

YOUNG WOMEN FIRST!

A Continental Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights Platform
for Young African Women



Issue 2, 2011



Sister, Sister!

Every girl needs a sister, even if she is not someone related to her through blood. We all need someone who will listen to us without judgement; someone who will tell us their story while listening to our own.

My sincere hope for you is that through this publication you are able to make friends and sisters – sisters who will help you to realise that no matter how hard a situation may seem there is always a solution. I hope that they inspire you and help you laugh and cry, but most importantly that they help you to grow!

Thank you so much for your letters to the editor sharing your thoughts on the first edition. It's really important for us to know what bits of information you are enjoying and what other issues you would like covered. So if you would like a chance to be featured in the next edition, send us your letter to youngwomenfirst@safaid.net

In this edition we tackle the issue of menstruation in a way I know will open your mind. Nilima, a sister from Nepal, shares her story about how starting her period at age 13 made her 'untouchable' in her society's eyes. Today, many years later, she is advocating for change so that other young women and girls do not experience the same stigma. Also, Anna tells us a bit about a cup that could change the way you see periods for the rest of your life!

On page 12, you will read what a brother, Ntazana, has to say about the colour pink, and the stereotypes that young men like him have to challenge on a regular basis. You'll love it!

Sister Angelique shares important points on providing sexual and reproductive health services for young women and girls who are refugees. Her story is on page 25.

In this issue, we also introduce to you a new United Nations agency, called the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, or UN Women for short. It was launched this year and we are all hoping that it will provide women and girls with the much-needed voice that is still missing in the world today.

This year also marks 100 years of commemorating International Women's Day! Over the last century, many women have fought to ensure that young women and girls have access to the basic services that young boys enjoy; education, choice of career, fair treatment at work the right to vote. Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda, Secretary General, World Young Women's Christian Association and women's rights activist speaks to us about what the 100 year milestones mean to her, and to women in Africa.

I know that your fingers are ready to start flicking through the pages! I'll stop writing now so you can get stuck in!

Keep shining!

Fungai
Editor



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Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in *Young Women First!* are those of the contributors. While every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this newsletter, the editor and SAfAIDS, its directors and members do not endorse nor are liable for the information contained in *Young Women First!*

Women Hold Up Half the Sky and More!

This poem is my tribute for the 100th year commemoration of International Women's Day. A famous Chinese proverb states that women hold up half the sky. For many years, women have been holding up a very heavy half of the sky. And even today, our world's women face many challenges. As we celebrate this important day, let's also not forget that so much more needs to be done!

Half the Sky: A tribute to 100 years of women
You held up half the sky;
the half that sagged heavy and fertile
with rain clouds:
grey, angry, rumbling clouds that erupted every now and then
with the cold and pitiless spit of
Storms
soaking through your burning resolve,
threatening to cool the boldness of your
Fire
to a damp whisper
limping silently on the breeze.

Yet still you held up that half of the sky,
your fingers bleeding from the pain of your fearless grip,
determined to hold on against all elements and enemies;
Still you held up that heavy horrid half of the sky
taking the taunts of a callous world that denied you the choice
to live,
to learn,
to vote,
to sing the songs forming on your tongue, their sound trapped deep within your throat;
songs of freedom composed but lost to your chained soul:

You didn't let go,
No!
You held on with every nerve and sinew of your might,
your clothes washed through with the sweat and bloody tears and sweeping stinging rain
of an untamed tempest:
Tempted to give in and surrender
you called out for help –
no response came;
just the crackling mocking laughter of Lightning shocking a spark up your spine
and the military thuds of marching thunder
threatening to trample you down back into the ground.

But you held on,
your tired arms holding up that scowling sky
until slowly,
sweetly
softly
it began to clear to a field of velvet blue,
light like your palms' touch once was
before your hands had to harden for War.

Today we continue your battle,
marching under the canopy of that clearer sky
all because of you who chose to stand up and hold up half the world
with trembling arms
and chapped feet
that still managed to dance tenderly to laughter's beat;
You whose passion and pain and persistence
held up a falling sky
that we may bathe in the glory of a new
Sun's rise.

Letters to the Editor

This is your space to give us feedback about what you've read in *Young Women First!* and also how you feel we can improve the content for you. Every month, we will be selecting a Top Thought, or star letter and the author of the letter will receive a SAfAIDS goody bag with lots of fun stuff. All you need to do is send an email to: youngwomenfirst@safaid.net, and you could be in the running! We are encouraged by your feedback and hope that you keep those letters coming.

Top Thought

Dear Fungai

I have just received the Young Women First! newsletter and I think we have needed something like this for a very long time. I read the section on blogging, and as a blogger myself I decided to write in and share my views. I wouldn't consider myself controversial or an activist, but I'm a woman who encourages women's rights and frowns on gender-based injustices. Mostly, my blogs are in the form of short stories, poetry and reviews. The stories are fiction-based on very real true stories. One of my stories made it to the Sunday News Leisure magazine, where I told a story about abortion and why sometimes women find themselves in a position that makes them do things that contradict their principles and values. Often society would judge them harshly, men in particular, when they are in fact the causes. My blog address is <http://gugusplum.wordpress.com/>

This is a wonderful newsletter, keep it up.

Nompilo Gugu Ncube

Dear Fungai,

I am a young Zimbabwean lady aged 23 and I do believe this newsletter is a great way of communicating with today's generation.

It made interesting reading and it warms me up when I see that out there as young women we face almost the same challenges.

I graduated with an Economics degree in 2010 and it has been an empowerment tool for me academically. I do believe I can achieve more and want the same for every young woman out there.

The Young Women First! magazine should also inform us on how we are to stand firm in these times where we want our voices to be heard. I can say I am educated but how do I command respect from the people out there who see my education as of no relevance? I want the education I have to empower me socially, especially in my community.

Tafadzwa Kunze, Zimbabwe

Dear Editor,

Reading the newsletter has been so interesting. This newsletter will help many girls out there get inspired, get information and involved and helped on issues affecting them.

The newsletter contains issues that girls encounter and do not know where to go and be assisted. This will really help girls across the globe to know what other girls are doing and the challenges being encountