allow anyone in, except for her parents. The same day she was moved to a special ward.

After a year, Isatu pleaded with her father to allow her to go back to school. Her father took a special teacher to teach her at home because if she went back to school she would face provocation from colleagues. Isatu was dedicated and very committed, so, she studied very hard. After two years her father found a primary school for her. After another year she sat for the General Certificate Examination (GCE O Level). She passed five subjects including Mathematics and English. Her father asked what she wanted to do next. She then told her father that she wanted to be a teacher. Her father agreed and bought an entrance examination form for her to do a Teachers Certificate Course. Isatu took the Examination and passed with flying colors. What I really mean is she passed all the subjects.

Isatu was admitted into the Training College in Makeni. Makeni is fifteen miles from Magburaka where she lived. During her first year in the Training College she fell ill and was admitted at the Makeni Government hospital. She was diagnosed with apendicitis and Sickle cell. She underwent an apendicitis operation. Isatu missed many weeks of college but due to the encouragement from her mother and father, she was able to continue her studies and was promoted to the second year without reference. She continued her studies for three years and completed with a second division pass.

Isatu went back to her previous school and continued teaching. She taught for another three years and thought she must upgrade herself. So, she continued studying. She told her parents about her intention and they were very happy and encouraged her to do so.

This time she bought the form herself and applied for a Higher Teachers Certificate Course in Secondary. She succeeded with the help of her parents. She went through hurdles but also succeeded and she completed successfully. She could not continue teaching in her home town because of the Civil war in our country. It was then very serious in the provinces. She had to move to the Capital City Freetown.

While she was teaching in Freetown, she engaged in the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU) as an Activist in the Women' Committee. She was very committed in her Union's work. She was then appointed to attend a Workshop at the Sierra

Leone Labour Congress (SLLC), which is the umbrella body of all the unions in the country. During the Workshop's closing ceremony, Isatu was asked to give the vote of thanks. Her performance made one of the International partners who came for the Workshop ask for her Curriculum Vitae (CV). She produced it and handed it over to her. She told Isatu; "You have to upgrade your CV".

This inspired Isatu and from that point she was eager to further her education. She started working with local NGO's in the community to raise funds so that she would be able to enter the University. It was really very challenging for her as she was now a mother with children, and had to pay for an apartment and school fees for her kids. As a teacher her salary was not even encouraging. She was very determined and nothing stopped her from achieving her goal.

Isatu had married a man with two children. He never cared for Isatu's daughter, so she had to send her daughter back to her parents. Isatu and her husband had two children, a boy and a girl. Isatu took care of all the children including her husband's. She never differentiated between her two children and her husband's two children. Her husband was really not a caring father. A lot happened during the period of their marriage so they separated.

Isatu had gone through many challenges, not only in her personal life, the classroom and community but also in her union. She was the Women's Committee Leader of her District, duly elected when she was in the province. When she came to Freetown, she started as an Activist and was elected as the School Representative (SR) in her school. When they had their District elections she vied for the position of the Women's Committee in her District and won. When the term ended, there was another election. This time she went for the Regional Women's committee position. She succeeded unopposed. Nobody contested against her. She had been connecting the women's affairs in her region.

In the year 2008, Isatu applied to pursue a Bachelor of Science Degree at the University. She was accepted and there again things were rough for her, especially when her father was not there to help. He died in 1997 during the Civil War and the mother was like a living corpse. She had to take care of her mother while pursuing the course. Her mother died in 2011 before Isatu graduated in 2012 with a Bachelor of Science in Development and Economics, specializing in Project Planning and Management.

Isatu who never completed year three in her Secondary Education is now a graduate. To God be the Glory!

As for her daughter, she went to school and sat to her WASSEC. When her mother was busy upgrading herself, she was also in the University studying. She is presently thirty six years old.

When Isatu visits her home town, people always admire her. Some of her age mates could not look straight into her eyes but she always comes close to them, to encourage them and assist them when the need arises. With perseverance Isatu could do more.

As a change team agent, I am encouraging more girls and women to eradicate School Related Gender Based Violence and work hard to always lead and love others. Our girls who are teenagers should never give up in life. When you fall down, get up, dust yourself and bounce back. You will surely reach your goal.

To our Parents: Please support your children. There is no bad bush to throw away a bad child. There is no bad child. You the parent will make him or her bad.

To the society as a whole: Never judge someone, especially the girl child. If you see anyone suffering or having a problem, if you are able to help, do so. If you are not able to help, do not point fingers. There is a reason for everything to happen.

This story is dedicated to Isatu's late parents for their effort in bringing her from grass to grace.





## A MARRIAGE NOT MADE IN HEAVEN

Alieu Deen-Conteh

SLTU (*Sierra Leone Teachers Union*)

There is an English saying that marriages are made in heaven but my story is about marriages that are certainly not of heaven.

I was born into a polygamous family with many brothers and sisters. You could easily spot out the bright potential in my youngest sister, Mbalu. She was a very beautiful girl who many described as the princess of our village – Mafaray. On top of her beauty, she was also intelligent.

Mbalu was 16 and in senior secondary school and, according to her teachers, she was doing extremely well in class. Because of her beauty and brilliance, she became the focus of attraction to all.

One fateful afternoon, Mbalu was sitting in the veranda reading her books, when she saw an elderly man, old as our father, approaching the house. Little did she know that this man had come to see our father on some sinister mission. Both men laughed heartily at the door as my father bade him farewell.

A few days later, father explained things to Mbalu.

“Come sit near me my princess. I want to talk to you,” father said, “You know that we are poor and I am getting old and can die at any time.”

“Yes Papa, I know this very well. That is why I want to be educated so that I can take care of you and Mama,” Mbalu replied.

She did not know that there was more to it. Father broke the news that the old man who was at our house was asking for her hand in marriage.

The little girl was shocked at her father's callousness. She insisted that she would not marry the old man as she was still in school. Tears of anger and frustration streamed down her face.

Father tried to convince other members of the family with the notion that with all their education, women still had to get married. So why not do it now as schools are meant for boys; not girls? Our father was one of those who believed that women in the city, who became too educated, ended up not getting married. He did not want his daughter to end up like that. He said any woman who was not married was like a house which was beautifully built but had no roof.

The next thing father did was to withdraw our sister from school. That news was devastating for all of us including our mother who always kept her silence and never wanted to offend her husband.

Father would beat up my mother each time she tried to put up a case against his excesses.

My heart was bleeding living under the dominion of such terror! My lovely sister, the village princess, who desired her freedom to go back to school, eventually accepted to marry Pa Amadu. This was to please her father, even if momentarily.

After getting married, she became the third wife and suffered two miscarriages that almost cost her life. Mbalu, however, contemplated a Plan B to deal with the situation of her marital home.

With the support of some sensitive neighbours, she succeeded in running away to freedom in the capital city of Freetown. She was able to get back to school and finish university.

This childhood experience of mine has had an indelible impact on my life as an SRGBV activist and change team member of my union.

My mother's words of counsel that remain with me to this day are that I should not hate my father nor anybody else. I should love all people and care for those who are in pain.

I think this is important in our work with SRGBV in trying to give a voice to the voiceless.

The story of Mbalu's early marriage and other forms of domestic abuse and violence are common in our communities. Domestic abuse destroys the destinies of many. However, a lot of these cases remain unreported mainly because of the

culture of silence in society. This culture of silence is very common in African Societies. Compromises are reached among family members when these acts are committed. The focus is on keeping good relationships and preserving the good name of the family. The victims carry the stigma and are sometimes also made to feel that they have done something wrong. They feel the pain twice.

My experience as a change team member has also taught me that there is a culture of silence at union level, in the union offices, among the executive and with classroom teachers who are sometimes perpetrators. Teachers often abuse children in various forms but we do not always see what action is taken against such members. How many voices do we hear from the union condemning such acts?

Our Profession is degraded in the public eye because they do not hear much from the union about what we are doing with members who are perpetrators.

As the Editor of our union's magazine and also as a trainer in almost all of our programmes, I have some leverage and the opportunity to fight against SRGBV. But as they say, charity begins at home and the fight has to start with our own house, the union, and roll out into the wider community. As a whistle-blower, one must be prepared for the consequences in this noble fight. SRGBV might fight back!

Together with Government, our union is currently reviewing the teachers' Code of Conduct, so as to include in it contemporary emerging issues, including SRGBV. Our union's Gender Policy is also being looked into.

During my trainings, especially in the regions, I came to realise that many practices like corporal punishment, domestic violence, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage and teenage pregnancy are considered normal because of our culture and tradition.

The fact that teachers, who are educated, sometimes hold fast to these negative cultural practices, poses a challenge.

However, to my mind it also provides an opportunity for change teams to engage these teachers with the facts and figures on the harmful effects of these practices, not only on individuals, but on the society at large.

Our teachers are encouraged to contribute stories to the union magazine. The SRGBV column helps to bring issues into sharp focus. The stories help us recognise that our own experiences are not necessarily unique. They help us

understand that we are not alone as we navigate this journey called life. Stories are also important because every one of us is looking for answers and we connect with appropriate and authentic stories that help us build bonds and bridges to overcome life's challenges.

Our union's training programmes have not only targeted the union leaders but also the rank and file members, especially women, through the women's committee structures across the country. These groups of union leaders and teachers are reaching out to school children, especially girls, their teacher colleagues and the wider community. The School Management Committees (SMCs), Boards Of Governors (BOGs) and the Parents/Community Teachers Associations (PTAs/CTAs) have all been part of this continued engagement in the crusade against SRGBV in our country.

I am currently serving on a joint committee set up by government to examine the existing legislation around Gender Based Violence and child abuse. There are problems with weak or incoherent laws and the ineffective enforcement of the laws. For instance, there is one law which says customarily it is lawful for a girl under 18 to get married as long as the parents give their consent. Another more recent law says that no girl under 18 shall get married. This new law does not make any reference to the previous customary law. These inconsistencies in the laws also pose a challenge in the fight against SRGBV. Through our advocacy, the Sexual Offences Act of 2012 is under drastic review by parliament to include life imprisonment for cases of sexual penetration against children (under 18). The previous sentence was 15 years in jail.

I appreciate the work of other members of our change team who are engaged in SRGBV prevention. This includes School Drama Clubs, community sensitisation and networking with other stakeholders including religious leaders like pastors and imams.

The fight has to be concerted and taken from all fronts as no one solution fits all. One approach or strategy can never be enough. We need all hands on deck. It is crucial that in all of this, we the men should take the frontline as champions in the struggle.

The fact that our country's President, Dr. Julius Maada Bio, declared a national state of emergency on rape and other forms of sexual violence underscores the seriousness of our situation. What about the first lady's campaign called "Hands

off Our Girls”, which is an initiative of the first ladies of the West African sub-region? Are these all not a wake-up call for SRGBV activists to network?

Each time I think of my sister’s narrow escape from a forced and abusive marriage, I feel very, very sorry. It reminds me of the many others in similar situations. It gives inspiration to continue the good fight against all forms of gender-based violence.

Our action plan is to keep decreasing the menace till we reach our ultimate goal of creating a zero percent situation where there is no more weeping and wailing. We have to help save destinies around the globe.

Aluta Continua!



## MY ANTI-SRGBV CAMPAIGN JOURNEY

Angela Chisanga

*BETUZ (Basic Education Teachers Union of Zambia)*

In my journey as an activist against School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV), I met people who had been perpetrators or victims. My first encounter with SRGBV which stands out in my mind was way back even before the SRGBV campaign began. I remember in my school where I taught something happened which opened my eyes. Yes, it was like a lot of negative things used to happen in the school environment without most of us staff knowing about it.

One Monday morning I received a text message which provoked me. The message was from a male colleague, Mr John, with whom I taught and it read in part, 'stop telling people lies about me'. I was confused as I did not understand what the text meant. It was warning me to stop talking about his deeds when on that particular day I wasn't even in school but at the hospital having my tooth extracted. I later learnt that Mr. John had sent messages to a few people who he suspected knew about his evil acts in the school, and they like me were equally offended at receiving his text. Little did I know that this was the beginning of my getting to know the ugly side of our beautiful school.

When my fellow teacher Ms. Banda bitterly complained to me about the message she also received from Mr. John, I quickly advised her to work with me to get to the bottom of the story. We planned to enquire from the learners to find out if there was anything they knew as to what was happening in the school. The next morning we asked for a room we could use, and the school offered us the use of a senior Teachers' office.

With my colleague Ms. Banda we called four grade eight learners to come in one by one and alas, what we heard from them gave us the shock of our lives! Even though I drew on the skills I had learned from a Guidance and Counselling course, I couldn't stand the interactions with the learners. Yes, it was too much to bear. The devil surely works in people. But then I thank God because he used me and my colleague by letting Mr. John send us the text messages.

Mr John had been sexually abusing our school girls using his position as sports master and teacher. My heart bled as I couldn't believe what the girls were saying as they narrated how their two friends had been victims. I cried as one of the girls, a fifteen-year-old, confirmed her ordeal to us. She explained that Mr. John had sex with her in his Toyota car, in the sports office and thirdly in a lodge just that past weekend. According to the girl Mr. John gave her the equivalent of \$3 after each encounter.

In shock my colleague and I asked the fifteen-year-old girl if she would say what she had just told us to the school head. Without hesitation she said yes, nodding her head. And so like moving ghosts we walked to the Head Teacher's office. Upon entering the office of the Head Teacher we presented our case of Mr. John's text messages and the revelations of the girls. Just like us, the Head was equally shocked. His face raged with anger, while he sweated. He refused to talk to the girls and bitterly burst out, "In my 25 years as a teacher and administrator, this is the worst incident I have ever come across".

Once the head teacher had recollected himself, he called for Mr John. Upon seeing us the young man was filled with anxiety. He stammered as the Head Teacher asked him if he knew the gravity of what he had committed, and as he indicated that he had worsened the situation by offending me, the union leader, who should have been there to protect him.

However, while Ms. Banda my colleague insisted that we report the matter to higher authorities I pleaded that we do not report. I felt for the young teacher whose wife, a fellow teacher at a neighbouring school was expecting their third child. I convinced my colleague that we should not report him. Instead we should forgive him, talk to him and counsel the victim girls.

At the time I thought that was the best course of action. But I think differently now. I keep asking myself what if Mr John had continued having sex with learners in the school where he later transferred to. Besides, I did not keep track of the abused girls after I also left the school to teach at another school.

Now I know the best way to deal with such cases is never to entertain perpetrators of SRGBV. The project Teacher Unions Take the Lead in the Fight against School Related Gender Based Violence has really moulded me and now my organisation and I know how to handle such cases. As for victims, they surely need our counsel from time to time. As for the perpetrators they must get what they deserve in the form of punishment.

Our everyday call in my organisation is that everyone must come on board to fight SRGBV - teachers, administrators, parents and learners; community leaders, law makers, law enforcers and everyone else.

### **Fighting SRGBV-Conflict of Interests**

In my fight and campaign against School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV), a vice that has been a hindrance to a smooth Education process in my country, I have encountered some conflict of interests. I had been on cross roads before, being a gender activist, mother and a trade unionist, having worked as head in the Gender department in my organisation the Basic Education Teachers Union of Zambia (BETUZ) for years.

I truly understood my rights to defend that which is right as regards gender and human rights. However, this was tested when we just started the programme and campaign 'Teacher Unions take a Lead in fighting School Related Gender Based Violence'. A teacher member was accused as a perpetrator of School related gender based violence and my own organisation wanted us to defend and protect this teacher at all costs. Once we had three well-built teachers come to our office because they had been charged, one of them was on the verge of being dismissed from the Ministry of Education having defiled and impregnated two grade seven pupils. My male colleagues and our General Secretary were running around assisting the perpetrators to counter react in writing, getting help from everywhere, contacting several people for advice as to how to get the charges dropped. I boldly took up a stance one morning. I confronted my colleague who was helping out the perpetrators. I said to him, "I will surely get one of these men as huge as they are and direct them to those young girl children of yours, so that they impregnate them too. Then probably you will know and feel the pain that parents of the victim girls feel".

My colleague was mad with me and retorted, "You, do you know that a salary that you get paid here is from these same teachers you want us not to defend." They underrated my anger and in response I told them I would rather quit my job if



being a union leader meant protecting and defending perpetrators of SRGBV who committed the offence with impunity.

I walked away in anger, but later realized that I needed to sober up if I were to win my colleagues' hearts and get them to join me in the fight against SRGBV. I decided to begin engaging my male colleagues on a one to one basis, reasoning with them on the dangers of defending the perpetrators of SRGBV. One of the dangers being that we were denting the name of the organisation by helping such people as they never repented from their acts, and this was besides the negative effects on learner victims and the negative impact on our education system when schools were not safe spaces. Abused learners and teachers remained traumatised for the rest of their lives and this created difficulties for achieving their goals in life.

When the time came for me to come up with the National Change Team to work with me as the head of the Gender Department, in the fight against SRGBV, I targeted the most vocal and hardworking Director Public Relations, the Human Resource Director and one teacher from a primary school who was also a member of the National Women's Committee. To date, I do not regret working with this team because immediately the team was put in place, we planned adequately and put our plans into action.

The most exciting thing about our Change Team programmes has been our interventions such as the anti-SRGBV clubs in selected primary and secondary schools; and the live phone radio programmes where we talk about SRGBV, what it is, its impact on education and how best it could be eradicated, with the phones opening up for the public to interact with us.

The anti-SRGBV school clubs involve our reference team members, the Guidance teachers, other teachers and of course the learners. The essence has been to heighten sensitisation among all stake holders. Through our initial baseline survey we learnt that both teachers and learners were either perpetrators or victims of SRGBV and vice versa. Besides we did not want to leave any stone unturned.

We have stories to tell in schools where the school clubs are functional. At Chinsali Girls Secondary in the Northern part of Zambia we have a powerful club involving girls who go flat out to sensitise the community against SRGBV. Even harsh weather conditions such as the rains on International Women's Day did not stop these girls from performing their poems denouncing SRGBV, much to the

amusement of the attendants. In presence were high profile dignitaries like the Town Clerk who even pledged to pay for their whole year of school fees.

Another school club is run by our Change Team member Bridget at Kabulonga Primary School. The children are always marvellous in their presentations against SRGBV, as they catch the attention of even older people.

The phone-in radio programme is another exciting strategy as it sensitises the masses in the country. This is so because we utilize the services of the national radio station which has country wide coverage including in rural and remote areas. The response is always overwhelming. We receive calls from the remotest parts of the country and mostly from community members, and not only from teachers.

Another important win in the fight against SRGBV is the establishment of Guidance and Counselling departments in all schools. \*Our union (BETUZ) through the National Change Team played an important role in the establishment of the department of Guidance and Counselling as we time and again indicated in our interaction with government the importance of having such a department at all levels in education. My colleagues and I pointed out the essence of Guidance at every given opportunity especially in our Education parliamentary subcommittee meetings. When we were asked to present on the impact of high prevalence levels of early pregnancies in schools, we made sure we brought into our presentation a component of Guidance and Counselling as a sure way of combating early pregnancies in schools, as well as other delinquencies. Shortly after this, we had the Guidance and Counselling departments established in all our schools.

While we appreciate the establishment of the Guidance and Counselling departments, our call now is to ensure that these departments have trained personnel and are well equipped with the necessary requirements so as to run smoothly.

In conclusion, I feel my efforts and my colleagues' efforts in the fight against SRGBV have achieved most of our goals. But I know we still have a long way to go in changing peoples' minds as we look forward to an SRGBV-free school environment.



## SCHOOL RELATED GENDER BASED VIOLENCE – TAKING ACTION

Kakunta Kabika Mbuyu

*BETUZ (Basic Education Teachers Union of Zambia)*

The first time I heard about School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV), I went into defensive mode, because I couldn't agree with what was being talked about as something true. My view was that it targeted our male teachers.

When our women's coordinator briefed the staff at Basic Education Teachers' Union of Zambia (BETUZ) about the concept of SRGBV and how it affected learner performance, I indicated to her that children in schools do not know about gender and that the concept did not exist in our schools in Zambia.

My position as a trade unionist was that ensuring the dignity of our teacher members was priority and must be protected, and that anything that comes out to show that teachers were acting unprofessionally was not to be tolerated by the teachers' representatives, their trade union.

But due to the women's coordinator's engagement and insistence that schools needed to be safe and that a lot of unprofessional acts happened in schools, I gave the issue the benefit of the doubt. I indicated that we needed to understand the concept clearly and that we must make sure that the interest of our members are protected.

I further indicated to the coordinator that we needed empirical evidence for us to be strategic in our engagement against SRGBV. But at the back of my mind was that we can't bite the finger that feeds us and we needed to buy time. I recommended that we needed to conduct a study in order to understand the concept and if at all it existed in our schools, to know how to tackle it.

The baseline survey was agreed upon and clear research procedures and tools were developed by the union. It was agreed that the study would be carried out in all 10 provinces of Zambia.

Union provincial structures were identified to be the lead research teams for data collection and a questionnaire was agreed as the main data collection tool. Three questionnaires were developed: one for head teachers/principals, one for teachers and another of learners.

When the questionnaires came back from for analysis, the results were shocking. The study showed that different forms of SRGBV were prevalent in most Zambian schools. It was very clear that SRGBV was real and that a lot of wrong things were being done by our members. It was clear that our members were involved in acts that were against the expected code of conduct for teachers and that this could lead to their loss of employment. The study clearly showed that the teaching profession was at risk and that as teacher trade union leaders we needed to take action to stop SRGBV.

The baseline study showed that SRGBV not only affected learners but that some of our teacher members were also victims. Some teachers indicated that they were no longer interested teaching in their current stations because the working environment in schools had become hostile.

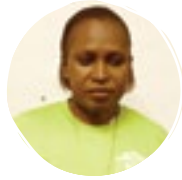
The key forms of SRGBV that the study showed included: sexual advances from teachers to learners, sexual advances among teachers and administrators, indecent dressing, bullying, abusive language from teachers and administrators to mention but a few. The revelations to me were a clear testimony that the fight against SRGBV was an emergency for me and my union.

One finding from the study which touched my heart was the nonexistence of a reliable support system in some schools for girls who were menstruating. Some girls missed school during their menstrual period for fear of being abused by boys in case they soiled themselves with blood due to a lack of sanitary towels - which some schools did not provide in cases of emergency.

Importantly the Basic Education Teachers' Union of Zambia (BETUZ) SRGBV baseline study showed clearly that if SRGBV is not stopped, quality teaching and learning would be difficult to realise. The study showed that SRGBV affected teacher performance and it also hampered learner self-esteem. The recommendations of the baseline study included the establishment of functional

guidance and counselling departments in all schools and that all education stakeholders take action against SRGBV.

It was at this point that I took SRGBV as part of my union work and I became more interested in the fight against SRGBV. I took it upon myself that we all have a responsibility to make our schools free from SRGBV thereby making them safe for quality teaching and learning for all.



## JATOU'S STORY

Saffie Nyassi

*GTU (Gambia Teachers Union)*

This is a story about Jatou, a tall, beautiful and slim girl who was in an upper basic school in the provinces of Gambia. She was the first daughter of her parents. She was an athlete and used to represent her region in national sports events. She was academically good too.

Jatou was very famous in their area, and loved by almost everyone in the community.

The story starts when Jatou was to represent her region at a national sports competition. All the regional athletes normally camp at one place during such events. A day before the event, at around 8pm Jatou decided to go to a nearby shop to get some chocolates. The area was dark and she was alone.

Before she could reach the shop, an unidentified man suddenly came from behind her and suddenly covered her mouth with a piece of cloth. Jatou was helpless. The man pushed her to the ground with force and raped her.

When Jatou was freed by the man, she managed to return to her peers. Her brown skirt was torn. There were blood stains on her. Her absence during that time was noticed. She was quickly taken to the hospital by her teacher Mrs. Njie. At the hospital, Jatou responded to treatment and was discharged a week later.

When Jatou returned to her region and school the news was all over the place. It became difficult for Jatou to be in that environment.

As a change team on School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) we wanted an environment free from SRGBV in all forms and settings to guarantee the full participation of all, especially of women and young people. Our first responsibility now was to give Jatou counselling and empathise with her.

It came to our notice that Jatou was away from school for some days. As a team we discussed this and decided to send some members from the women's wing of the union to visit her.

During the visit, we spoke about finding a way to relieve her from the trauma. She preferred to move to her aunty's home in a different region. As a change team member I decided to always monitor her progress both at school and at her aunty's place. Jatou still continued her good academic performance but decided to stop taking part in sports activities.

Little did we know that her father wanted her to get married soon after the rape incident. He thought that was the only option for Jatou. When we received this news from the aunty, we decided that as change agents, teachers, parents and good role models we should meet her father. We discussed possible strategies to use before we met her father.

The first visit was not fruitful because Jatou's father was very mad at us. On our second visit we went with Jatou's aunty. After a lengthy dialogue of appeals, jokes and smiles the mission was fruitful but was based on the following conditions:

- The change team will take responsibility of any further negative effects on Jatou
- Jatou will get married as soon as she completes her senior secondary school.

We agreed to the conditions because we believe that when you educate a woman you educate a nation.

Jatou is now in her final year at senior secondary school. She is being monitored at both school and at home with regards to her performance. There is effective communication between Jatou's father and the change team, with mutual understanding, trust, confidence and friendship. We continue to give Jatou encouragement to further her education to college and university.

Our change team's intervention was timely and fruitful. I learnt from this process that it is important to respect and trust yourself so that others will have trust in you. And that guidance and counselling is a powerful tool for addressing SRGBV. I also realised that Jatou's father did not think about the effects of early marriage. The dialogue with the father shows the importance of raising awareness on SRGBV and having participation by all stakeholders.

As a union most of our activities are centered on women, girls and youth given that they are the most vulnerable. We show them how and where to seek redress when violated. We also give youth a platform to show their potential and talent, and the opportunity to voice out their experiences. Women caucuses and youth conferences are places to voice out SRGBV issues.

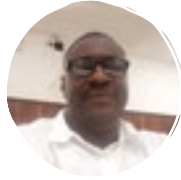
### **Objectives of the Women's Wing**

- The women's wing of the union is there to support, guide, counsel and seek redress for people who are violated.
- We partner with stakeholders and other civil society organizations with whom we share the same agenda
- Another objective is to leave no one behind – that is to conduct trainings, visits and monitoring of our grassroots members.

### **How can we make a change?**

- By equipping GTU with both immediate action and longer term strategies to continue to address SRGBV well into the future
- Mainstream and inculcate SRGBV into our national curriculum
- Have a training manual on SRGBV and gender
- Increase girl's education on gender related matters in our union programs and activities
- We should act as good guidance counselors to our girls
- Use school clubs, mothers' clubs and cultural groups to spread the message on SRGBV
- Use phone-in programs to address and clarify myths and misconceptions
- Have a code of professional ethics and conduct





## THE DEATH SENTENCE OF BEING A GIRL CHILD

Ebrima Sajaw

*GTU (Gambia Teachers Union)*

The story I want to write about is between my humble self and my beautiful Fula wife called Fatoumatta. I met Fatoumatta in 1988 while I was on a posting in her village teaching. Her beauty attracted me. So, I decided to approach her and eventually asked her if she would be the queen of my life, but only under one condition - that is whenever we are blessed with a girl child, she must not undergo female genital mutilation (FGM). It is a traditional belief in our tribe that every girl child should undergo such a horrible and degrading act. However, her response was let's wait until that day comes.

The knot was tied and we became husband and wife. Later, we were blessed with two girls. Gass was five years while Abbie was three years younger. We were all living happily. One sudden day, while together on the bed, my wife said to me that it's now time to circumcise our girls. I was so shocked to hear her utter such words. I told her never to utter those words again. Then she started to cry and make all kinds of noise. I just couldn't sleep because I wasn't expecting it from her, but I was ready for the challenge.

To my surprise the day had been set by the community for the girls to be circumcised without my knowledge. While in the village, a friend of mine called Ousman asked me whether I was through with the necessary preparations for my girls. In two weeks his girls were also going and he was really happy about it. I told Ousman my girls weren't going anywhere. He told me I was a disgrace to the community, due to my ignorance of my traditional responsibilities. Before I could respond, he gave me a hard slap on my face and walked away.

I said to myself that the real fight had begun. When I reached home my entire family was waiting for me. My mum, dad, in-laws, neighbours and relatives far and wide came to advise me to let my girls go through it, because it would make them better women when they grow up. Then I asked my wife Fatoumatta, “has it made you a better woman? You have undergone a series of operations, pains and nearly died due to complications during the delivery of both of my girls. And now you are not allowed to conceive anymore or else you will lose your life.”

I told them that the practice was unhealthy and I would die for my girls, no matter the consequences. They said I’m stupid, ignorant, poisonous and a disgrace to the whole tribe that I belong to. My dad said that he is commanding me to allow my girls or else the customs and norms of my entire family would be killed. I was so angry, I couldn’t control my emotions. I told them to go to hell with tradition. As far as I was concerned the others should not allow their children too but I don’t have the power to stop them. But as long as I was alive my girls weren’t going anywhere.

Fatoumatta became frustrated due to the pressure, because people blamed her for doing too little to convince me. She decided to insult me, refusing to cook because she thought that by irritating me I would give in. One evening I was reading and a village elder came to me with a message that I should report to the council of elders in the village, because my wife reported that I said FGM has no relevant effects on girls and that in fact it causes more harm than good. They said this was insulting and that I was ignorant. Fatoumatta was happy when she heard that I was going to answer to the elders because she thought I would now give up.

When I reached the elders I was asked to repeat the exact words I had mentioned to Fatoumatta, which I did. They called a girl to narrate the effects of FGM while I listened attentively to prepare myself to respond. This girl was called Jainaba. She mentioned that what they removed from her helps her body not feel any sensation for boys unless she is married.

I told them that it is nonsense because there are girls who go through FGM and end up losing their lives due to complications from FGM. I told them that in the cities, 90% of girls have never been through it. They are healthy and living fine. Why can we not be like them? They concluded I was insane. They wondered why a man in their community was behaving like this, because men are always in the front to see that FGM is done. I told them I have the feeling we are all born complete. “OOOh! No! oooh! No!”, they replied.

Eventually, while I was at work, a friend and neighbour called Ousman came to inform me that he had seen my wife taking my girls along with others to be circumcised. I couldn't hold my breath. I nearly fainted and prayed to God to protect them before I arrived. I took permission from my boss and headed by taxi straight to my father-in-law's house. The way I banged on his door, Kebba, my father in law, nearly insulted me. I asked Kebba to tell his wife, Binta, who was the leader of the group of elders conducting FGM in the community, to bring back my girls without anything happening to them. I told Kebba to go to hell with their beliefs. Kebba was so angry that he started to tremble. He said Fatoumatta told them that I consented for my girls to be circumcised. I responded back, God forbidding, that if I don't get my girls back I will make life miserable for him.

Immediately Kebba sent for Binta. When Binta, my mother in-law came and saw the state I was in, she nearly ran for her life but Kebba asked her to bring Gass and Abbie immediately. She said that her and my wife had done their final sacrifice and the girls are just awaiting their turn, and that being the case it can't be reversed. I told Binta that if anything happens to my daughters I will report both her and my wife and kill myself.

So, Binta had no other choice but to go and fetch my girls, although she felt that she nearly lost her own life for snatching the girls unnoticed. I was really surprised to get my girls naked but safe and sound.

Binta was the champion of the crusade of these barbaric acts inflicted on innocent girls, who were unaware of their rights to resist their parents' decisions, due to their tender age and the traditional beliefs. Many a time girls lose their lives in the process.

Fatoumatta was tormented because my girls were the laughing stock of the community. Most of the people disassociated themselves from my family, especially from my wife who cried almost every day because of frustration from her peers. Most of the men said that I thought that my family is better than theirs because of the western education I went through and that I saw them as uncivilised and ignorant. No matter the pain, embarrassment, insults and disconnection, I raised my head high among my peer groups. There was a time when my colleagues asked me to vacate the village and go to the city. I refused because I wanted to see FGM being eradicated slowly but surely.

Abbie could not understand why I didn't allow them to be circumcised with their peer groups and their mom kept on telling them to speak to me, especially

whenever she was depressed. I told Gass and Abbie that they are too young to understand but that time would tell. In school their peer groups always told them that they will end up being lonely because no man will ever marry them, because they are not clean and pure. I advised them to concentrate on their education and avoid these conversations and then they would be better people.

Binta, my mother in law, felt under great pressure as the leader of the custom. Binta had inherited female circumcisation at a tender age from her grandmother and she was initiated by the community, and Binta had been told that if she betrayed the cause she would die miserably. Some months after she had fetched my girls, Binta became severely sick. My wife told me her mum is going to die because she betrayed the cause by withdrawing her grandchildren. At first I thought that it was a joke and I didn't want to visit her. When I realised it was serious, I went to visit her. I wanted to take her to the city hospital for treatment but she told me her illness has nothing to do with doctors. She held my right hand and asked me to please take good care of her only daughter to whom she would have passed on her traditional inheritance to continue her legacy, but I had said God forbid. Little did I know that Binta was breathing her last breath. I felt her hand dropped off from my hand and I lost control of my tears.

I never knew that I was fighting a worthy cause for Gass and Abbie until one day I heard something on the news about gender based violence (GBV) and a talk about the abuses inflicted on women and girls. I was so happy and called my girls to come and listen but they could not comprehend what the news was about. I invited Fatoumatta to listen. I didn't blame her because she was not exposed to the city. The message I heard motivated me to do more to save girls from FGM. I knew it would not be easy due to the beliefs which were laid down by our ancestors but we have to venture into better practices.

Luckily for me I was invited to attend a workshop on SRGBV. I wondered first what it was all about but I was blessed to know that I am an activist. And more is expected from me now that I am a member of the peer learning and the change team. I also have more support than ever before.

There is SRGBV in our schools which is affecting students, teachers, communities and most of the time it is under the carpet due to poverty, stigmatisation and cultural barriers. So with the knowledge gained I decided to be the voice of the voiceless to combat the horrors of FGM.

Moreover I started to sensitise Fatoumatta. I was surprised when one day she suddenly gave in and hugged me, with the girls, and told me how she wished I

was her father when she was young, to protect her from undergoing FGM. She remembered two of her peers who died in the process because they bled to death. She said that they celebrated FGM just because they were ignorant of the bad practices due to traditional beliefs. She apologised to me and the girls for not being aware earlier but that it was better to be late than never.

Fatoumatta was now ready to join me in the crusade to eradicate the bad practices of FGM along with Gass and Abbie, without being afraid of the challenges in the community. We were insulted when we first started the sensitisation on FGM but I was the rock of the family despite all the threats to kill us. I had prepared my family for everything.

As The Gambia Teachers' Union (GTU) we were able to create centres for women and children to come for counselling with trained GTU change team members. We have platforms for the voiceless to be heard. We have also trained GTU School Representatives on SRGBV in each cluster, and they in turn form school Clubs and dramatise the effects of SRGBV. Schools have secret boxes where Teachers and students can post written notes about their ordeals in the school, and community. These boxes are checked weekly and the cases are reported to the change team members. Schools also have drama clubs which sensitise students and community members. Bantaba is a local setting where people from different backgrounds come together to speak out openly of their ordeals after being sensitised and counselling is given to victims and perpetrators. School clubs sing local songs on SRGBV for better understanding of the message. We engaged the National Television (GRTS) which gave the change team several slots on SRGBV for wider coverage. Media outlets were sensitized and asked to spread the message in both electronic and print media.

I personally use the school assembly on Mondays and Fridays to address the whole school on all forms of SRGBV. I give examples of corporal punishment, name calling such as calling the girl child 'my wife', practices such as making girl children do domestic work. The teachers have given me the name Mr SRGBV.

Similarly, I am able to inspire others who are the perpetrators to stop the act of FGM on our girls. To my surprise I have helped men to take the lead in telling their spouses to stop encouraging their peers to venture into such practices.

Yes, it has just begun, but I know we will be victorious one day for sure. This is my purpose - to break the culture of silence, to break boundaries and fight the stigmatisation of the girl child in relation to all aspects of SRGBV.



## STRONG WILL

Destaye Tadesse

*ETA (Ethiopian Teachers Association)*

A female teacher was born and raised in Addis Ababa. She attended primary and secondary schools in Addis Ababa. She completed both her high school and University education with high scores. And because of her excellent achievements in the University, she was hired as a graduate assistant in one of the new Universities located 300 Km away from Addis Ababa. Her story begins here.

She is a very strong, confident and competent teacher. While teaching in the University, the Academic Vice President approached her and told her he is interested in her. As much as she tries to tell him that she is not interested, he kept on insisting and started to harass her. However, for others he started to say that he wants to marry her. If not he would like her to be his girlfriend until they get married. She kept on expressing clearly that she is not interested in either becoming his girlfriend or becoming his wife. She explained that her purpose in the University is not to be married but to continue her education. He never understood her refusal means “NO!” Rather, the Academic Vice President continued his harassment, to the extent that he started using his position to mobilize his colleagues to force her to accept the request. The colleagues started to push her through phone calls and messages. As she persisted with her position, the messages started to include threats on her life. She never succumbed to all the pressures, rather continued her struggle. In the meantime, she passed the competition to work for her Master’s degree in one of the Universities in the country.

While studying, she was given classes to teach in the summer program in the same University she came from. When teachers are given classes to teach in the summer program, they are given additional payment on their regular salaries. However after completing her assignment, while other teachers like her were paid their salaries, the Administration and Finance Office head, who is a close friend and relative of the Academic Vice President, refused to pay her salary. The situation began to be more and more difficult for her in the context where other heads of departments remained silent for fear of the consequences of standing up with the truth. She continued fighting for her rights in such unbearable conditions.

After finishing her Master's degree, she came back to the University and directly reported to the Academic Vice President and requested the renewal of her recruitment and increases her salary scale accordingly. The Academic vice president directed her request to the Finance and Administration department and the Human Resource Departments, while at the same time giving them oral direction to systematically avoid addressing her requests. As a result her formal request was ignored and not included in her personal file. As a result she was forced to work without salary for many months. At some point, she brought the issue to the attention of the University Administration, she was not given any solution. Rather, the number of people pushing and advising her to consider the Vice President's request in the pretext of supporting her increased. Some even advised her, if she married a Vice President she will gain a type of life and prestige she will not be able to get normally. In the process, she brought her case to the attention of Ethiopian Teacher's Association.

At that moment, ETA was yet to establish its representative office given the newness of that particular University. Therefore, she came directly to the Office and presented her case with evidences to the ETA President in person. As a member of the change team organized through the EI initiative facilitated by Gender at Work, the President brought the issue to the ETA Gender Office. The change team understood how such a situation affects the national level effort to increase presence of women in the academia and acted quickly with determination. The ETA Gender office wrote a letter to the Ministry of Education Gender Desk demanding immediate solution to the problem. In the middle of delayed response from the Ministry, the ETA Gender Office after compiling all the evidences, directly wrote a second letter to the Minister and State Minister of the Ministry of Education.

The Minister responded by immediately organizing an interim committee with the responsibility of investigating the situation and providing recommendations for action. However, the chairperson of the committee avoided including the representative of ETA as one of the committee members. And directly went to the University to investigate the issue.

At this moment, two mistakes were made in due process of the investigation. The first mistake was that the fact that the investigation took place in the absence of the same teacher whose case is being investigated, and the second mistake was to exclude ETA from the process. When the investigation was completed, ETA requested the Committee to share its report including the recommendations, however the request was rejected by the head of the Committee. ETA, recognizing the gravity of the situation decided to write an additional letter to the Gender Desk at the Ministry of Education. In addition, the ETA president directly discussed the issue with the Minister and State Minister of the Ministry of Education, and told them that if the issue is not resolved immediately ETA will take it to the court on behalf of its member. The victim was transferred to a university of her choice and later on went for her terminal degree. Finally, the Academic Vice President was removed from his position. Here I want to stress the confidence and perseverance that the victim who has suffered the abuse showed. Without her strong will and support from her family and ETA such abuses would have gone unnoticed.

### ***Why do I write this story?***

Currently, increased number of female academic staff are joining Universities and higher education institutions in Ethiopia. These young women get into higher institutions without the appropriate information to deal with such abuses. They do not know when and where to go and how to report such cases. I would like to send a message to them that they are not alone and they need to report such abuses. They have to discuss openly and seek support from their students and their family. In addition, female students and lecturers need to be conscious about collecting evidences and know where to bring their cases.

In every higher institutions and schools, there is a committee organized with the aim of preventing Gender Based Violence. The committee is organized based on the guideline called “guideline to prevent Gender Based Violence in schools” that was developed through the collaboration between Ministry of Education and ETA gender representatives. In each school the Committee is organized constituting



two representatives of ETA. In high schools, the “gender violence index” is meant to measure levels of violence in schools twice a year with the aim of bringing together teachers, parents, school support staff (PTA) in order to raise awareness and bring SRGBV to their attention.

### ***My message to the school community***

A school community means those who directly or indirectly involve in the learning process. The school community plays important and pivotal role in the prevention of violence and establishing a safe and secured school environment. Therefore:

- A. Education institutions:** make sure that the school environment is free of unnecessary influences (bars, nightclubs, drugs...). The schools should be fenced, have appropriate, separate and clean toilets where especially girls use freely. There should be a school compound where students can play, sit freely, read and hold discussions.
- B. Parents:** parents besides buying school supplies have the responsibility to hold free discussions with their children. They have to guide their children on how to deal with gender based violence, peer pressure, etc. They have to understand and support their children.
- C. Teachers:** You are custodians of knowledge. Parents trusted you with their children and hence please count these children as one of your own children, brothers and sisters. It may happen that you may fall in love with one of your student. However, you have to remember that, using your positional power to abuse students will eventually cost you more. Please, respect your profession, be disciplined, and please avoid being a disgrace to this sacred profession.
- D. Students:** Education is your future. Education is meant to capacitate you. You have to know negative influences will interrupt with your education and attainment of your goals. When you join universities there are many challenges. Peer pressure and addiction affect your education. Focus on your goals, deal with the challenges that may pose obstacles on your education. You may feel “free” when you joined University and go to other places where you are not under the direct eyes of your parents. Be careful whatever is being presented by your peers may cost you dearly.

- E. Support staff:** You are essential for the successful achievement of the goals of the teaching learning process. Do not use your positions to ask female students out and abuse them. The study that ETA conducted in 2014 shows that support staff also play roles in SRGBV. You are also responsible in the fight against SRGBV.
- F. Government:** The effort to provide accessible quality education for all is commendable. However, the effort and the attention in providing legal support and coverage to SRGBV is not as strong as it should be. The long time it takes to investigate and the lack of evidence is being wrongly interpreted by some people (perpetrators are not punished for lack of evidence and this makes some people think that they can get away with such violence). The government should come up with a solution that helps victims to get justice timely and include SRGBV in the criminal laws of the country.
- G. Teacher's union:** The only way to prove that teaching is a sacred profession is when we can be professional enough to respect our code of ethics. Today's students are tomorrow's teachers. Our members should be encouraged and supported to fulfill their professional requirements. Unions need to take strict measures, on those who fail to respect the code of ethics.



## ACTION AGAINST SRGBV

Yohannes Benti

*ETA (Ethiopian Teachers Association)*

The reason I am writing this story is to increase awareness of the complexity of SRGBV. My other reason is to let others know that it is possible to measure violence and take strategic action corresponding to the level of violence noticed/identified.

SRGBV requires concerted efforts under the leadership of teacher organizations. I believe that teachers have a primary concern to create conducive learning environments for their students. Teachers' organizations, education officers, community and local stakeholders, need to understand the difficulties involved in SRGBV and also need to fulfil their social responsibility to act individually and collectively to end violence in schools and violence against women in society in general.

Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) apart from defending education and members' rights also deals with student issues based on the principles provided in its articles of association. In other words, ETA is expected to create conducive learning environments for students in general and for girls in particular. School related gender based violence is one among the issues ETA is concerned with in order to create a conducive learning environment for students.

School related gender based violence (SRGBV) is such a broad issue that it could be visible and invisible. The challenge is to be able to exhaustively list the types of violence happening in schools and beyond. On the one hand, students do not clearly report the violence that has happened to them. On the other hand, some violence was considered normal since they happen to exist since ancient

times and had deep roots in the culture of the society. This requires mobilizing the school community and beyond. Mobilizing out of school community or local stakeholders is very important since cultural practices exist in the wider community.

ETA decided that a starting point in addressing SRGBV was to survey the types of violence and how the school community understands SRGBV. Therefore, two university staff, one man and one woman, were hired to conduct a survey in seven secondary schools randomly selected out of the 32 pilot project schools at national level selected based on three predetermined criteria: schools led by women principal/deputy principals, reported violence, and the number of female students.

While the researchers came out with various recommendations, two of their recommendations requested immediate action. One is to be able to self-measure the status of violence in schools and the other is to come up with life skill manual to enable students to be assertive and positively defend themselves.

With regard to measuring the status of violence, there was a debate among participants drawn from ETA members and stakeholders who were called to validate the survey. One of the debates was whether it is possible to measure violence. Though there was no consensus among participants, the ETA leadership pushed the matter for further consultation. Experts were hired to find a solution to the challenge. The experts came up with a manual which enables measurement of the status of violence in schools, known as school violence index (SVI). The manual incorporates four dimensions, each one constituting measurable tools drawn from the survey.

Three groups of the school community – students, teachers and school administration – were trained to measure violence. After finishing the measurement, the three groups sat together and discussed in order to reach consensus. Through this process, the status of violence of a school was measured.

Measuring the status of violence is not enough. The wider community needs to contribute its share in supporting the school to mitigate the problem. Hence, the status of violence of the school was presented to relevant local stakeholders in order to make them aware of the situation and get their commitment towards contributing their share. Those stakeholders were parent-teacher-student association leader, local education officer, the police, justice officers, Children, youth and women affairs, and communication officers. The participants

were inspired by the activity and agreed to meet quarterly to evaluate the improvements made in mitigating school violence related to gender.

Although ETA's activity to fight SRGBV was in place before the EI and Gender at Work initiative, the concept of a "change team" which came during the "Hearing Our Stories" workshop really helped in intensifying the activity. In addition, the peer learning sessions deepened my knowledge and enabled me to learn from other contexts. Our work on SRGBV was institutionalized through the change teams established from national to local levels. ETA'S Change team is made up of four people. Two were from ETA headquarters, one from Ministry of Education, and one a woman lecturer from Metropolitan University. The team guided the process of establishing a system/strategy to take action against SRGBV.

The two manuals-SVI and life skill were shared with ETA and education office structures including some schools. The SVI manual is specifically shared widely including with the International Working Group to end SRGBV.

A number of success stories as a result of the activity can be shared. For example, school principals committed themselves to include issues of SRGBV in their annual school plan and to allocate the necessary resources to mitigate the problem. Policemen and judges we have worked with have made shifts in their thinking. A policeman confessed that he had done an injustice to a victim by convincing a victim who had been married by force to remain married rather than take the matter to an attorney. A judge, who was part of a workshop to discuss a school where violence had been measured, came to the realisation that he had given perpetrators minimal sentences due to his minimal attention to violence. The Children, Youth and Women affairs officers promised, in front of workshop participants, to meet quarterly with the school principal to identify a common agenda and to act jointly.

ETA signed a memorandum of understanding with the state Minister of higher Education in November 2014. The memorandum is an agreement between ETA and the Ministry to prevent gender based violence, and as article 6, sub article 6.2.9 of the agreement states, "To follow up and create conducive conditions as well as prevent gender based violence on women teachers and girls". This provision is very important since leaderships of the two institutions will now plan accordingly and take the necessary actions. It also gives an opportunity for the victims to bring reported cases to the concerned authorities. ETA follows the 'zero tolerance' principle in this regard.



## SCHOOL RELATED GENDER BASED VIOLENCE TURNING POINT: THE STORY OF AN SRGBV VICTIM, PERPETRATOR AND CHANGE AGENT

Alice C. Twei.

*KNUT (Kenya National Union of Teachers)*

After serving for 10 years as a teacher, I was elected branch treasurer of Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT and later a member of the National Executive Council (NEC). In 2016, I had the opportunity to attend a regional women's caucus where Gender coordinator and the National Gender Desk Officers were facilitating a workshop on SRGBV.

We shared our experiences as 25 branch women representatives from the Rift Valley Region. Women shared examples of abusive language, sexual abuse and discrimination among other forms of SRGBV. This moment marked my turning point in starting to look back and reflect on how I had been treating learners in school. I discovered that I had unconsciously been a perpetrator of SRGBV.

I realized that although I was a victim, I should not have projected my feelings of anger and revenge onto learners and even my children.

My life as a victim started from my childhood, being born fourth in a family of 18 siblings with a very harsh father. My father used to beat us thoroughly whenever we made a slight mistake and my two mothers were not safe either.

Therefore, I grew up knowing that men beating women and children was "normal". I can remember vividly when at the age of 12 in class six, my music teacher, Mr. Omari, entered our class majestically. His first command to us after

greeting was to sing the national anthem. I loved music and sang it to the best of my knowledge.

To my astonishment, I heard a loud voice, "Alice which voice is that? It's out of key and cannot even be compared to a frog! You stupid girl, do you think you're beautiful? Nonsense!"

I blacked out. When I regained consciousness, I was sitting on my desk, my dress soaked in tears. The teacher had left class immediately after the national anthem. My friend Sarah, tried to comfort me, but it was unbearable. I went home complaining of a headache. Luckily, I met my Mother at home and shared what I went through. She really encouraged me by quoting the Bible verses, Psalms 139:14 and Deuteronomy 31:8, which says, "you are fearfully and wonderfully made" and "do not be afraid; and do not be discouraged respectively". She paraphrased the words such that it looked like God was talking directly to me. Her words were very strong. They helped me come out of it, though not completely because to date, I can't even sing a simple song solo. Whenever I sing, that same voice rings in my mind and I immediately stop singing. But I thank God because through the help of my mother I didn't remain the stupid girl as stated by the teacher.

In class eight, many girls who were our classmates dropped out of school because of unwanted pregnancy and early marriage. Word in the village had it that some of our teachers were responsible but no action was taken against them. This left my class with only two girls - my cousin and I - and nine boys. I really felt bad that some became mothers when they were too young to understand the responsibilities that came with motherhood.

Teachers really misused us girls. We were used by the teachers to prepare food for them, and at times wash their clothes during break time or games time. The nine boys would either play or do their assignments. The worst experience was one afternoon, when my cousin was absent from school and I was the only one helping the teachers prepare food. Unfortunately, being a Friday, most teachers were absent and there was only one male teacher. I prepared food for him and served him. When I wanted to leave, he grabbed my hand. The grip was so strong that I could not remove my hand. He pulled me closer to him and told me, that he wanted to show me how he loved me. I was very scared and didn't know what he was up to. I just screamed, "Ooh my God!" No sooner had I done so there was a knock on the door. Immediately the teacher released me to check who

was knocking. It was our class prefect sent by the head teacher to collect the marking scheme. That was my saviour. I imagined what would have happened to me, having in mind the things my classmates had gone through that led them to drop out of school. From that time, whenever they looked for me, I would go and hide in the lower classes so that they would not get me.

When I finished my O levels, I joined a teacher training college. After Graduation, I was posted to the same primary school in my home village. Fortunately, the teachers who abused me had left. But I also became a perpetrator of corporal punishment to learners. I wrongly applied the saying, "a new broom sweeps better", because I wanted to show that I could discipline learners better. When I was on duty, I would cane late comers thoroughly. I would tell them to bend over, put their hands through their legs and touch their ears. This would expose their buttocks and the impact of the cane would be higher.

When I was teaching English in class seven, there were six boys who had just come out of seclusion after circumcision. I would punish them harshly when they failed my questions and even told them that girls were doing better than them. Traditionally, that was an abuse, because they were men and any other woman was a girl to them including me. One boy became so bitter that he walked out of class and never came back again. Those who remained nicknamed me 'Masikio' (meaning ears) because I told them to touch their ears before caning them. I also ensured that I gave the boys duties which were traditionally meant for girls, like sweeping the classroom.

This went on without intervention. To me it was normal because corporal punishment was the order of the day. I also projected onto the boy children in school what I saw and experienced from my father beating us at home, and what the male teachers had done to me. I would cane them more harshly than the girls.

One result of being a perpetrator is the pain I feel whenever I see the boy who had dropped out of school. He is wasted in the village as a casual worker depending on manual work to take care of his family. I shed tears silently, because I am the cause of what he is going through. Once during a games activities day his sister, a fellow teacher, said sarcastically to me, "some people say they are leaders yet they have ruined the lives of their learners by making them drop out of school".

At times I feel like going to apologize but how will it help?



After I was married for five years, I met another challenge, when my son put me to task.

“Mum, are you really my mother?”, lamented my four-year-old son.

“Yes,” I answered.

“Did you give birth to me like Martat?” This was our cow which had just calved.

As I was wondering why he was asking such a question, I remembered I had slapped him until he fainted the previous day because he had broken the glass door of a wall unit. I had also caned him severely before, because of small mistakes.

I then realized that I had really mistreated him. That’s why he was wondering whether I was really his mother. I looked at him and said that yes, I was his mother. He then left to play with other children. From that day, I did a lot of reflection and soul searching which eventually changed my way of discipline. I also became careful with my words. I thank God that his questions helped me and his younger siblings.

Despite being a perpetrator in school, my subjects were the best performed by learners. I was committed in my work and taught my subjects with passion. This made me think corporal punishment was doing wonders.

After attending the regional women’s caucus in 2016, I started to reflect deeply. I asked myself: how many learners was there that would have been successful in their education if they had not failed through my hands? I reflected on the questions asked by my son and the sister of the boy who dropped out of school.

I really regretted my previous actions and started talking to the other teachers on alternative forms of punishment. At times, teachers would abuse learners, but I would correct them, as it was killing the morale of learners.

When I started doing that, the teachers accused me of representing learners instead of teachers. I had to be tactful in dealing with these issues. I changed my approach and used my experiences in the form of stories which really helped a lot. Teachers started using alternative methods of discipline in place of corporal punishment. For example, not allowing learners to go out during break time.

From my experiences as a victim and as a perpetrator, it’s clear that any kind of SRGBV in school can impact learners negatively and can affect their future

potential. It may leave a permanent mark on some while others like me, may be lucky to have the opportunity to change.

When I went to the KNUT Head office last year (in 2018) as an Assistant Gender Coordinator, I learned a lot from the four elected SRGBV change team teachers from Muranga, Makueni, Mombasa and Bungoma. During the EI, Gender @Work, UNGEI Education Unions SRGBV take action initiative, KNUT with National Education Association (NEA) support tried to reach as many teachers as possible through the four Change Team teachers, Mary (Makueni), Kenneth (Bungoma), Mwangi (Muranga) and Grace (Mombasa Shanzu TTC). Teachers were invited to forums such as the Women's Caucus, School Representatives trainings as well as other teachers' forums, to sensitize them on SRGBV.

Equally, the KNUT National Steering Committee led by the Secretary General have done a lot in supporting the programme and using teachers forums to sensitize them on SRGBV.

The Change Team teachers have real touching experiences as evident by their quotes below.

*“SRGBV initiative has made me use both formal and informal sessions to address and create awareness among teachers (who now) give alternative corrections like writing or scribbling some sentence to fill an A4 page instead of corporal punishment.”*

*– Kenneth Waswa, (Change team Bungoma).*

*“I underwent a paradigm shift in my thinking. This made me embark on sensitising the administration, tutors, students and non-teaching staff on ‘SRGBV’ and all that it entails. The bullying culture stopped, students were happy and there is a peaceful atmosphere in the college up to date.*

*– Grace Alwala, (Change team Mombasa)*

For sure these are some of the fruits of SRGBV programme in KNUT. In conclusion, each educator, parent, care giver and anyone entrusted to take care of learners at any level should try as much as possible to provide an environment free from SRGBV to enable all learners to achieve their potential.

As the saying goes, children are flowers grown in concrete gardens and thus need proper nourishment.



## THE POWER OF WORDS IN FIGHTING SRGBV

Winnie Namata

*UNATU (Uganda National Teachers Union)*

Forever is supposed to be a beautiful thing. I mean, people declare to their loved ones, "I will love you, forever." We even have millennial slang such as BFF to mean "Best Friends Forever". It is such a beautiful feeling when the people and things we love assure us that those good vibes will never go away. Our hearts do little 'flip-flop' dances when we think about these beautiful memories.

Walking this journey, unveiling and unwrapping layer after layer on what School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) is, my heart is suddenly filled with mixed emotions. "Maybe not everything should last forever." These workshops have taken me down memory lane and made me relive emotions which I thought I had carefully tucked away at the back of mind and left inside those school walls. It has finally dawned on me that though not physical, my friends and I have in a way been victims of SRGBV. We can no longer talk about those 'poor girls'. We are part of the statistics. We are one of them. Those girls are us!

It is a sad feeling, one that is made worse by the fact that if ever an opportunity presented itself and we were to face those responsible, they would quickly dismiss our pain. After all, it was just 'WORDS'.

It is important for our teachers to know that while they credit themselves for influencing eternity through their spoken word, in the same way, some of their words can leave a wound that may never heal in the lives of the learners.

I am one of those girls who attended all the best schools right from Kindergarten. I was born and raised in the capital of Kampala and like my peers, school life

was generally easy-breezy. Cases of rape, defilement, corporal punishment were things we heard of in the news or when our parents discussed the matter over dinner. After all, we had nothing to worry about because our teachers were the *crème-de-la crème*. The ones who qualified top of their classes and were celebrated 'experts' in most of the subjects. They authored textbooks which were used by their peers as teaching guides. These teachers were good, actually great at their jobs but they were also great at other things, such as 'instilling fear' and verbal abuse. I do not know whether they used 'fear' to get us to respect their 'greatness' or simply thought that they could say and do anything because they were 'untouchable'. They would 'manufacture' the best candidates in the country as easily as Coca-Cola manufactures soda. They had the secret formula to quality education and were therefore invincible.

If only our teachers knew the power of their words. If only they knew that some of us today behave in a way that is impacted by their tongue and NOT in a good way.

I remember clearly our inaugural lesson in Primary Seven. We were fresh from a long holiday, ready to learn and wind up our final year in Primary School. We had heard tales about our Class teacher – a strict disciplinarian who was no-nonsense. I remember when he walked in, I could tell just by looking at his neatly pressed shirt and trousers that all the tales we had heard about him had some truth. A tall, dark man with thick rimmed glasses who kind of reminded me of those detectives we watched in crime investigation movies.

He walked in with a cane and with just that gesture, the class fell silent. His presence was not only intimidating but also somewhat unsettling. The way he looked at us through his glasses, one felt as if he could see right through your soul and know exactly what you were thinking about him. He seemed to like the fact that we all seemed scared of him.

When he spoke, he started with some rules. Those rules that continue to control me, even though he already went to meet our creator. He said, "In my class, there are many things I don't tolerate! Those who do not want to comply can find another class."

"No girl in my class is allowed to wear jewellery. The school allows it but I do not accept it." He explained that girls who wear earrings and bracelets are merely temptresses out to seduce 'his' boys and make them fail in the finals.

“All girls must wear the school uniform on all days including Saturdays. The school allows casual wear for weekend classes but it is unacceptable in my class.” According to him, all other clothing except the school uniform would be another form of distraction for ‘his’ boys who needed to top the country in the Primary Leaving Examinations.

Braided hair, makeup, nail polish were unacceptable in his class. Hair was to be kept strictly at 1 inch and below. This was very strange because these things were normal for any city-born. Our own mothers took pleasure in taking us to hair salons to get our hair and nails done. My school which had a fair share of foreigners especially Indians accepted it all. I was so confused.

A health check every Wednesday by the same teacher was instituted to ensure that this particular hair and nails rule was followed. Of course he was aware that some girls would be tempted to use colourless nail polish after all, he had been teaching for over 10 years.

He went on to lecture the girls in the strictest form possible, about how we would land ourselves in problems if we chose to ignore his rules. We were made aware that ‘his’ boys were at a critical age and at that stage, it is usually the girls who ‘create’ problems for them.

Wait, where were the rules for the boys? Weren’t we ‘his’ girls as well? Had we come to school to merely grow or to work on our future? What did my clothing have to do with my education? Honestly, I had so many questions but no answers. One thing that stood out for me was that I did not want to be caught on the wrong side. That very evening, my mother took me to the barbershop and got my hair cut. I loved my hair, very dark, long and beautiful when straightened out but would shrink into a thick, bushy afro when washed.

It got worse because what were supposed to be enlightening science lessons about growth and maturity turned into ‘mocking’ sessions for the girls. This class teacher was also our science teacher. When he taught about body changes in girls during puberty, he made it a point to remind us that we were now mature and if we were not careful, we would land ourselves in trouble just like the unfortunate girls whose stories circulated in the news. In short, men and boys rape girls who dress and behave in a certain way. He continued to ‘hammer’ it in that girls were not supposed to be ‘too beautiful’ or ‘too smart’ but needed to keep a low profile if we were supposed to survive in this world.

You may say this teacher never actually touched us in anyway but oh he did....

I was made to believe that before taking any action, I should first put the opposite sex in mind. To date, I do not wear makeup for fear that I will be 'too beautiful' and entice someone to hurt me. I do not wear perfectly fitting dresses for the same reason- I prefer loose pants. I prefer the Plain-Jane look. I find safety in that look. I have to constantly ask myself, "Will this hairstyle make me look like I am searching for attention?" "Do these earrings make me stand out?" I always dreamt of becoming an air hostess but the fact that they always have make up on partly made me opt for a career that keeps one hidden behind a computer!

Unfortunately, I have also grown to be judgmental about fellow women who wear heavy makeup. I tend to label them as 'wanna-be's', 'show-offs' and 'attention-seekers' yet in reality, there is nothing wrong with looking gorgeous!

I look at my daughter who is only eight months old and I wonder if her life will be different. Sometimes, out of habit, I tend to dress her up in dull clothes- mostly greys and blacks as if in a way trying to make sure that she does not stand out. My mind tells me that it is wiser to groom her early on how to protect herself, how to be subtle and not attract too much attention to herself or else she might get into trouble.

One of my friends got into trouble, actually. One Saturday, her family had been invited for a wedding reception and the plan was to pick her up after class. She was so excited that she wore her party dress underneath her uniform but forgot to take off her earrings while entering class. And then this teacher spotted her...

He called her out and said, "Look at this prostitute. Whose attention are you trying to attract with those earrings." The shame of being called out did not die easily. By lunch time, the whole Upper school section had known about the incident. She had to lie-low for some time because the whole school was looking for the 'prostitute'. Will she ever forget this incident? Imagine being labelled a prostitute for wearing a pair of earrings!

One may be wondering whether we had counselling and guidance teachers. Of course we did. The government policy required each school to designate a senior woman teacher to handle these issues. However, in my own experience, the counselling and guidance teacher we had in Primary school was very tough and unapproachable. In fact, she was so strict that going to her for help had to be a matter of 'do or die'. At that age, one of those moments when a girl may need

help was when she suddenly got her period without adequate preparation. But we all knew that it was more advisable to feign sickness and be allowed to go home rather than go to the counsellor to ask for sanitary pads.

I hate the way menstruation was made to be a 'dirty' thing, a shameful thing. Something girls had to hide desperately for fear of ridicule especially from the boys and male teachers who would tease us by saying, "This one has now grown and can get pregnant.". If you happened to stain your uniform and had to tie a sweater around your waist, the teasing would go on until the end of day. By this time, you would have already cried your eyes out and cursed the day you were born female! I remember how I prayed to God every day that my first period would come after finals.

At this moment, I am actually thankful for whoever invented sweaters! Those sweaters provided the much needed 'cover' for our signs of maturity. I remember how my friends whose breasts had started blossoming never took their sweaters off no matter how hot it was. I still see this habit among the older girls in Primary schools around my home in Kampala.

Where did this period-shame start from? It all started with that teacher and how he explained it during our science lessons. His words did not help us appreciate periods as 'normal' but rather to see this as some sort of challenge girls had to endure on a monthly basis. I do not want my daughter to grow up with this same mentality. That change starts with me.

As a Communication and Advocacy Officer working with the Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU) I am well placed to use the platforms available to me to speak to teachers. As a teachers' union we have used several platforms such as meetings, trainings, community sensitization sessions, radio talk shows, information, communication and education materials to tackle the issue of School Related Gender Based Violence. We have mainstreamed SRGBV into our school based programmes such as Stop Child Labour and early marriages, Teachers Action for Girls, and In-Service training. The communication unit which I lead has developed a credit-worthy array of materials such as posters, fliers, brochures, radio spots, newsletters, compound sign posts, all addressing different issues around SRGBV identified in the respective school or community of intervention.

In my opinion, UNATU has done a lot in terms of advocacy, and teacher sensitization on issues concerning SRGBV including a firm and constant call to teachers to recommit to the profession by adhering to both the professional and Union codes of conduct.

The SRGBV workshops organised by UNGEI, Gender@Work, and EI particularly through the 'Hearing of Our Stories' sessions have clearly led to a personal reflection on what more can be done. This realisation has come through sharing my own story and listening to stories from others. As a Union, and as an advocate, there is a lot of work to be done around the issue of language used in schools. Our teachers must understand that SRGBV is not only about 'physical' abuse. Emotional abuse, even if it is meant to be a joke, is still abuse and can have lasting effects on our learners both boys and girls.

Allow me to explain.....

When you tell our daughters that they should be careful not to get raped by dressing in a certain way, you are indirectly telling our daughters that they are to blame for rape, and you are indirectly telling our sons that it is okay to take advantage of a girl or woman depending on what she is wearing.

Teach our sons that it does not matter what a girl is wearing, rape is wrong and sex must be consensual. Wearing a short skirt, dress or pants are not an invitation. She is not 'asking for it'. Teach our sons about self-control and respectful relationships.

When you are teaching about body changes, do not use words that make this experience shameful. Growing up is a beautiful thing. Use words that encourage both boys and girls to embrace the changes in their own bodies. Create an open space in the classroom where these issues are discussed. It is never okay to single out anyone to use as examples for the different changes taking place. Do not say, 'See that one, her hips are widening and her breasts are blossoming!' When you do this, you make girls feel like what is happening to them is a mistake- a curse even. You are also teaching boys that it is okay to objectify and call women out on their bodies. This is never okay.

Boys go through changes too but teachers never point these out and when they do - it is usually in a positive way. I have never known a boy who was scared about having their voice deepen. They would proudly show off! Why can't our teachers create the same experience for our daughters? Use words that will put an end to period-shame. I remember when Procter and Gamble, the makers of Always Sanitary pads did a promotion at my school. All the girls in the upper Primary School were called for a 'special' meeting and given free pads. We gladly accepted the pads but the puzzle remained how to 'smuggle' them from the meeting room back to the classroom. The same thing is still happening today.



Some supermarkets in Kampala offer black polythene bags to carry the pads you have bought and brighter colours for all other items. Menstruation is normal and teachers can support in sharing this message.

Teachers, it is never okay to use your own stereotypes and beliefs to judge our learners. When our sons and daughters dress in a certain way, it is not right to judge them unless it goes beyond the normal standards of decency. Calling our daughters 'prostitutes' or 'spoilt' because of what they are dressed in is wrong. If your religion frowns upon braided hair, jewellery and make up, it is not right to impose the same beliefs upon your learners. Teach our sons and daughters about decency and trust that you have given them enough information for them to make the best choices.

Enough with the comparisons! It does not matter how much you know one's mother or grandmother for that matter. It is never okay to say, "You are as dumb as your mother!" "You stupid girl, you will also end up getting pregnant early like your mother." We are all different. Every young girl is her own person with her own unique qualities and aspirations. The more you compare her to relatives, the more you dim her hopes of breaking the cycle and becoming something more. By doing this, you are also indirectly teaching our sons that disrespecting women is okay. You are telling our sons that women will never amount to anything; that women have no place at the top! Use words that encourage both our daughters and sons to do their best in school. We live in a world where we have inspirational women even within our own communities that can make for good examples. Use those to inspire our daughters. Show them the possibilities; give them hope that their education will not be in vain.

Finally, it's important for teachers to understand their critical role in supporting learners to cope with mental health difficulties. The ability for learners to stay in school, compete favourably and enjoy their experience is affected by their mental well-being. In one of the SRGBV workshop sessions, one of the participants shared a horrible story about a young girl who was chased out of class because her uniform was stained with period blood. The embarrassment was too much that she committed suicide! A young life lost, just like that. It fills me with dread imagining my daughter going through the same ordeal. Families and schools are the strongest social institutions in a child's life, meaning that both parents and teachers have a role to play in offering the much required support and coping mechanisms. Examination pressures, home and relationship frustrations, hormonal and body changes can all take a toll on our pupils. In

some cases, Counselling and Guidance rooms are used more as punitive than supportive spaces where 'troublesome' and 'problematic' children are referred. In some schools, teachers assigned duties of counselling and guidance do not have the required expertise to help learners. How do such learners deal with helplessness in the face of crisis? Who do they turn to if the teachers are also the source of this frustration?

As teachers, your words have power. They can heal and can also hurt. They can build but also destroy. They can make or break a learners' future. Beware of the seeds you are planting through your words.



## GONE ARE THE DAYS WHEN SCHOOL RELATED GENDER BASED VIOLENCE WENT UNNOTICED

Baguma Filbert Bates

*UNATU (Uganda National Teachers Union)*

I am currently the General Secretary of Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU). I was born in Kigezi, the famous Switzerland of Africa. I grew up in a typical rural set up where I attended school. The environment was full of all the kinds of Gender Based Violence you can dream of.

Men woke up to go to bars while women did all the work and fended for their families. As if this was not enough, men sold their wives' household harvests to go and drink. Any woman who questioned this was battered and chased from the house for a night or nights. This was the agony of the village woman.

Imagine a woman carrying a baby on her back, a basket of sweet potatoes on her head and some firewood, pulling a goat on a rope. Come rain, shine, this was the order of the day. What a difficult life women lived!

I was made to believe that women were supposed to do all the domestic work and feed the family, while men's duty was to drink alcohol and beat women at leisure.

I believed that women were supposed to sit on mats while stools and chairs were for men. As a young boy, I started imitating what I was observing and I used to refuse to sit on a mat. Whenever I was told to go and put firewood in the cooking stones, I would do it hesitantly because I knew it was the work of women and girls.

Whenever we were at home, house chores, kitchen work, sweeping and washing was the work of women and girls. As a boy, I was to fetch water, collect firewood and graze goats.

However, when I started school, boys and girls were treated equally in most cases, apart from when it came to corporal punishment. Then boys would receive stronger beatings with the cane than girls.

During physical education lessons, boys would remove shirts and girls would remove dresses. When some girls did not have knickers, they would remain in their dresses. This was bad because everybody would know that she did not have knickers.

When I was in primary five class (P.5), I started being used as a perpetrator of School Related Gender Based Violence. I was a short, young, innocent boy whom two teachers used to send to bring the older girls in class to their living quarters. This was a daily routine and the teachers would change the girls every other day. The girls would come back in time for the evening assembly.

I didn't know the game they were playing. At that time, I could not even think that a teacher would have sex with a learner. Until when we were in primary six, and the girls started revealing that some of the teachers couldn't punish them because they were friends. And indeed if you made a mistake with one of those girls, the teachers would either punish you or he would caution you not to repeat the mistake.

In primary six I was a member of the school choir. We competed and won at zonal and county levels and qualified for district level. At the district level, each school was to bring only 50 members of the choir. It was at this time that I was psychologically tortured by our own choir master (RIP), who replaced three of us boys who were in three items with three "girlfriends" who were not in any item, under the guise of going to cook for the choir. Yet the school had hired cooks. Imagine - after washing and ironing plus borrowing black shoes! I was a good dramatist and a singer but since then, every time I hear the word 'choir', I feel the pain and tears flow inside my body. I hated listening to music and role playing since then. My talent was curtailed as a result of School Related Gender Based Violence by an unprofessional teacher.

In my primary seven, the same teacher forced me to join the choir and I refused. He resorted to caning me in assembly every morning. I was caned for five

consecutive days and I swore to him that he could do everything he wanted but I would never join the choir again. After five days, he gave up. It was a painful experience. Imagine the stress I went through as a learner.

It was unfortunate that these girls and others in lower secondary dropped out of school, sometime after P.7. teachers exploited them and destroyed their future. How I wish I had been empowered to report this mess to the school authorities. I would have saved their future.

In secondary school, exploitation of girls by teachers was the order of the day. Student “members” in Senior Secondary 2,3,4,5 & 6 also abused the girls in Senior Secondary 1. Imagine the innocent young girls excited to have joined secondary school, only to be welcomed by SRGBV torture.

After my O level, I joined the teacher training college. To my utter shock, the choir master whom I had a nasty experience with in primary school taught music, dance and drama at the college. Alas! It was darkness at noon for me.

He knew my abilities and he put me on the list of choir members. This time I feared being expelled and participated in a drama competition titled, “The Hydra”. It was about HIV/AIDS. By this time, the choir master was an AIDS patient. He exploited many female students during visits to other colleges for drama presentations.

He was not the only tutor who was exploiting innocent students. One of them wanted to impose his girlfriend on us as a sports prefect but I led a campaign and we rejected her. He got annoyed with me. One day he gave us an assignment and a female student who was sitting next to me copied my work. The tutor wanted revenge, so he gave me 0/15 and gave her 14/15. I told him that if he were to mark the final exams, I would fail. I knew he was not an examiner and therefore giving me a zero in an assignment did not mean much. Indeed, I passed very well. What lessons do we learn from such teachers? Do we have such teachers in our education institutions? Watch out, our children may fall victims if they are not ready.

After the teacher training college, I joined my first place of work. I was in the department of English. Learners who spoke their home language were spotted by their peers and every Friday at 2:00pm was hell for them. We would punish them for speaking their home language, and I later realised it was too much corporal punishment. Indeed it was horrible.

We had a teacher in P.2 who would mark pupils' books while touching the private parts of the young fat girls. His wife was also a teacher in the same school. When rumours about what he was doing spread, he was transferred. But the habit grew until he impregnated a pupil in a school where he was a head teacher. He was arrested and remanded.

At this point, I was a union branch leader and the case was brought to my attention to help him as a member of the union. I told the family members that the union does not stand with defilers. The family bribed the parents of the poor girl, who were living in absolute poverty, so that she would not appear in court. The teacher stayed on remand in prison for about two years and the court later cleared him because the complainant did not report to Court. The district retired him in public interest. He accused me of not helping him as a member of the union. He alleged that I wanted his children to suffer without education and die miserably. I asked him whether the one he had defiled was not a child with the same rights as his children.

School Related Gender Based Violence was not a big issue in our union agenda although we had activities to empower female union members. The cases we handled related to challenges female teachers go through.

At this time, I was fighting SRGBV but I didn't call it that because the concept was not in my vocabulary. I was only defending colleagues as a human rights activist and a labour unionist. It was indeed great work. As a union leader, female teachers confided in me and narrated what they were going through at their work places.

When I was a branch chairperson in Kabale District, a female teacher was transferred five times in one term by the area inspector of schools. He had demanded to have a love affair with her and she declined. He would transfer her and call the head teacher of the school to reject her on arrival. He wanted her to get tired and give in. When I learnt of this from her friends, I called her and said I wanted to intervene but she told me that it would escalate the situation. I went ahead as a leader without her consent and confronted the area inspector. He denied it and accused her of inefficiency but never followed her again. She was then accepted by a school and settled there. This was one among many cases of this nature.

When some female teachers requested to be transferred, some unreasonable education department officers took advantage of their position and invited them to come to the office over the weekend. Guess what followed!

Some female students and female teachers were taken along for workshops, seminars, conferences and meetings only to be exploited under the guise of giving them an opportunity. They give them titles like “take away” or “side dish”.

In 2015, UNATU selected teachers/members from all regions of Uganda to attend the hearing the stories session about SRGBV. During the sessions, there were many testimonies and during these revelations, I realised that indeed, I had done a lot of work in the field of fighting SRGBV.

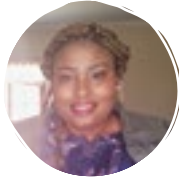
From this activity, I was nominated as one of four change team members and I continued my work of fighting SRGBV. I have had the opportunity to interact with very many members during our union activities and every time I have an opportunity to talk, I mention SRGBV. Surprisingly, every time you mention it, someone follows you to help her find a solution to what she’s going through.

Unions must stand out and take the lead in the fight against SRGBV. We must not only be seen to fight SRGBV but also name and shame the perpetrators and their sympathisers. I have chosen to be a champion and an ambassador. I am mobilising other union leaders to join the crusade against immoral and wicked behaviour against girl children and the mothers of this world.

Say no to SRGBV. Save the lives of the would-be victims of SRGBV. The girl children and the mothers of the world deserve better treatment as dignified human beings with rights to respect and protection.

It is now. Don’t hesitate! Save the innocent souls. It’s up to you and me to bring about the change we would like to see. We must be seen to act more, speak less. SRGBV is real, it has tormented many. It is a monster.

Together, we can eliminate SRGBV!



## TEACHER ADVOCACY IS A KEY TO CREATING A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL

Tshwanelo Mmutlana

*NAPTOSA (National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa)*

“How is it that SRGBV has not been arrested, tried, found guilty and sentenced to serve time for its crime against humanity?” I ask myself. “How is it that SRGBV is allowed to reign and plague the lives of so many, children, young children in particular?” This worm is allowed to feed and grow and render schools unsafe for learning and teaching.

SRGBV was a champion gladiator with many victories, and hungry for more. Clearly this was a case of do or die. Were there any warriors, courageous souls with insight to challenge this goliath? Has the story of David vs Goliath not inspired anyone to take a stand and crush the head of this giant worm?

Being called to be an SRGBV change agent was not something I asked for. I had no choice as a loyal union employee but to champion the SRGBV initiative in our union. Mine was to coordinate the union’s activities and write reports. Little did I know, that I too would be personally touched by the initiative.

The first activity was organizing a national “hearing our stories” workshop for a select group of union members, in particular young leaders. Many, including myself were curious as to what this “hearing our stories” is all about. By the end of the “hearing our stories” session I realized just how important it was to hear the stories of union members. It was clear that there were many stories of SRGBV and that there was in many instances no action for recourse for victims.



We did not receive a scripted approach but were mandated to develop a programme to attempt to eradicate SRGBV. I quickly realized that the “hearing our stories” approach was the best approach.

First you have to identify a specific problem before you can attempt to address it. Yes, research was there, but history has proven that victims and perpetrators should be given a platform to speak. As I travelled from one province to the next, one podium to the next, I heard many stories of SRGBV.

All SRGBV stories I heard were important and equally painful. But there was one particular story told by a young teenage girl called Siba from a small village called Kamanyazane, in the province of Mpumalanga, that I will not forget. The genesis of this hearing our story workshop was necessitated by an article I had read online regarding the high teenage pregnancy rate in Mpumalanga.

It was an uneventful morning. I cannot tell you if it was hot or cold, nor what I had for breakfast. All I remember was that, I was searching through media clips when my eyes came across a shocking headline about teenage pregnancy in Mpumalanga province. In one year, about 5000 young teenage girls had become mothers. The article indicated that the numbers had risen by 87 % in one year alone.

I called a colleague in Mpumalanga to discuss this shocking information. I was greatly disturbed by the article and wondered if quality teaching and learning was possible. To what extent was SRGBV a contributing factor to the high rate of teenage pregnancy? What would the future look like for the teenage mothers and the children? How can the future of the girl child be secured if this is allowed to continue? I immediately knew that it was up to the affected communities to change the narrative.

The “Hearing our Stories workshop” where Siba told her story of SRGBV was held on June 16. You see June 16, Youth Day, is celebrated as an annual event. However, as I listened to Siba tell her story, I realized that there was very little for her to celebrate. It was clear from the stream of tears rolling down her cheeks, that Siba was still grieving the untimely death of her best friend, Nandi.

I vividly remember how Siba took a deep breath, sighed heavily, and remained quiet for a time so as to compose herself before beginning to tell her story. Her heavy sigh was followed by a deafening silence. In the room, were fellow teenage learners, parents, members of the School Governing Body, an official from the

department of education and teachers. Siba shook her head as if to say, I have changed my mind, I don't want to talk, I don't have the strength, you don't care, what difference will my story make. I bent down and looked into her eyes. My eyes told her this is a safe space for you to speak. I hoped that my unspoken plea would give her courage to speak.

Siba told us how, a teenage girl, her friend Nandi and her unborn child, were kicked and beaten to death in the school toilets. Nandi was kicked to death by her boyfriend's friends because she would not terminate her pregnancy. Her short life was ended at the institution that was supposed to give her a future. Her school mates were responsible for taking her life. Her coward boyfriend had asked his friends to bail him out. It is believed that the target was the unborn foetus and I guess Nandi was just collateral damage. Nandi was buried and life continued at the school as normal. The perpetrators roamed the school corridors freely and unashamedly. The lack of consequence only fed the giant worm and terrorised Siba. Her best friend was gone and no one cared.

Siba stopped telling her story and sobbed bitterly. Everyone in the room was frozen by her pain and the story they have just heard. I quickly rushed to Siba's side and embraced her. I asked the community to come and embrace her, because, I knew that she needed their support more than mine. I was going to leave them, but they had to carry on and find a way to give her best friend and her unborn child the justice they deserved.

There was a serious crisis in this community. I left Kamanyazane with the hope that I had inspired and activated the community to take a stand against SRGBV. To turn every stone until justice was served for Nandi and schools corridors and bathrooms were safe for all learners. It was clear that learners, teachers, parents, SGB and education department of the Kamanyazane community needed to come together to find solutions to the high levels of teenage pregnancy and violence in schools. The community of Kamanyazane should find safe social support spaces for young teenage parents to get help when they face challenges.

My journey as an SRGBV change agent continued. As a team we used every opportunity where teachers gathered to speak about SRGBV. We used print media and radio to reach union members and community members. Good teachers were no longer willing to stand the degrading of our noble profession.

Teacher advocacy restores the dignity of the teaching profession and creates safe learning environment for all learners. My journey as a change agent took me

back to my community in the North West Province, where I had spent my teenage years as a scholar. After my presentation, some of my former teachers who were in the room came to greet me. I immediately realized that destiny had brought me face to face with teachers who could possibly be activists at my former school to advocate against SRGBV.

Seeing my former teachers brought mixed emotions about my school days. In as much as I had been excited to be a high school student, I had not anticipated that I would face the monster worm called SRGBV. At my school back then, and in the community, it was normal for teachers to have sexual relationships with learners. Some of those relationships had ended up in marriage. As a young girl, I never had the courage to speak out against what I thought was fundamentally wrong.

In the hostel dormitory, I heard many stories of young girls whose first sexual encounter was with a teacher. I knew that it was wrong. I felt unsafe and my respect and trust for teachers was reduced. These perpetrators of SRGBV were in positions of power. They were sexually abusing young girls, violating the trust parents had given. No one was condemning teacher- learner sexual relationships or holding the perpetrators accountable for their crimes. If I spoke up against what they were doing, who would listen. The lack of action by those in power not only normalised SRGBV but smothered the voice of activists and those who believed that SRGBV had to be addressed.

I knew that silence was no longer an option, that I now had an opportunity to speak against SRGBV. Standing on the podiums I could see oppressed souls who knew and shared my views regarding how wrong SRGBV was. Released from shackles of obscurity they could now stand with me to condemn SRGBV. These meetings had become change agent activation spaces. Change agents against the scourge of SRGBV were born. The life time sentence of silence was finally lifted.

My union leaders joined the team to advocate against SRGBV. It was hoped that if union leaders spoke out this would dissuade teacher perpetrators from continuing to abuse learners. I was elated by the support we received from union leaders. They had become spokespersons of the SRGBV initiative.

The SRGBV initiative had helped me to find my voice again. This learning space helped me and other teachers to reject acts that seek to dehumanize me or others. I hope that as I continue to advocate against SRGBV I will activate many more activists to find their voices. I believe that when the voices of activists come together the vicious cycle of SRGBV will be broken and schools will be free from SRGBV.



## THE PAINFUL VOICE OF A YOUNG MANAGER

Aubrey Makhubedu

*NAPTOSA (National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa)*

My participation in the School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) project helped me to face my own challenges as a school manager.

Violence experienced by school managers renders many schools dysfunctional in terms of ensuring that learning and teaching takes place in a safe environment. Emotionally wounded school management are unable to support teachers, and teachers who are supposed to be in loco parents to learners are not able to do this because they themselves require help.

School managers are supposed to be supported by the department of education, but I was to find no support. There is meant to be collaboration between the Departments of Social Development, Police, Justice and Education but in reality collaboration does not exist. School governing bodies do not know how to support learners and teachers who are faced with life threatening situations. SRGBV continues to increase in our schools. The voices of learners and teachers are marginalized.

The employee wellness program offered by the department of education is not accessible to all educators who need it, anywhere in the country. Department officials are unable to reach every school to offer workshops. Until there is more support in place, we will continue to have a high number of managers who are emotionally wounded, and school managers will remain under pressure and undermined.

When I was appointed as a school manager, I thought being young would give me the motivation to work hard at Mahlareng high school, a school of 800 learners. Unfortunately, it brought emotional trauma, psychological diseases and poor self-esteem into my life. I am now serving six years in the institution but emotional abuse, assault and victimization are the order of the day.

Two years after being appointed as manager, a teacher came to my office to discuss his absenteeism. Emotions were high and the teacher ended up assaulting me in front of two other teachers.

The matter was reported to the authorities and the teacher was fined R10,000, after one of the teachers who had been present wrote a witness statement. The second teacher refused to write a statement.

To my surprise all the other teachers contributed donations to assist the teacher to pay his R10,000 fine. I was left alone, scared and without counselling. I had to go back to school to work with the same teacher.

Three months down the line I called another teacher to my office to discuss his absenteeism. He also assaulted me in the passage of the admin block. I reported this to the Department. The teacher was advised by his union to resign before the matter was transferred to the Dispute Management Unit.

I was left alone again, without support, without counselling.

I had no one to talk to, no place to go, no one wanted to listen to my challenges. I trusted no one in the institution, the department, and even in my own family.

I thought this was the end of emotional abuse, but four months down the line my office was burned down. Not a single teacher said anything when investigators interviewed staff members. I was drained emotionally and physically.

While I was trying to recollect myself, a grade 8 learner came to my office, to report how her male science teacher had kissed her in the science laboratory. According to department policies this is serious misconduct. To my surprise, although the deputy head reported this matter to the department, an agreement was reached between the grandmother of the young girl and the teacher. Money was exchanged between the teacher and the grandmother. The child received no support or counselling. The teacher returned to school to continue his job as though nothing had happened. This incident made me further distrust my fellow teachers.

After all of these experiences I felt there was no one who was listening to me. I felt like I was living WITH THIS BROKEN SOUL. Fortunately, I was able to speak to my family. My sister who is a medical doctor arranged for me to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital for three months. During the time I spent there I was assisted with skills to cope with situations I found myself in. The sessions with psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and occupational therapists helped in developing my ability to survive in any working place.

I realised that one must be able to share with other people facing similar challenges. This helps to overcome one's fears. Short courses can help one to cope with the situation one finds himself or herself in. Courses can help - on things like setting boundaries, being assertive, self-acceptance, moving forward, letting go of the past, understanding your weakness, different types of management styles, a healthy eating life style, separating negative and positive thoughts, working on self confidence and self-esteem, exercising.

Telling your family how you are feeling about the situation you find yourself in also helps. This journey is sometimes a painful one, but at the end of the tunnel there will be a light.

May the painful voices of younger managers be HEARD by everyone. Let us take a stand to end SRGBV IN OUR SCHOOL.



## DEAL WITH SRGBV CASES

Leah Samakayi Kasaji

*ZNUT (Zambia National Union of Teachers)*

It was a cool Monday morning in March 2017. We were in the Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT) board room packing shirts for the international women's day celebrations. It was me, Juliet and Sombo. We were very busy because the shirts had to reach all the 10 provinces the following day since International Women's Day was just a day after. Linna, the secretary, was helping us with recording the number of shirts packed in each bag.

When all was done, I called Ndundi the Office helper to load all the packs on the ZNUT Gender Vehicle so that he could take them to the intercity bus terminus in Lusaka and put them on buses to various provinces. At this point, the General Secretary of my organization (ZNUT) sent his Office Secretary to call me saying there was a sad development that needed my urgent attention. This worried me and scared me at the same time. I quickly rushed to the Office of the General Secretary who saw me entering in a panic state. The General Secretary then said "Why are you panicking?", I replied 'but what is it Boss that has gone wrong?' My boss then told me that, he had received a phone call from Herbert. Herbert is one of the national change team members who resides in the Southern part of Zambia. That scared me even more because he usually travels for SRGBV programs within that province. What came to my mind was that he was involved in a road traffic accident. At that point, my colleagues Juliet and Sombo followed me to the Office of the General Secretary while Linna and Ndundi remained looking after the packed shirts. Sombo then screamed "what is the matter?" Juliet said, "Is everything okay?"

Our boss looked at us and smiled, “Ladies there is no funeral here! Why are you all panicking? He further said “I just wanted to inform Leah the change team lead that I have received a phone call from one of the change team members that there is a case of SRGBV at the school next to where Herbert teaches. The school is called Katondu and the case involves a Primary school girl in a grade 5 class. Then out of curiosity I said, “has she been killed, raped by the teacher or what has happened to her?” Before I could get the answer from the General Secretary, Juliet had already called Herbert using her cell phone. As Herbert started to explain to Juliet, I grabbed the phone from her because I wanted to hear for myself. At this point, The Union President together with other members of the National Executive Committee walked in the general Secretary's Office for a meeting. My colleagues and I then left the Office and in my mind, I kept hoping that the General Secretary will take that opportunity to brief members of the National Executive Committee (NEC) on the recent cases of SRGBV in the schools across the country where our teacher members are and how such cases are affecting the delivery of quality Education for all. As a matter of fact, this process delayed the dispatching of shirts, making Ndundi also to start panicking because he would miss the buses to provinces. He said to me, “madam, we are running out of time.” This made me panic even more. I allowed him to take the packs to the bus terminus while I continued struggling to redial Juliet's cell phone to speak to Herbert and get the story of the girl.

Herbert explained that there were several cases of SRGBV involving teachers and learners in schools in the province but that particular case was at the school next to where he was teaching. He said that, the case involved a grade 5 girl by the name of Jane. Jane was a very intelligent grade 5 girl who liked school. She never missed class and always got the top position in her grade beating all the girls and boys. He further said that, there had been other cases of SRGBV affecting learners and Teachers which he was able to handle. This particular case seemed a bit complicated and the school had reported several cases of a similar nature. That's the reason why he had called for me as the change team lead and other members of the change team to step in and work with him. Herbert requested that I travel to the province so that we can get to the School and deal with the case at hand. Having got that explanation, I called a quick meeting with my fellow change team members so that we could agree on how we could go to Katondu School and work with our colleague.



As members of the change team, we went to the office of the General Secretary to try and get permission, although, we were afraid that we would disturb the meeting of the General Secretary and members of National Executive Committee (NEC) members. When we reached the door to the office, we saw a journalist coming out of the Office of the General Secretary and this assured us that the meeting was over and the National Executive Committee members had left. We went in and I requested that I travel with Auster, one of the change team members. Auster was the head of the Workers' Education Department that had a budget line for Education and Training, whereas my department of Gender had a budget line for gender related activities. My main goal was to go and hold meetings with learners, Teachers and Parent-Teacher Committee Members of that particular school. Actually the aim was to make it a pilot school that can give us strategies of how to fight and stop SRGBV in the province. We were granted permission to travel to Southern Province and without wasting time Auster and I went to prepare ourselves for the journey.

On Tuesday morning of March 2017, Auster and I arrived at Katondu primary school in the South of Zambia. It was outside the Headteacher's Office, when I was greeting and asking the deputy Headteacher of the School by the name of Mr. Chintu to direct us to the Headteachers Office, that a girl appeared, her name was Jane. Jane looked very lonely and unhappy. At the same time Herbert, the change team member appeared and pointed at the girl saying "that is the girl." When Jane heard the voice and saw Herbert, she came running in such a way that Auster and I thought she was either a daughter to the Deputy Headteacher or to Herbert or a relative to one of them. However, when she came closer, we realized that the girl was trembling and had tears in her eyes. Before she could be asked anything, Jane shouted, "Sir, they have done it again, punish them, punish them." I looked at the Deputy Headteacher and then I turned back to Jane, she was still shouting and trembling, "Punish them, punish them" This caught the attention of the other learners who were walking to their classrooms on the foot path that comes from the netball pitch. They looked concerned but they did not say anything to us or to the girl, but kept on walking and talking among themselves in low voices. I believed, they were asking each other questions about what was happening.

At this point, Mr. Chuntu the Deputy Headteacher, Herbert, Auster, Jane and I, went to the Headteacher's Office. We all sat down before Herbert asked the girl to narrate the story about what had happened. The Headteacher did not seem

to be very concerned about what was happening considering the fact that this involved a small girl in grade 5 and not even a teacher. However, our presence made him sit and listen to us and the little girl. He even told us that such cases are usually handled by the office of Senior Teacher, not even the Deputy Head teacher because there were issues of young people. I then thanked him for giving us his time to meet in his office so that we could discuss matters affecting the learners, the Teachers and his Office as Head of the School so they could have a good free and safe learning and teaching environment. The Headteacher thanked me before asking the Deputy Headteacher to get the little grade 5 girl to narrate her story.

Jane then narrated that when she went to the school pit toilet and was sitting nicely over the pit, she heard the voices of two grade 6 boys laughing and saying “we have seen everything, we have seen everything,” She then quickly stood up, pulled her pant up and her skirt down and walked out of the toilet. Meanwhile the boys had already seen her nakedness and followed behind her, shouting and teasing her. With tears in her eyes, Jane went to report to her teacher who also didn’t show any concern but told her that was school life and boys were like that everywhere. As Jane narrated the story, her eyes were full of tears. It was a touching issue even to the Headteacher who had down played it in the first place. There was a moment of silence. I imagined what if it was my daughter or myself in the toilet and a boy or a man came to view my nakedness. I am sure such thoughts ran through everyone who was in the rooms’ mind’

The school was a rural school which only had one old grass thatched toilet for girls from grades 1 to 7 and another similar one for boys from grades 1 to 7. The grass thatched toilets were very old and the grass on the doors was almost eaten up by termites so that if someone was inside and another person stood close by to peep in, they would see the one who is inside. The toilets were 100 meters from the classroom blocks and 10 meters apart.

Auster, Herbert and I then requested to have meetings with the learners and teachers and with members of the community (parents). The Headteacher was now touched and did not hesitate to organize these meetings. We were at Katondu Primary School for three consecutive days. During this period, boy and girl learners, the school as a whole and the community they live in, were sensitized on the negative effects of SRGBV on the victims. Forms of SRGBV were discussed as was the need to stop such.

Learners appreciated the meeting and many other girls confirmed that it was a common habit of the boys in that school to peep into the girls' toilet. Many of the older girls in the upper primary missed classes when they were menstruating because they couldn't use the toilets to change their sanitary towels as going to the toilet meant exposing one's nakedness to boys. The girls also mentioned that this matter was not taken seriously whenever it was brought to the attention of teachers. It was being taken seriously only when it came to the attention of Herbert, a member of the SRGBV change team. The meeting changed the mood and attitude of the learners and some teachers who were present because I had asked to attend to listen to what we were discussing with their learners.

After that meeting, without wasting time, we went to meet members of the staff at the school. They welcomed us and were eager to hear more about this thing called SRGBV which almost every learner was talking about. As the meeting progressed I could see some teachers looking down as if they were guilty, others nodding their heads, and others looking straight into my eyes as if they wanted to ask a question. The Headteacher kept swallowing as if he had a dry throat. At the end of the day I and other members of the change team had achieved our goal because we managed to sensitize the learners, Teachers, and school administration.

I advised the School Management to organize a meeting for the Parent-Teacher's Committee and the general members of the community who were parents. The Headteacher then sent notices of the meeting to the parents through the learners. He told the learners that each one should come with their parents when they reported for school the following day. At 6am, I was already at the school and I was very excited to see almost every child coming in with their parent. By 07:30 am our meeting with parents started. My colleagues and I informed the parents that we were from the Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT) and that as a Union our duty is to end school related gender-based violence so that schools become safe places to learn and teach. I explained what SRGBV is and the forms it can take. Finally, we told them the story of Jane and the toilets. Parents were touched and one parent who was a business man volunteered to construct a toilet for girls. Then a resolution was made that the community would take up the responsibility of building toilets for the school. Everybody appreciated this and promised to work towards ending SRGBV at the school. It was a successful mission.

Two months later, I travelled to Southern province for a different program but I decided to pass through Katondu school to confirm the good news I was getting from Herbert, and also the promises I heard from Teachers and parents. Indeed, it was good news. I found very good toilets constructed of blocks and iron sheets. With wooden doors, and a nice floor. Finally, the school had five modern toilets. Three for girls and two for boys. They were located 50 meters apart with different foot paths leading to and from classrooms. This brought dignity to the learners especially the girls. These toilets were constructed out of community voluntary work spearheaded by the School Parent-Teachers Committee. SRGBV cases can be reduced, if not stopped, when dealt with.

**DEAL WITH ANY FORM OF SRGBV NOW! MAKE THE SCHOOL A SAFE PLACE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING**



## THE DEATH OF A CLASS MONITOR

Joe Kasaka

*ZNUT (Zambia National Union of Teachers)*

After my colleagues from ZNUT Headquarters and I had gone around to schools in Kitwe to sensitise the teachers on the evils of School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) a nasty incident happened at one of the schools involving four grade one pupils.

Peter was a quiet, handsome and intelligent grade one boy who was always very smart and loved and admired by many of his friends, his class mates and teachers. Peter was a class monitor. He was a very intelligent boy who always came first in his class. He was always punctual and dressed neatly in his grey school uniform which was always clean, as compared to children of his age who always soiled their uniforms with earth. His uniform looked like it was imported from an international uniform manufacturing company, when in fact it was sewn by his mother who resides in Kwacha compound in the city of Kitwe in Zambia.

This seven-year-old boy who always wore a friendly smile came from a medium income family. His parents did not earn enough to make ends meet. The mother sold tomatoes in front of the two bedroomed house they rented from the retired teacher, while the father was an underground miner who worked long hours digging copper in a mine owned by a South African company. The company did not pay them well despite long hours of hard work. The father could not leave such employment as there were no alternatives given his qualification as a grade twelve school leaver.

The day was Monday 6th May 2019, and the school had just opened for the second term. Every child was excited to meet their friends and teachers after

missing each other for one month. The children gathered at the assembly point and were addressed by the head teacher on many issues, among these the need to behave well in school and avoid confrontational behaviour amongst themselves, and respect for teachers. This came in the light of several sensitisation meetings that we had conducted at the School over School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV). The head teacher was just re-emphasising the point to the children and indirectly reminding the teachers of the need to identify SRGBV.

It was time for the children to be in class and begin to learn. Peter's teacher quickly came into the classroom to appoint a monitor as he was trying to sort out an issue with a parent who had come to the school. The teacher appointed Peter to note the noise makers whilst he was away attending to the parent. The teacher left, and the class went into a deafening silence as though the teacher had not gone out. But not for long. Two boys and one girl started playing in class and made a loud noise, such that the teacher cut short the discussion with the parent and rushed to the classroom. The teacher asked Peter who was making the noise. Peter named the two boys and one girl. The teacher then asked the three culprits not to leave school at the end of that day, as they were on punishment. School rules prescribed that all pupils on punishment, should sweep classes after school.

All went on well at school. After school the trio swept the class very fast and then ran out to find Peter. In a short while, they managed to find him. The trio, who were aged 7,8 and 9 years, asked Peter why he had reported them to the teacher for making noise. Peter did not answer. The trio became agitated and started to beat Peter. Efforts by Peter to defend himself failed. He was overpowered by the three classmates and beaten like a rat. The fight was fierce and vicious as though it involved adult persons. As the three saw Peter was powerless and not fighting back, they ended the fight and ran away to their homes leaving Peter lying on the ground.

By this time news filtered in the compound that four grade one children had been fighting and one of them was lying on the road leading to the school. Members of the nearby community rushed to the spot and for sure discovered Peter who was just gasping for breath. A well-wisher picked the boy up and took him to his residence.

As this was happening, Peter's father was already at work underground in the mine. Peter's mother was home, busy preparing food, anticipating that Peter would soon be home from school. As usual Peter's mother liked playing Zambian

music loudly as she did house chores. She liked playing songs by the Masasu band which portrayed the life styles of many Zambian peoples. That music moved her heart so much. Normally she would also dance and sing along as the food cooked on the charcoal brassier behind her house. Sometimes she forgets that she was cooking and the food would get over cooked.

Suddenly there was a thunderously knock on the front door and Peter's mother, in a jovial mood opened the door. No sooner than she had done so, her mood changed. She almost fainted when she saw Peter in bad shape, but she plucked some courage and received Peter from the well-wisher. She laid Peter on the their recent bought settee and immediately called for a taxi. In a short while the taxi arrived at their home, and Peter was placed on the back seat. The taxi roared like an ambulance meandering through the heavy Kitwe traffic, in a rush to the hospital. Normally, it would take thirty minutes to reach the hospital but the taxi took only fifteen minutes.

The community where Peter's family resided began inquiring as to which children had done such harm. Eventually the children were identified and their parents were asked to contribute towards Peter's medical costs. The compound was tense, gripped with grief over the event.

At the hospital Peter was immediately rushed to the Doctors' emergency room where the doctor started to work on him. He was slowly degenerating and was soon put on life sustaining machines. Hours later the doctors assured the mother that he was responding to the medication and would be fine. The mother gave a sigh of relief.

Meanwhile, Peter's father had just come out of the mine and had gotten news about Peter's admission to the hospital over the alleged beating by his classmates. He quickly called for a taxi and was soon in the emergency room where he found peter recuperating, an oxygen mask over his face. The father felt extremely exhausted and saddened. The doctors reassured him that all would be well, that there was no need to worry.

Two days later Peter's condition had improved greatly and the father was happy that Peter would soon be discharged from hospital and continue with his schooling. The news of Peter getting better filtered through the entire compound and most people sung and praised God for Peter's recovery. This was good news.

The teachers at school also learnt of peter's recovery with great happiness and could not wait to see Peter back in class. The teachers began talking to pupils

over the ills of SRGBV and started cautioning the pupils that fighting at school was not a good thing. The school SRGBV committee also started sensitizing the teachers that SRGBV was a crime and that all teachers should avoid it by all means. They emphasised that the beating of Peter by the classmates should serve as a warning to would be perpetrators of such criminal acts.

Peter's admission to the hospital had now entered day four and Peter was now much brighter than the first day of his admission. The doctors were contemplating moving Peter from the emergency ward to a general ward. It was great news for all. Peter was finally moved to the general ward and everyone was saying Peter was just remaining in hospital for observation.

The following day, day five of Peter's admission, all was well. The doctors moved into the ward checking on patients and when they reached Peter's bed, they looked at Peter and said there was no reason to keep the boy as he had recovered. So Peter was discharged that morning and headed home with the mother. Upon arrival at their home, the entire community took turns to come and see Peter. It was an exciting moment for the family and the community.

But that very night, Peter's condition changed for the worse. It was late in the night that his parents have to take him back to the hospital. Both parents had tried to administer first aid to the boy but in vain. At about 03.14hrs, in the early morning of the sixth day of his illness, Peter met his death. It was shocking for the parents to see the boy who had almost recovered, die in such a circumstance. At about 0900hrs the body was taken for post mortem and mortuary services. The post mortem report was that Peter had died of internal bleeding as a result of severe beating sustained from his classmates.

After Peter's death police swung into action so as to apprehend the perpetrators of this heinous crime of murder. At first the police thought community members had lied to them that Peter was killed by three children all aged below ten years. After thorough investigations, the police found that it was actually the under ten-year-old minors who had conspired to kill their classmate because he was appointed monitor and had reported them to the teacher for making a noise in class.

The trio could not be held criminally liable as the law in Zambia does not criminalize minors below the age of ten, and they were below the age of ten. So the school and the community equally were not able to do anything to the minors.



A few days later after the death of Peter, my colleagues and I re-visited the school to talk to the teachers about the effects of School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV). We discussed the turning point from that experience. It was at this meeting that I learnt how traumatized our teachers were after Peter's death and pledged to commit themselves to the fight against School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV).

The lesson is that we need to come together as a school, as a community and a country and fight School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) whenever it manifests. It has the potential to end one's life like the case for Peter. School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) has no age limit. It can be perpetrated by anyone at any age. Let's keep our eyes open to avert School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV).



## TEACHING IS A WORK OF LOVE

Mpule Dorcas Sekabate

*SADTU (South African Democratic Teachers Union)*

In school, we were advised to think of the careers we want to follow when we finish school. I was doing maths and science and wanted to be a chemical engineer and if that failed, a dentist. Teaching was my last resort when everything else failed. I guess the universe had other plans for me. In my training as a teacher, I was never prepared for the fact that teaching requires more than just interacting with learners in the classroom. If one is going to make a meaningful change in a child's life it requires engaging with learners beyond the classroom. It demands that a teacher gets to understand the learners and the environment they come from.

I started teaching at the age of 21. The excitement, and at the same time anxiety, were overwhelming. I wondered if I would be a good teacher. As per the norm of the school, I was given a class to be in charge of. Throughout my training years I told myself that I would not want to be that teacher that learners are afraid to talk to even when they have problems or challenges with the subject. When I first met my class, I gave them rules for their behaviour. Some of the things I expected from them were respect of each other, dedication to their schoolwork, support of each other and most importantly, discipline at all times. I assured them that whilst I was their class teacher I was also their sister, mother and most of importantly their best friend.

I took time to understand each one of my learners. I monitored their behaviour and their performance in different subjects. I was only teaching them mathematics but it became important for me that they perform well in all their subjects.

At the school where I am a deputy principal, there was a particular girl in my class who was very hyperactive and did well in her schoolwork. I will call her Lee. I had never seen Lee wearing a skirt, nor had I ever seen her in the company of other girls except when she was with her best friend. Otherwise the rest of her friends were boys. I had something in common with Lee, which is the love of soccer. Lee was the best soccer player. She spent her weekends playing soccer in the township.

The one thing about Lee was that she would be caught doing mischievous things, always with boys. One of the things they were caught doing was smoking. Lee's behaviour irritated some of my colleagues who would pass nasty remarks about her. Some of them would even ask if she was a girl or a boy. I did not like the comments my colleagues made about Lee. They made no comment about the boys who were misbehaving equally. For me, such behaviour was expected from any child. In my colleague's eyes Lee's sin was that she did not present herself like a typical girl nor was she behaving as society expects girls to behave. She preferred doing gardening to sweeping the classroom and trousers to skirts.

At our school there is a policy that from January until May girls are only allowed to wear skirts, and not trousers. The uniform committee always ensured that this is adhered to. They would stand at the gate to make sure that learners are in their proper school uniform. Girls in navy skirts and yellow shirts and boys in navy trousers and yellow shirts. Those not wearing the proper uniform would not be allowed into the schoolyard. The committee would also go class to class to check on the learners who came to school earlier for extra classes.

When the committee got into Lee's class there was mumbling especially from girls. They were complaining about Lee. Lee tried her best to plead her case but the committee would not listen. Lee's class teacher came to my office to plead her case. He said that Lee was crying hysterically because she didn't have a skirt at home either. Her situation meant that she might drop out of school. The class teacher asked me to intervene and not tell other committee members that he had asked for my help.

I asked him to send Lee to my office. When she got to my office, I asked her to go home and tell her mother to write a letter saying that she did not have a skirt and has not worn one since she started attending school. She quickly ran home and came back with the letter signed by her mother. I told her to go back to class and if anybody asked about her uniform, she should refer them to me. The next

hurdle was that I had to communicate my decision to the principal of the school. I knew his view about learners who presented themselves like Lee. I knew that if I had involved him before taking a decision we would have not agreed with my way of dealing with this. I went to his office and said, “Sir I know we are not going to agree on this one but I have done it anyway and I stand by my decision. Before I tell you what I have done, I’d like to ask you for a favour. There is a girl in grade 10B who is wearing trousers and other learners are complaining. Please go this class and just observe.”

He acceded to my request and went to the class. After a while, he came back with feedback. When he got to the class, he asked the class captain to tell him the total number of learners in Grade 10B. There were 44, with 28 girls and 16 boys. On that particular day they were all present. Now he asked all of them to come stand at front of the classroom and instructed all girls to sit down. When he counted, there were 27 instead of 28 . He changed his strategy and asked the boys to sit and the girls to stand up. When he counted the learners who were seated they were 17 instead of 16. He looked at all the learners who were seated and all he could see were boys. He then asked the class who the extra person sitting with boys was. They told him it was Lee. The principal left the class without saying anything.

He asked me if I was sure that Lee was a girl and I assured him that she was a girl. I told him what I had done earlier and that my reason was to protect this young girl. I told him if we forced her to wear a skirt, she would drop out of school and that it was our responsibility to ensure that she finished school. Thankfully he agreed and we filed the letter as evidence.

One weekend we were hosting sports teams from a visiting school. One of the sports played was ladies soccer. Obviously, Lee was going to play in this game and I was looking forward to watch her play. When the time arrived we gathered at the local stadium. Lee was a real good player and she gave our opponents a tough time. She scored goals for our team. The opponents could not contain her when she had the ball. She would dribble from the middle of the field to the goalposts of the opponents. On the side of the field where I was standing, some of the players from the visiting team were murmuring and complaining that our school made them play with a boy. I tried to assure them Lee was a girl but I could see from their body language that they did not believe me. I was not ready for what they were planning to do after the game.

As expected, we won our game because of our star player Lee. I was looking forward to congratulating our team as the deputy principal but I did not get the opportunity. There was chaos on the field. I was told the visiting team players were chasing Lee because they wanted to prove that she was a girl. The intention was to undress her and look at her private parts. Thank God Lee was also a sprinter so they could not catch her. Had they caught her she would have been undressed in public. This would have been the worst form of SRGBV. What was worse was that as educators we did not do anything to protect Lee from this humiliation. None of us bothered to stop this madness. Instead we laughed at the situation.

The incident reminded me of a similar situation in a neighbouring school. One Saturday I was at the soccer field watching a match. A girl, around 14 or 15 years old, came to stand next to me. She was a learner at another school, and I had seen her around but had never talked to her before. We ended up talking about soccer and the teacher in me started asking about her schoolwork. Her name was Brenda. She told me how she would give educators a run around because she was naughty. I told her that it's not good to misbehave. Brenda liked running around with the boys and being chased by educators. She told me that one day the principal and deputy principal called her to the office. She thought that she would be reprimanded for her misbehaviour. Little did she expect that they would undress her because they wanted to see if she was a girl or a boy. I was shocked to hear this story. How can adults subject a child to such a humiliation? It was worse that the people doing this were mothers.

As time went by, I realised Lee's performance was dropping in many subjects. She became more reserved and was not the vibrant girl I knew. When she was in grade 10 Lee started bunking classes and not coming to school on some days. This was very strange because previously she was always present at school. I tried to talk to her about the changes in her behaviour. She did not give me a convincing answer but she promised that she would change. However her behaviour did not change, instead it became worse. When Lee did not come to school for a whole week, I asked her friend what was happening and where Lee was. The friend just told me Lee was at home and had told her that she was not coming back to school. She asked me to talk to Lee and I could see in her eyes that there was something she was not telling me.

I took it upon myself to visit Lee's home to establish what the real issue was. I found her at home with her mother. I told her mother the reason for my visit

and her mother told me that she had been talking to Lee to go back to school, but that Lee was refusing. She said that Lee had also changed at home and had become moody. Lee locked herself in the bedroom most of the time and did not go out to play anymore. I asked Lee to accompany me to the car. I wanted to create a safe space for her and hoped that she would be able to open up and talk freely. With tears in her eyes, she asked why she had to suffer like this. Why must she be subjected to such hatred? I looked at her helplessly, with no words to console her. She was now crying uncontrollably and told me that her friends raped her. They did this to show her that she is not a boy.

The rape had really affected her self-esteem. She felt everyone at school was going to laugh at her. She told me that she did not see any reason to be alive if this was what she had to be subjected to. The pain in her eyes was so unbearable to watch. I assured Lee of my support and protection. I realised that we had failed to protect this poor soul. I tried my best to encourage her not to give up on her education. I could not bear the thought of such a brilliant mind going to waste because of people's prejudices. I was grateful that she could open up to me and I was determined to save her. But I knew that the task would not be an easy one. I needed my colleagues to put their stereotyping minds aside, and see this poor little girl as just a child who needs guidance and nurturing. Sometimes we bring our fears and prejudices to schools and in the process destroy potential in our learners.

In September 2009, I was elected to the National Office of the Union and my presence at school became minimal. This meant I had less contact with Lee. In 2010, when I visited the school, I was told Lee was repeating a grade and that she was doing well in her studies. She did not come to school regularly though and there was a suspicion that she was taking drugs. Later, her drug addiction led her to drop out of school. The pain I felt on hearing this news was unbearable. Our lack of support led to Lee being a statistic. Who knows what she would have become if school was a safe space for her. Maybe she could have gone on to play for the national team. Maybe she would have become an important person.

My work on SRGBV and gender issues in general made me realise that we have been prejudiced to many learners and that many of them drop out of school because of this. The bullying they are subjected to is so intense that some cannot take it. Words stay in a person's mind and they can break or build a person.

There is a great need to sensitise educators and society about issues of sexuality and gender. Some of our actions are out of ignorance. Culture and religion cannot

be used to discriminate and exclude others. Human beings are human beings, regardless of their race, gender, nationality or sexuality. We need to learn to coexist. Schools are institutions of learning and therefore they must be used to inform, educate and nurture talent. Religion teaches love and it cannot be used to hate.

I am glad that my union has signed a collective agreement that will protect children during hearings on sexual abuse. Previously learners were expected to testify or be witnesses on three different occasions. As a result, victims were subjected to secondary trauma and often ended up not attending the hearing. This would result in perpetrators winning cases because their guilt could not be proven without witnesses.

Learners like Lee should never have to drop out of school because of hate and discrimination. Teaching is a work of love and that love must be given to all children. Educators must treat all learners as if they are their own children.



## DEALING WITH UNFORTUNATE INCIDENTENCES OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS – A UNION’S RESPONSE

Khanyisile Mdziniso

*SADTU (South African Democratic Teachers Union)*

From 2016 there has been an increase in the global scourge of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in many societies, and school communities are no exceptions. All news channels: national TV, local radio, newspapers and social media, have reported incidences of GBV. When this occurs in schools, it is called School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV).

I started working on these issues after I attended an EI workshop on SRGBV called “Hearing Our Stories 1” in Johannesburg South Africa, organised by Gender at Work. Provincial gender and education conveners (union leaders), and one additional teacher from each province attended the meeting with three union staff from our research department, including myself, as observers. The facilitator explained that the meeting was an opportunity for the union to hear its own stories of SRGBV. At first, the participants stared blankly at the facilitator, as if to say, they had no idea what she was talking about. Then one at a time, we started recalling stories.

When all was said and done, we reflected on the different atrocities that had been shared and were in complete shock that these things go on and no one says anything about them. A wide variety of violence was perpetuated by different members of the school community, e.g. school principals suffered violence from learners; women teachers by school teenage boys; young girls by male teachers; and at times it was learners at large violated by women teachers. The workshop



also brainstormed the impact that SRGBV has on the teaching and learning environment.

The participants were asked to sit in their provincial delegation groups and identify pilot schools plagued with SRGBV in which to implement change programmes. They had to describe the types of problems they have heard of from the school and justify why they want it to be a pilot school. The research team's role was to listen to proceedings and come up with research questions that would help guide implementation.

I took particular interest in the development of the survey questionnaire and shaping the questions. At the back of my mind was the question of how this all starts. Surely a teacher or learner doesn't just wake up and decide to violate another learner or teacher? Secondly, I knew that it would not be easy for leaders to think SRGBV was an big issue in their areas, since these incidences are normally not reported, until they were confronted with incidents that gave it a face. I wanted the questionnaire to identify the forms of SRGBV which occur in schools as well as where they occurred so that the teachers who complete the survey could see it for themselves. The survey also asked about the existence or non-existence of policies that may protect or promote SRGBV in the school.

We agreed to pilot the survey in one school. I met the regional leadership and change team members to begin work on the pilot. In attendance from the union were the educational convener, the gender convener, the regional chairperson, deputy secretary, a few comrades. Also present were 4 teachers (3 ladies and 1 male) who were change team members from the school where the pilot would take place. There were now 10 educators including the leaders in the room. After a brief introduction by the regional chairperson about the new programme on School Related Gender Based Violence I explained that we needed to understand the school context, and establish the need for the programme. We needed to get the teachers to buy in into the programme. That we need first to establish "What forms of SRGBV if any, occur at the school? What sparks and/or fuels them? Who are the perpetrators? What are the enabling factors; are they structural or systemic? What organizations exist in community that we can co-opt to be part of the solution for our school's change team to help address these issues? What policies exist to promote a culture that is pro-safety in the school that can be implemented to eradicate SRGBV? What policies need to be developed? Are there any structural changes that need to be recommended to the school governing body?

I explained that we had designed a questionnaire to help establish whether SRGBV was an issue in their region. I wanted them to be the first to use the survey, but I needed their input to determine whether the questions help mirror the situation at their respective schools and how the questionnaire may be improved. They were happy to complete the questionnaire there and then.

They all took it enthusiastically and started completing the questionnaire quietly, like it was an exam. The room went dead quiet. When I said, "Hey, it's not an exam!" they all laughed. As they finished I collected the surveys. I had told them to just write what first comes to mind.

When they had completed I asked them "So please tell me in one word, what was it like? I just want your first impressions!"

Three of them responded in a chorus, "We're all perpetrators!" The others also echoed this sentiment, one by one, "For sure, neh, we're all perpetrators, and I wasn't even aware!" said another teacher.

They said, for example, "since there's no longer corporal punishment, we're used to calling learners names, yewena nhlokenkulu (hey you big head) or "ubhala ngathi ubhala ngelunyawo" (your handwriting is like you're use your foot). They explained that they see how that this is verbal abuse and makes learners angry. Another said, "teachers also make sexual comments about the way some learners dress".

The convener then took the questionnaire to give to fellow staff members at the pilot school. About 38 questionnaires were received from them, and from their analysis, the following issues emanated:

- Bullying amongst learners
- Learners using dangerous weapons like knives in school fights
- Lack of security at the gates, anyone can come and go as they please
- Absence of a school safety policy and no monitoring/checking of what learners carry into the school.

When we went to meet the school principal, he expressed appreciation of our efforts. We also had a meeting with the school governing body (SGB), SMT and SADTU regional and branch leadership and following this a meeting with the school staff. At both meetings, the principal introduced us, the programme and survey results.

The SGB pledged their commitment to the programme. Teachers cited personal problems as the main cause of impatience with learners and failure to tolerate their mistakes. They said they needed de-briefing sessions on how to deal with emotional stress, grief and general wellness issues. They acknowledged that lack of discipline from learners leaves them helpless, and thus re-affirmed the need for school policies that will be implemented.

The school decided to form a change team to come up with a strategy and to run a workshop for the staff. We left the school with a sense of hope and to some extent achievement, as the school seemed prepared to tackle this issue head on to promote a good learning and teaching environment.

But it was also brought home to us on the change team just how difficult an issue SRGBV is. When we met in the “Hearing our Stories 2” workshop led by EI and Gender at Work, we were shocked to hear from a woman provincial change team member that a male teacher who had attended a previous workshop as a change team member had been suspended because he was implicated as a perpetrator of SRGBV. I recalled I had interacted with this teacher at that previous workshop. He had seemed a respectable man, tall, formally dressed, quietly participating in workshop activities. We now heard that a primary school girl child was found pregnant, and that this teacher had raped the child and was responsible for her pregnancy. My thoughts just went wild. This teacher who looked like such a gentleman had such things going on in his mind? Had he already done this when he had sat with us in that meeting on SRGBV? It was hard to understand what a man is capable of, I thought to myself. I was so angry. Someone we saw as part of the solution was more a part of the problem than we could ever have realised.

The following cases are some examples of the forms of SRGBV that the union was asked to account for.

#### Case #1:

A teacher's memory card was found by school boys on school grounds. When the boys played it, they found it had a video of a male teacher having sex with a fellow girl learner who they recognised. On the video it was apparent that the learner was pregnant and passively allowing these sexual activities. The video went viral throughout the country. I came to see it when it was shared in a WhatsApp group by the provincial gender convener from that area. The union in this case took the lead in addressing the issue and held campaigns on SRGBV in the area. The teacher was eventually suspended. However, in the following

months we heard that the situation changed between the teacher and the girl's family. The teacher said the girl was his fiancée and pressed charges against the Department of Education.

#### Case #2:

A case was reported whereby a man from the community, walked into a school, and asked for a particular teacher. Without waiting for the teacher to be called, he proceeded to the class and shot the teacher dead, right in front of the learners. He then walked out of the school.

#### Case #3:

One morning we woke up to the news that a young male teacher had been killed. What was startling was that the killer was his ex-matriculant student. The news reported that the male student went to the teacher's home after matric results were published in national newspapers and stabbed the teacher to death. He said the teacher was the reason for his failure. The teacher was still young, less than 30 years, and had a long career and life ahead of him. I felt so helpless as shock waves went through me. I wondered what could have been the cause that warranted this pre-meditated act by the student that was worth such a tragic end for both. Premature death for the teacher and life in prison for the ex-matriculant.

#### Case #4:

A video that went viral on social media (WhatsApp), showed a primary school boy between 10-12 years old, pointing his finger at the face of a formally dressed male teacher. The boy was shouting at the teacher, "who do you think you are ...", as he pulled him by his tie and kicked him. Two other boys stood next to him and just watched. The teacher silently looked the learner in the eye. A female teacher walked in, and told the boy "stop what you're doing"! What has become of our children? I wondered. I figured that the teacher had to hold his breath. Had the teacher said anything or even pushed the boy away, it would have been a case of harassment since corporal punishment has been outlawed. I realised that teachers are at the mercy of learners, especially in schools where discipline is a problem.

These are just a few cases. Schools experience high levels of SRGBV but are often left to fend for themselves.

The union has developed proactive and preventative strategies to address SRGBV. One decision was to include the SADTU teachers' code of conduct on

the first pages of the SADTU diary, which is distributed to every member at the beginning of each year.

As a union we are concerned with creating and promoting a conducive learning environments and ensuring that schools are safe for both teachers and learners. The union uses media interviews to communicate its position and speak against violent acts.

To date SADTU has produced a gender policy and a policy on dealing with sexual harrassment in the workplace to promote human (women's) rights and mutual respect between men and women of all ages. SRGBV pilot schools are maintained and SADTU is addressing teachers in all union structures on the impact of SRGBV and thus promoting safe schools through programmes such as "I am a school fan" which promote access to education for all and all enabling factors to make school environments suitable for learning and teaching.

The newly elected gender conveners are oriented on the functions of the SRGBV pilot schools and empowered to address these problems openly whenever and wherever they occur. The union makes use of all relevant local structures to address challenges with SRGBV.



## QUASHED DREAMS

Eringu Etonu

*(El Africa Regional Office)*

Afare woke up that morning feeling very light-hearted. He whistled while he took his bath in a bathroom he would now call his own for he did not share it with another person. All his life he had shared bathrooms. At home where he grew up everybody shared one bathroom - his father, mother, and four siblings. He attended day schools for both primary and secondary, so he had never had the opportunity to see another bathroom. The bathrooms in the teacher training college were always busy especially early morning and in the evenings. The story telling while the students waited for their turn to use the bathrooms made the occasions entertaining.

“Anyway, that was all gone” Afare reminisced, as he smiled inwardly. “I am now a qualified teacher preparing for my first day in school as Mwalimu Afare as everyone else would be calling me soon”.

Moments later he was dressed in the white shirt he had reserved for this occasion when he would show the world he had joined the noble profession, where not even the meagre salary would prevent him from getting the reward that awaited every teacher in heaven.

At 8 O'clock sharp, he was at the headmaster's office. He knocked on the door and entered when he heard the words, “Come in”. The Headmaster was seated behind his desk and looked at him from above the rim of his glasses.

“Good Morning Sir”, Afare Chanted gleefully. “I am Mwalimu Afare.”

“Good Morning Mwalimu”, The Headmaster responded as he got up and turned towards the cabinet behind him. Then calling over his shoulder he asked;

“What is your subject again”

“Geography, Sir”, replied Afare.

The Headmaster then turned around and handed him some stapled document saying; “You will be teaching Senior Two and this is the syllabus”. The Headmaster then pulled out a form and told Afare;

“That is for the timetable. The general timetable is in the staff room. Ask whoever is there to help you extract your own. I have a meeting at the education office in town this morning. Good luck.”

Afare said thank you and proceeded to look for the staffroom. He found the staffroom, but nobody was in it. He looked around the staffroom and located the general timetable. He scanned the timetable to see what is on in his class. Indeed, he discovered that he had a Geography class in S.2 and it was ten minutes into time.

Afare had not been discouraged by the lukewarm reception he had received from the Headmaster and was optimistic that things would get better when he met his colleagues. He had even heard that as a teacher he would belong to a family called a teachers’ union which would take care of his welfare and professional needs. There would be enough time to discover everyone including the education office. In the meantime, he would go and meet his Geography class. “Excuse me”, He called out to a student passing by. “Where is Senior two?” “Over there, it is the second door on that block”, the student answered without giving him a second glance.

Afare moved towards the classroom not giving a thought to why the student had not given him a second glance or why he had not called him ‘sir’. Afare could in fact have passed for the student’s agemate. It did not occur to Afare that he was not much older than the students in his class.

Afare was probably too naïve to have realised that he had not undergone any meaningful orientation into the school life. The headmaster had not called him by name, nor remembered the subject he was to teach. No reference had been made to a head Geography teacher, or any other teacher of the class he was about to meet. He had no idea what topics had been covered by the class and where on the syllabus he should begin. He did not know that someone ought to have given him proper orientation. Afare was far from knowing that a school representative or steward of a union could be an entry point or soft landing in settling him into the complexity of school communities.

Afare could not have known better until he encountered what was supposed to be his dream moment in his dream class for the first time as “Mwalimu”.

Mwalimu Afare raised his shoulders, lifted his chin, and planted a smile in readiness to meet his class. The greeting he had rehearsed a few times flashed through his mind; “Good Morning class. I am Mwalimu Afare. I will be teaching you Geography and I am happy to meet you all”

He took the final step towards the S.2 Classroom. He turned the doorknob and stepped into the classroom. The scene that greeted him was more than he had bargained for. A boy was lying over a visibly hopeless girl in a mock sexual act while other boys cheered on. Some boys were perched on top of their desks laughing at the top of their voices. A group of girls cuddled fearfully in a corner while some boys taunted them.

Afare took in the situation with utter dismay. His chest was pounding as anger built up within him. He mustered all he could and shouted: ‘Stop! What do you think you are doing?’

The room seemed to have come to a complete stand still. One could have heard a pin drop at that moment. Then slowly a motion picture begun to unfold before Afare’s eyes. Like in slow motion, the heads and eyes of the boys started turning towards the intruder. Like portraits, the girl’s eyes remained wide open and fixed on Afare. Afare himself looked like a statue with its mouth wide open, his words frozen inside.

What followed could only be drawn from Afare’s unconscious mind some hours later in a hospital. A barrage of shoes, bags, pens, mathematical sets, name it, were hurled in his direction. Heavy footsteps, shouts, banging, blows, heavy breathing, surging crowds of wild students after him intermittently crossed his mind in his hospital bed where he lay barely able to move his body. His swollen, half closed eyes and bandaged foot seemed to tell the rest of the story.

As this story highlights, many teachers are not prepared as young professionals for the realities of School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) and can become actual victims of such violence. SRGBV has been an issue of discussion in sections of Education International Affiliates and Education International Africa. The scale up and wider coverage among unions in Africa can ensure that young teachers like Afare who join the teaching profession are properly equipped to bring an end to School Related Gender Based Violence.





## THE MISFORTUNE OF JULIANA

Victor Issaka Kpandja

*(El Africa Regional Office)*

Education is an instrument which enables us to build societies. The essence of education to the best of my knowledge is to promote values pertaining to skills, peace, development, justice, equity, prosperity etc. It is in this sense that it commonly said: “Education is key to development.”

It is therefore recommendable that every child be given a chance to learn, and, equally, every teacher be able to teach without fearing his or her workplace, so as to bring out his or her best.

From my perspective as Professional Assistant in my organisation, I realised that there are so many challenges to making education what we wish it to be.

One of these challenges which is negatively impacting on our schools, is School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV).

Like many people, before I had the opportunity to take part in the SRGBV Peer Learning Sessions, I thought of SRGBV as sexual harassment or rape perpetrated by a male teacher against a female student. Through participation in the peer learning sessions, I discovered other realities. Of cases, where SRGBV was perpetuated by a student against a fellow student or by a teacher against his or her colleague. SRGBV is also about corporal punishment or language abuse.

One of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially SDG4 calls on governments to promote an inclusive and quality Education. I believe all the governments are committed to work toward the achievement of the SDG4, by 2030. Moreover, in Africa there is an agenda called Continental Education

Strategy for Africa, adopted in 2015, whereby all the African Governments pledged to achieve quality education.

Many questions now cross my mind: “is it really possible to achieve the inclusive and quality education, when some students and/or teachers are scared to be raped or sexually harassed? How can we achieve the inclusive and quality education, when some students are afraid to go to school, because they want to avoid teachers lashing, caning or insulting them, because they did not agree to be their girlfriends?”

I think that it is crucial to empower the EI affiliate unions, to become aware of SRGBV and to fight against SRGBV in their communities, as well as in their school environments. From my experience, there is no way we could achieve an inclusive and quality education without putting a stop to SRGBV. To illustrate some of the challenges relating to SRGBV I would like to share a story with you.

There was a Head teacher of a Junior Secondary School in my district, called Mr Anani. One day, a video of Mr Anani, the Head teacher, having sex with one of his students, named Juliana, went viral on social media. Juliana was a tender girl of 14, from a very poor family, who could hardly afford food to the household.

Mr Anani, whose family and children were staying in another district, used to request the assistance of Juliana in cooking, sweeping, cleaning and doing other house chores. Mr Anani, in turn had been rewarding Juliana with some money, food and gifts in kind. The parents of Juliana were aware and proud of the head teacher for all the gifts to their daughter.

One Saturday morning, while Juliana was sweeping the room of Mr Anani, he suddenly jumped on the girl and started touching her young small breasts. The girl tried to shout and escape, but he promised to give her a subsequent amount of money and also offer her a bicycle. This deal interested the girl, and she availed herself to the head teacher. The head teacher set his phone on the Video Recorder and had sex with Juliana while recording the action. He gave money to the girl and told her that he will not hesitate to kill her, in case she reports the act to anyone.

Unfortunately for the head teacher, one day, his phone had to be sent for repairs, and the repairer saw the short pornographic video and shared it throughout the WhatsApp platform.

On viewing this video, members of the Teachers' Council summoned Mr Anani and questioned him. After Mr Anani acknowledged having sex with the girl and that the video had been recorded by himself, the Council dismissed him, as he has flouted the Code of Conduct. The Ministry of Education supported the decision of the Teachers' Council. Mr Anani was simply fired.

Teachers who were very close to Mr Anani got furious about his dismissal. They approached members of the Council, the Ministry of Education as well as their union leaders. Their objective was to get Mr Anani back to school. One of the arguments from these teachers was that Mr Anani did not rape the girl. They intimated that the teaching profession is not rewarding, and that therefore having sexual intercourse with a student is compensation for a profession that has little rewards.

I drew the attention of the management of my office to this case. I was then requested to draft a letter to some unions in the country, so as to get more information, before we could assist them in this matter. The letter was sent, and a meeting was organised between some of the union leaders and my office. The leaders informed us that the teachers who are against the dismissal of the head teacher are threatening to withdraw from the unions, as no action had been put in place, to defend Mr Anani. Moreover, they accused the union leaders for conniving with the Ministry of Education to fire Mr Anani.

All the teachers who supported Mr Anani became targets of insults, wherever they pass or find themselves. In short, they became the devil to be combatted at all cost.

In the meeting, we urged the union leaders to organise a press conference to publicly condemn Mr Anani's act and make it clear that he did not set a model to the other teachers. We also asked union leaders to explain that though their role as unions is to protect and defend their members, they cannot condone wrong, harmful and criminal behaviour, therefore, Mr Anani, as a disgrace of teachers, must not be defended. It was after this press conference that the community resumed their trust in and respect for the teachers.

We also had the opportunity, together with some of the union leaders to meet the furious teachers supporting Mr Anani. We explained and drew their attention that by law, this was a crime of statutory rape since Juliana's consent as a 14-year old girl, to have sex with the head teacher, is null and void. Besides this Mr

Anani's responsibility was to educate the girl as a good father and not sleep with her and make a recording.

Deeply traumatized, embarrassed and ashamed to go back to school, Juliana spent almost two weeks at home. She lost her interest in school and kept herself indoors.

Despite all the efforts of Juliana's parents to convince her to go back to school, Juliana was reluctant and even aggressive. She does not know what awaits her next. Following the encouragement and advice of her mother, Juliana became confident and accepted the idea of going back to school. However, she indicated that she will never go back to her current school. Juliana was sent to another school in the district. Unfortunately, she was not motivated and her performance dropped drastically.

This situation urges EI Africa to embark more on a programme to empower all the EI affiliates in the Region to stand against SRGBV.

Some unions had the opportunity to participate in the SRGBV sessions, during the meetings organised by the African Women in Education (AWEN), which is the Women Desk of EI Africa. But I think, this is not enough. To be able to reach out on all the EI affiliates in the Africa Region and build on their capacities to combat SRGBV, a standalone budget ought to be made available for the SRGBV programme. This will enable the Regional Office, for example, to create more awareness on the issue of SRGBV, and assist unions which do not have a Code of Conduct to acquire one. It will also be our responsibility to encourage unions which have a code of conduct, but do not use it, to start using it. I believe that there is hope to see this budget made available, because Education International has made the issue of SRGBV one of the priority areas of its agenda.

There cannot be quality education as long as there is SBGBV. To have quality education implies having quality teachers, meaning teachers who are trained, conscious of their professional responsibilities, and about their role as mentors and parent figures to the children they teach. Another condition which will help reduce the rate of SRGBV in our schools, is to have a quality environment. It is also my belief that schools should include learning and teaching material, to enable learners to know their rights. Most times students do not know that they have the full right to say no to a teacher who invites her/him to their houses, or when this teacher confidentially touches any of their private parts.

## FACILITATOR'S WRITINGS



Image credit: Gender At Work



## FACILITATOR REFLECTION: OLD METHODS, NEW LESSONS

Nina Benjamin

*(Labour Research Service & Gender at Work)*

It is a very hot afternoon in November 2018. We are in the Hotel 5/10 in Freetown for Peer Learning 2. The generator is buzzing very loudly and I am trying to facilitate above the noise.

There is an air of expectation in the room. The Sierra Leone Teachers Union has promised a performance on School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV), by a group of young boys and girls, students from the biggest Muslim school in Freetown, the Muslim Congress Senior Secondary.

In Peer Learning 1 the SLTU change team had spoken about the importance of theatre in their union work. Salimatu, one of the change team members had announced: “I am an actress who loves the stage” and the rest of the change team had spoken about the importance of community theatre for awareness raising in the context of a society with relatively low levels of literacy.

UNESCO statistics in the Index Mundi online report on demographics<sup>13</sup> indicates that in 2013 the adult literacy rate was 32.43, ranking Sierra Leone 154 out of 158 countries. Like Sierra Leone, the Gambia is cited as having a 41.95% adult literacy rate in 2013. So it made sense that the 2 West African union change team action plans would include theatre as a method for raising awareness and encouraging action on SRGBV. Also, SLTU had used community theatre for social change as part of the union’s contribution to peace building after the Civil War.

So when we arrived in Freetown for Peer Learning 2, I was not surprised to hear Mohammed, the President of SLTU and Principal of the Muslim Congress Senior Secondary, proudly report that the School Club formed to sensitize students about SRGBV, had created a play.

Just after lunch on the third day of the Peer Learning Workshop, a group of about 30 young people arrived at the hotel with their English teacher Mr. Brown. Together with the GTU, EIRAF and SLTU change team members, I was invited to sit in a semi-circle outside the meeting room. As I looked around I saw the excited faces of the students. Girls just a step away from being young women, dressed in their school uniforms, their heads covered with white hijabs. Young men with all the cheekiness of school boys. They started with a song. Young, innocent faces serious and determined to get their message across.

Mr. Brown, the English teacher looked a little anxious but soon relaxed as the young actors got into their stride. Opening with the line *“The first World War ended in 1918, the second World War ended in 1945 and today we are fighting another world war that has no definite beginning or ending – School Related Gender Based Violence. So shall we continue to surrender ourselves to be victims of sexual, psychological violence? SRGBV is another Global War.”*

This was a shocking reminder of what these school boys and girls are faced with every day. As I sat flanked by the SLTU change team members, I felt a lump in my throat. My thoughts went back to the 1980's to the midst of the Apartheid Regime in S.A when I was a young activist ready to take on all the injustices of the world. I remember the thrill of being part of a community theatre group, Action Workshop, which travelled to different communities raising consciousness to take up action against apartheid. I went back to the hours we had spent discussing and creating sketches and I smiled as I remembered our earnestness, our amateur acting. I had learnt so much in those days. Lessons that I have carried with me through all my adult life

Another country, another time, but here before me I see the beauty of young people committed to changing the world. While they carry the same fervour I had as a young activist, these boys and girls are not focused on an external state enemy, in the way my activism had been shaped by a struggle against the South African Apartheid state. Their *“enemy”* can be found in their classrooms, in their neighbourhoods, in their homes and sometimes even in themselves – in their own behaviours as boys and girls. Theirs is a much less visible struggle, theirs

is a struggle to address the intertwined oppressions of poverty, state violence, patriarchal cultural practices and behaviour - that all feed into school related gender based violence.

Mr. Brown introduces the play describing it as didactic, a message motivating for change. What I experience as a facilitator watching the play is more than just the lesson – what I see are young people moving through a journey of self-awareness, of increased consciousness and activist creation. The boys performing in the play show that they are acutely aware of the choices they are forced to make when relating to each other and to the girls in their school and community. Standing tall, the girls in turn take charge of their situation and show what is needed to shift from survivor to activist. In the play they discuss the situation amongst each other and take carefully chosen teachers and community members into their confidence, breaking the silence that allows abuse to flourish. I am a spectator, a member of the audience and I can see their conviction and courage shining through. Their performance on stage is but a rehearsal for addressing the challenges of SRGBV in the world.

I feel very emotional. I try to imagine the work involved in the creation of this play. The commitment of the English teacher, the commitment of the principal.

Many years back I taught in a high school and I know what commitment it is to bring students together outside of school hours to support a process that is not part of the formal schooling curriculum. As the audience we experience the production and not the creation, we know little about what happens in the hot, sweaty long afternoons after school where issues are discussed, debated, ideas are embraced or thrown out. Tempers flare, sometimes tears of frustration are shed. Laughter rings out when everything gels, when actions flow into each other and the bodies and spirits in the room rejoice at what they have created. The performers - girls, boys and teachers become a family with a common purpose.

Who are these teachers who have committed themselves to addressing not just the bullying between students, but who are also willing to discuss the role of teachers themselves as perpetrators of this horror of SRGBV? Here is an initiative where teachers and learners have come together to co-create a message to share with others and in the process of creation are also learning to see, hear and understand each other outside of the traditional teacher-student relationship in the classroom. The students bring their entire bodies into the process, revealing through their performance – what they are thinking, experiencing, hoping as well as the pain they feel.



The Muslim Congress Senior Secondary play, is not “directed” by the teachers, but rather supported through creating a safe space for the learners to express all their inner fears about teachers, parents, community members and fellow students. The message of the students is clear, *“we are not just survivors of SRGBV, we are young people willing to champion the creation of safe schools and we expect your support.”* The teachers, the members of SLTU who are prepared to see and hear what the students are saying, will receive this message.

The stock characters in the play, all represent easily recognizable characters, characters that both the actors but also the audience can relate to - the teacher who is attempting to get “sex for marks”, the boy students sexually harassing the girl student, the innocent girl student who gets caught in the web, the feisty girl student who fights back and gets into trouble, the concerned mother who is afraid of challenging the cultural norms and the busy father who is oblivious to the issue. The play offers the opportunity to “break the silence”, the bolder the performance, the louder the discussion that follows. For the performers and teachers little silences are broken with the creation of the characters, the creation of the script, the embodiment of the characters and the engagement with the audience.

The Muslim Congress Senior Secondary play performed outside in the heat and dust, with no props, no acoustics and only the commitment and enthusiasm of the young actors was a reminder of the power of community theatre in creating a community and a common purpose. The teachers, students, community members all shared in the experience of breaking the silence around school related gender based violence. Not everyone will leave the performance in agreement, happy or even willing to address their own behaviours – but everyone will have been part of the SPECTACLE of the exaggerated stock characters engaging each other, the songs that draw in the audience with catchy tunes and important messages, the poetry that leaves the audience amused, bewildered and even confused and the dance moves to transport you physically. Nobody leaves untouched, an essential ingredient for our work of reducing SRGBV.



## FACILITATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Mahlet Hailemariam

*(Gender at Work)*

I am an associate member of Gender at Work based in Ethiopia. I am one of the team facilitating the School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) action learning process initiated by Education International and UNGEI in Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya. My role was to facilitate the gender action learning processes and to mentor the change teams in their initiatives to address SRGBV. The mentoring process included following up progress and providing technical support to the change teams as needed.

During one mentoring session, I was sitting in a small, dark and congested conference room with the change team, administration and program members. All of them knew each other very well. I was the only outsider. There were three men among the participants. I saw one of the men sitting at the edge of the chair. He looked as if he was getting ready to quickly leave the room. A second man was reading from a magazine in front of him, while the third stood in a corner of the room pretending to read from a poster on the wall. I guessed that they were feeling out of place and wondered why. The female participants, oblivious of their surroundings, were chatting and laughing.

After a brief welcome and introduction, we started by revising what had happened in the previous action learning sessions. A female participant, from the administration department, asked a question. "I wanted to learn more about what SRGBV is? I want to understand how I can identify SRGBV?" Based on her question and recognizing that not everyone in the room had participated in previous trainings, we started our discussion.

In the middle of the conversation, one of the men pushed the table forward, struggled to stand up and spoke. He said "oh gender!" something sounded familiar to me, in his tone and the way he stood. I had seen this before. He was not completely convinced about SRGBV or gender equality. He continued talking about how this issue marginalizes men by focusing only on women. His female colleague tried to explain. He stretched himself out on his chair and looked away, as she spoke. I could see he was not convinced. Was he even listening? He seemed not interested to hear her response.

As the discussion went on I struggled with myself internally. Should I change the workshop program I had worked on for days back home? When developing the program, I had assumed that there would be no need to define what SRGBV is or what gender equality means. As I reflected now, I thought "am I jumping to a conclusion prematurely?". "Am I not being judgmental?" However, I felt I needed give participants the chance for discussion on what was at hand before proceeding. I could see defining some concepts such as gender and SRGBV was important, so instead of sticking to what I thought should happen, I allowed the process to be led by the participant's needs and in my mind I started adjusting the program.

I was anxious, but what choice did I have except thinking on my feet? After all, how can we (as facilitators) remain relevant in such a process where what we prepared beforehand did not fit what was actually going on in the room?

As I reflected in my mind, on how to adjust the programme, another participant added to the discussion by saying "S.R.G.B.V." emphasizing each letter very slowly, as if this was the first time he was saying this. He concluded "it happens everywhere, people do not understand it, we teach them what it is...what it means..."

We heard story after story of SRGBV. Painful stories. This girl was raped in this school and the teacher got away with it. This female teacher was harassed by so and so and finally she was transferred. Stories of teachers caning students, students abusing and harassing teachers. The stories went on and on. "I heard that this girl was dressed in a mini-skirt." "This teacher was walking outside alone in the dark". These were explanations given in some of the stories we were hearing. I thought "are these attempts to justify the act?" Or "was it an attempt to understand human behaviour, to understand how anybody can be able to commit such a crime?" "Are we not blaming the victims?" I felt myself choking. I felt

suffocated and all of a sudden I seized the opportunity and almost shouted “acts of violence should be condemned for what they are!”

Most of the stories seemed to focus on what men have done to this girl and that. My mind wondered “what is it that I am hearing, what are we saying/implying? Are we saying that only men are perpetrators and have no control over their feelings? Are women the only victims?” Too many questions came to my mind, and the discussion continued before I was able to articulate any of my thoughts into questions that would help participants explore the issue from different angles.

My mind continued racing, while at the same time listening to the discussion following my last comment. A participant who seemed overwhelmed by the discussion offered “we need to work on awareness raising. Parents, teachers, students, government should be aware of what is happening.” Her comment triggered another thought in me and I said to myself “how easy it is to externalize and talk about what is happening out there and what we can do out there”. While I was mumbling inside, one of the participants almost rescued me. She said “Change starts from within us”. How I loved that participant for saying what she said, how relieved I felt because I thought that was the exact moment to bring up the issue of looking inside oneself and inside the organization itself. And without thinking much, I asked “can we please share instances or examples of GBV in the office?”

No one saw this coming, and all of a sudden, the room descended into heavy silence. I did not expect that reaction so feeling a bit of guilt, I tried to explain what I meant as if they did not get what I had asked the first time.

Again, nothing. I looked around hoping someone would rescue me. Nothing. Just 20 eyes staring back at me. Some looks conveyed that they could not believe what they had just heard. What have I done? Feeling scared that I had blocked discussion, I asked myself what if I was wrong? What if staff in the organization have never experienced GBV? What if they were staring back at me because it was not my place to ask such a question? What if these looks were saying “Who do you think you are?”

I wanted to jump to another topic but could not. I thought I saw a smile on one lady's face which seem to say “Yes, that was what I was looking for”. I could not believe what I saw and turned away. I definitely saw a small nod from a participant at the far end of the table, he seemed to be scanning the room, trying

to make sure others did not see him. This encouraged me to pursue the topic. But how?

I knew I needed to take a risk. I could not leave the issue, but at the same time I realized I had made an incorrect assumption. All of a sudden, I sort of felt angry at myself for being insensitive and ignorant. I said to myself, “am I crazy, what makes me think that this is something they will talk about without fearing consequences?” “How can anybody feel safe to talk openly about such things in such a setting? I am an outsider. I will leave at the end of this workshop, but ...” My own internal struggle forced me to put myself in their shoes.

I do not know how many minutes went by.

Some eyes were no longer fixed on me. Some female participants were exchanging faint smiles across the room, while another one seem to be busy scribbling on her notebook...

The room remained silent!

From the intensity of the silence, and the body languages of some of the participants I decided to pursue the issue but to change my approach. My dilemma was how to continue the discussion, create space where people could learn from their own experience in a way that was safe and not judgmental.

Out of desperation, I came up with an idea. I tried to compose myself and asked “Please write a letter to a dear friend, giving an example of instances where GBV took place in the office. And please, submit your letter without identifying your name.”

I promised I would be as careful as possible in handling the information and the letters.

Without hesitation participants started writing and quickly submitted their letters. After reviewing the letters overnight, the following day I shared the very long lists of examples they had identified. To my surprise no one objected, and people started talking openly about how to use the information to initiate change in their organizational cultures.

Reflecting back on this experience makes me realise how much we have to hold as facilitators. I guess I was lucky that day. I believe I need to thank the participants for trusting me and the process. This does not mean I will get lucky every time. So the questions are for us as facilitators, “how can we work in ways

that expand participant's experiences? How can we facilitate in such a way that people acquire not only skills but also the willingness to look at themselves critically and to change? How can we do that without asking difficult questions? Without taking risks?"



## FACILITATOR DILEMMAS: HOW CAN I RESPOND AND WHERE DO RESPONSIBILITIES LIE?

Michel Friedman

*(Gender at Work)*

*“As a change agent working to create safer schools free from SRGBV, what should I do? I’m caught between a rock and a hard place. How can I share difficult stories when I fear that my colleagues will mock me? Without your protection I can’t share. Sometimes I feel that as a change agent I am not always able to be the change I want to see” (East African change team member).*

SCHOOL

RELATED

GENDER

BASED

VIOLENCE.....

After three years of working on this initiative, these words roll off our tongues easily. The SRGBV shorthand somehow hides the layers of complexity, pain and courage that lie beneath the words. They mask the stifled throats and trembling bodies that stare in the face of what SRGBV brings to the surface. I’m a South African who’s been asked to be part of the team facilitating the Education International and UNGEI initiated Gender Action Learning Process addressing SRGBV in East Africa.

It's my second time in the region and I don't feel as scared, unfamiliar and uncomfortable as I did during my first time in 2007. Still, I'm very aware I have a lot to learn. How to stretch my ears wide, empty my head of my own assumptions and open my heart to be present to the experiences, perspectives, realities of the lives of the change teams, schoolchildren, other teacher members I'll meet on this journey. Despite many years of facilitation experience working on issues of gender equality and gender-based violence, I, like my change team colleague, sometimes feel that I also don't know what to do. How do I know what is the most appropriate response when faced with life's realities that are part of the wide field that SRGBV covers, but which I know are like an elephant in the room?

The process has unfolded for almost a year. It's early 2017 and I find myself in a standard room we use for our workshops. Bare walls except for the workshop notes, flipcharts, papers and drawings that participants have so colourfully created. There's a desk and chairs, a few windows. It is the end of a long intense week of working with the change team and some staff. I have heard stories that reflect both sides of what it is to be human - bravery, care, compassion, actions of solidarity and transformation as well as those of violation, treating others like objects to be used, with justification of behaviours that I'm sure to the victim feel like pure hell. I've travelled long hours on dusty roads to where union members live, been filled with emotional conversations. My body-mind holds all of this in my bones and cells. There's so much to digest. I'm tired.

The team wants to explore how to approach and unpack social norms and cultural practices connected to SRGBV. We have just finished our first session exploring messages received from cultural norms that dictate what girls and boys can and can't do. A change team member calls me aside at tea-time, wanting to ask me something. Only afterwards do I realise that some part of me had registered a slightly shifty stance, as the change team member's eyes looking everywhere but at mine: "One of the secondary school teachers who attended an SRGBV sensitisation workshop told me: We have a problem of rampant lesbianism in our schools. Is this SRGBV?"

I ask: what do you mean by rampant lesbianism?

"Older girls are abusing younger ones in the boarding school", the change team member replies.



So much goes through my mind. In the past year I have heard many stories that describe how both learners and teachers are practicing behaviours that are not really considered acceptable in East African society, and are usually brushed under the carpet. They are all difficult to face, but in this process, as far as I know, change team members have not felt like their lives or jobs are threatened if they give voice to such stories. They have been able to use the space as a learning opportunity to discuss issues freely, yet, I have learned that anything to do with same-sex sexual orientation is a real hot potato. I feel sure it must be one of the most taboo and reviled topics that falls along the SRGBV continuum. In the early Hearing Our Stories sessions, a year earlier, same sex sexual orientation was given as an example of SRGBV - usually in reference to boys or boys and male teachers - accused of sodomy - always assumed to be violent or violating. Soon thereafter, at a peer learning session the topic re-emerged, when one of the people who is with me today, a union leader who is a fierce advocate of human rights and teacher's rights, had asked if he could be part of the change team if he does not support the rights of LGBTI people? For him, LGBTI rights is something the west is bringing to destroy local culture. He is a Christian, a polygamist, a passionate protector of women who describes himself as a 'traditional' African man. As facilitators we had felt it was not our decision, that the change teams had to decide. It was a question left unanswered at that workshop. At the start of this current meeting the same union leader shares: "I am more humane now in my relationships with others". He feels kinder to me, softer, more conscious of how he has used language in the past to demean. I respect what he has been through to make this change.

Confronted by the question of "rampant lesbian" at tea-time in this workshop I am now caught off guard. I was not expecting this request and I am surprised to hear a participant introduce it. I immediately realise however, here is an opportunity to open a discussion. Coming from South Africa, I am aware that we are one of the only countries on the continent with a constitution which has expanded the meaning of 'human rights' to legally protect the rights of people who have a same-sex sexual orientation. I have to remember what it was like before 1994 when South Africa had its first democratic election and rewrote the apartheid dominated constitution. I've often heard people say: "God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve". "Sodom and Gomorrah, was destroyed, because of homosexuality". Other Christians countered with: "We are not God, we were created in the image of God, and God loves all his children". Coming from a Jewish background, I know what it's like to live inside a context that demands

loyalty and abiding by what is considered culturally normal. I have heard cousins debating whether their children should be excommunicated from their wills because they made choices Jewish culture did not approve of. Whether a child wanted to marry a non-Jew or live with someone of the same sex, the offence to culture was equal. Ever since I was eight years old and was banned from playing with my neighbours, two German girls, I've been trying to understand why as humans we always need to find someone to make other than ourselves and then treat them like they don't belong to homo sapiens, which in turn often leads to justifying violence and murder.

Now I too am caught between a rock and a hard place. It's the first time the issue of same-sex orientation between girls has been raised. I have so many questions shooting through me like arrows. How do I respond and where do responsibilities lie? Are they first to the girls involved in the story I've been told? What is the truth? Is there violence and abuse or are they young teenagers experimenting with their sexuality? Might they become victims with destroyed lives if they do not get support? Are responsibilities to the union's culture, existing norms and the participants I am here to work with? The culture and legal environment of the country I am working in? The Education International umbrella body and its 2015 resolution that resolves to "champion LGBTI rights throughout all EI campaigns and policies"<sup>14</sup> and to "commit resources of Education International to lobby governments to end the criminalising and persecution of LGBTI people and to campaign for human rights for all"<sup>15</sup>?

There is no time to process all these questions running through my mind and I have no co-facilitator with whom to discuss a strategy. Tea ends shortly, and I have to decide. Can I role model that it is possible to have a conversation about a taboo, difficult, sensitive subject, where we can hear all voices, however painful or shameful they might be? I am driven by my South African experience. The conundrum the change team member is sitting with, the starting question - "Is this SRGBV?" - is an opportunity. I jump in the deep end and decide to stare the taboo in the face. When we reconvene in the group, I invite this team member to share the conundrum with the group.

No response....

Mmmm - ok then, I'm thinking, I will have to raise the question myself, since the change team member is reluctant to do so. I am also thinking, clearly it is an issue teachers and union members are facing, so it would be helpful for the team

to be more able to engage with this, using this 'safe' learning space to begin the exploration. I respond at face value to the question posed to me as I share with the group that the change team member had asked me if "rampant lesbianism" is SRGBV. "What do you think?" I ask the assembled group: "Is this automatically something abusive/violating/forced, or might the girls be involved in consensual relationships and are being harassed for it because they are doing something that they are not culturally expected to do?"

Silence.

I could have dropped a bomb.

The lawyer in the room, finally speaks. Saying how common same sex relationships are now in urban areas and how it is becoming more acceptable. He gave some legal input. The conversation continues awkwardly in fits and starts. The man who had previously questioned if he could continue participating in the change team if he didn't agree with LGBTI rights was now quite clear, that if he was a school principal who found a boy having a relationship with another boy, he would expel him, no questions asked. In his view, any kind of same-sex relationship is a violence, an abomination, it's inhuman. I listen to the team debating with each other. We also hear how some girls, when caught, are trying to kill themselves or just run away.

With hindsight, I'm asking myself what I could have done differently - instead of diving in the deep end with such a taboo subject. Should I have put one toe in at a time? Now I see I could have gone more slowly, been more curious and taken more time to lay the groundwork for the conversation. I recognise that in my tiredness I broke a basic facilitator's guideline by not asking the change team member for permission to share his question with the group.

I could rather have started by clarifying that I was stepping a little out the shoes of the facilitator and becoming an advocate to put an issue on the table that has been brought to me but which participants feel shy to raise themselves. Then I could have reflected on the wider issues first - like what it is that creates a sense of lack of freedom around the issue of sexuality and homosexuality in particular? Find out more about how others in the room understand 'rampant lesbianism'. Explore if anyone else had this issue come towards them - or had heard about it in any other school and how that had happened. I could have spent more time learning about the different ways the group understands and responds to what is going on, or what it means for the change agents, teachers, union to deal with

a sensitive and culturally taboo topic? Explore if there is a difference for the group between abuse – whether it is done in a heterosexual context or a gay/lesbian context?

Only then, it might have made sense to ask if there is a difference for people between abuse and a different sexual orientation - or is any sexual orientation other than heterosexual always seen as abusive no matter the context? And if this is the case, what does it mean for the human rights of people with alternative sexual orientations? Who decides who is eligible for being treated as 'human' and is deserving of having a 'human right'? Should our schools only be safe for heterosexuals? How will change teams support union members who find themselves having to deal with such sensitive topics?

I'm writing now, two years after this incident. Unesco research confirms that there are worrying rates of violence directed at students whose gender expression does not fit, or is perceived to not fit into binary gender norms. "Homophobic and transphobic violence in educational settings has a significant impact on students' education and employment prospects, with poorer academic performance and achievement. Victims often feel unsafe at school, avoid school activities, miss classes or drop out of school entirely. Victims of this violence are at increased risk of anxiety, depression, self-harm and even suicide".

I'm still thinking about that moment of feeling between a rock and a hard place. As I write, I hear that it is still hard to report instances of same sex relationships for fear of victimisation. "It will tarnish the reputation of our school. If the administration hears one is even talking about this, they might come for us and we could even be interdicted".

Gender at Work prefers our facilitators to be able to create space for all perspectives on a topic to be heard even if we don't like them or if the dominant culture feels that some perspectives are 'wrong' or 'bad'. Should union change teams be creating such spaces? Do they want to create such spaces? And if so, what will it take for us as facilitators/teachers/union leaders to prepare ourselves to 'hold the space' for difficult conversations – for taboo subjects – especially when those taboos potentially live inside of us as well? What does abuse mean in the end? Are the abusive ones those who defy culture - like a man who challenges FGM in a context where this is 'normal'; a woman who chooses divorce, a girl who does not want to get married, or people who wish to love

others of the same sex? Or are the abusive ones those who use their power of whatever kind to violate other people's bodies, minds, hearts – against their will? I am still wondering what it will take to expand our hearts and our meaning of 'human rights' to be fully inclusive of diverse expressions of humanity.

14. Clause 16 in Resolution on LGBTI rights. Text by: Education International . Published: 26.07.2015. The 7th Education International (EI) World Congress meeting in Ottawa, Canada, from 21nd to 26th July 2015: <https://ei-ie.org/en/detail/14752/resolution-on-lgbti-rights>

15. Clause 17.



## THE ACT OF REFLECTION IS A HUMAN STRUGGLE

Nosipho Twala

*(Labour Research Service & Gender at Work)*

It is a Monday morning in April. The trees are blowing in the gentle wind, the sun is beaming bright. I am ushered through to the Zambian National Union of Teachers headquarters. Leah holds my hand as we walk past groups of teachers who have come to the headquarters for different reasons. She introduces me to her colleagues. We move from office to office greeting and shaking hands with everyone. A group of teachers arrive and request to speak to the organiser. I am taken to the boardroom while Leah and Simon talk to the teachers group.

There is a still silence in the boardroom in stark contrast to the buzzing sounds I have just left in the reception area. The caterer is setting up the table. She greets me with a warm smile and offers me a cup of coffee. I gladly accept, the alluring smell of coffee could not allow me to say no.

Members of the change team start arriving. Herbert, from Southern province arrives first. There is laughter and jubilation as others arrive, all happy to see each other.

I put the Tai Chi music on and we start doing the exercises, everyone in sync. You can tell they have been practising. When we are about to finish Tai Chi two people peep through the door, say hi, looking at Leah, Joe and Samuel. They say, "These are the exercises Leah made us do in that other workshop".

We sit around the table about to start our check-in when the door opens once more. This time teachers are looking for Samuel. I sigh and think to myself, is this

meeting ever going to start. Was it a mistake to hold the meeting in the union office? Is it possible for the change team to be present if there are so many disturbances? Joe picks up on my anxiety and explains that early mornings are always buzzing in ZNUT, but today it is more so because of the many different trainings taking place.

After ten minutes of waiting Samuel joins us. He draws on his humour to apologise for the interruptions. He tells us that the teachers he went to assist are members of the SRGBV reference group in Lusaka and had come to report a case of SRGBV in their school.

During the check-in everyone shares how they are feeling at this mentoring meeting. All share from the heart.

I then ask them to share how they, and ZNUT are keeping the SRGBV initiative alive. They look at each other and respond as if in a choir. "Actually we did not do much because of the cholera outbreak". I learn that schools and public gatherings were suspended for a few months as a prevention measure, following a cholera outbreak.

It is only when I start asking questions about the cholera outbreak and how the union responded to this crisis that they start to reflect on their role as the change team and reference group. They begin mapping and reflecting on their different interventions in dealing with the cholera crisis. They tell me that they had not seen it necessary to share this with me because these actions had not been part of their change plans. They intervened because they had to respond to the crisis. After an hour of reflecting, they are surprised to realise that the crisis served as a catalyst because it cultivated urgency and allowed them to openly and willingly work as a team as well as do things differently, in order to create a clean and safe learning environment free of cholera and SRGBV.

Through these reflections the change team was also surprised to realise that they had made contributions in dealing with SRGBV. Through this exercise the change team begins to see the importance of reflection in making their work visible.

I realise that many of us struggle with reflection, especially self-reflection because it requires soul searching. Often as activists we overlook the fact that reflection helps us understand where we are in our own practise. Being conscious of what we do and the manner in which we do it, is a struggle which makes reflection difficult.

I used to think that reflection was gendered with women being more uncomfortable to reflect on their strengths and successes because they were socialised to be seen and not heard and that this blocks women from “blowing their own trumpets”, or praising themselves. But through this process I realise that reflection is a general human struggle.

Reflection after an action allows us to learn from our experience and has huge benefits in increasing self-awareness. We learn from reflection on our own uncertainties and mistakes. Reflection is important because it helps us uncover “what we know, but do not know that we know” as well as “what we do not know and want to know”.

When I walk out of the office on the second day, there are smiles of glee and satisfaction. The buzzing sound of conversations and laughter had filled the silent room that I first walked into. I could tell by the vibrant energy in the room and smiles on people’s faces that the meeting was a great success. As a facilitator I was touched to see the team reflecting on their practise and impact. One of the change team members said “we want SRGBV programmes to remain in our books for a long time. It must form part of ZNUT even when we are no longer there. It must be part of our DNA.” It was evident that the team was working together and trying their best to do more with less. They say part of the reason they are hands-on is to be able to monitor and check if members are reporting incidents of SRGBV. The team developed hypotheses that they are going to test. Indeed the initiative allowed the change team’s passion to ignite the flame in teacher’s lives. The mentorship meeting surfaced questions never asked before and inspired Joe to write a poem about nature and crocodiles.

I loved the fact that as change agents, they were now aware that change starts with them, that they should become the change they would love to see in others. Because it is hypocritical to expect others to become the change you are not. This initiative has touched their hearts and all of them are passionate about seeing the change and becoming the change. The big question for them was how to use their passion and the passion of provincial change teams to sustain the initiative to fight SRGBV.

Holding the meeting in the ZNUT headquarters, helped me understand the change team’s context, their day to day realities and challenges. Most of the change team members are directors. My assumptions had been that director’s deal with administration and delegation. I was surprised to see change team



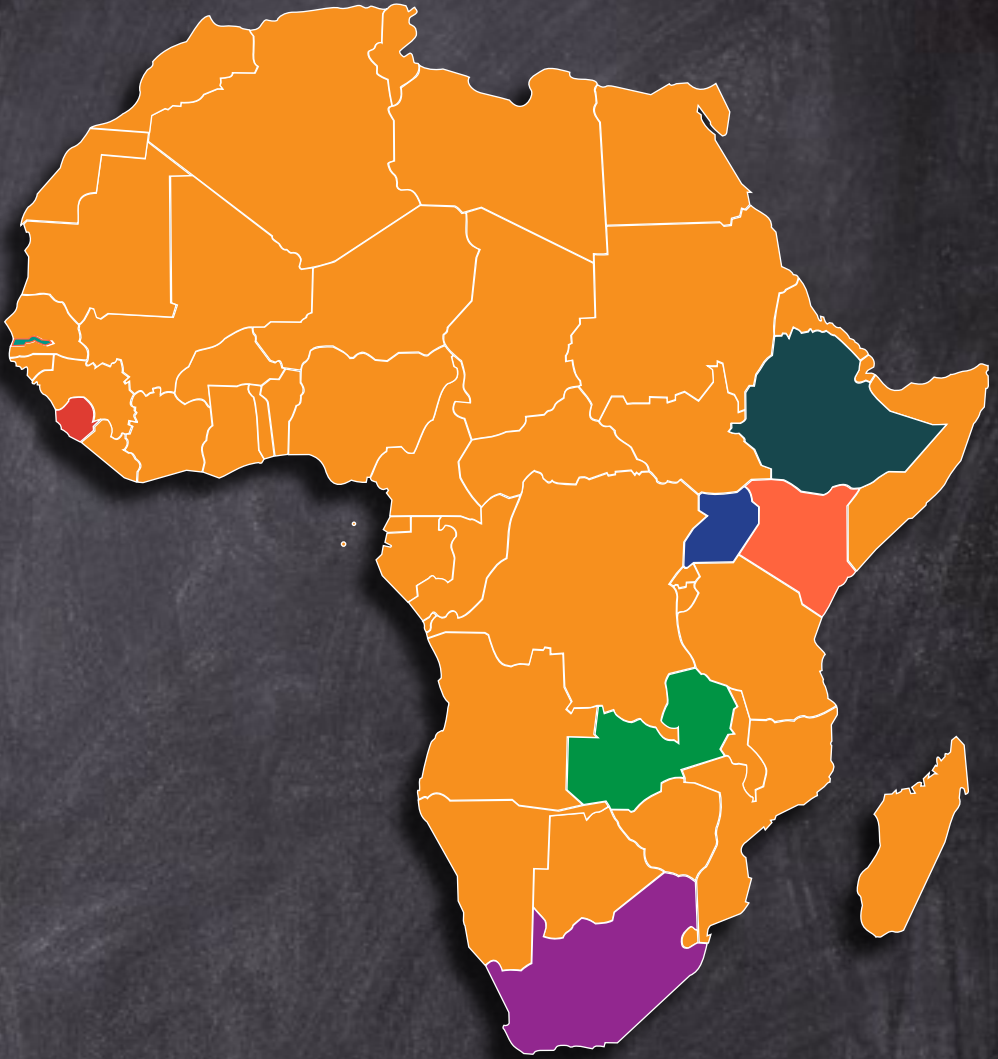
members running around, consulting with others in their teams in order to assist members who came to the office for help. I got an opportunity to feel and experience the culture in the office.

When I mirrored my assumptions on their roles as directors back to them, Samuel said that the SRGBV initiative had changed their understanding of leadership. “We had to adapt and change because this is not a project but an initiative. It will not disappear next year. It will help us get our respect and dignity back as teachers. Thanks for the initiative because today we can gladly roll our sleeves and work hard to support, mentor and build members confidence”.



Image credit: Joe Kasaka (ZNU)





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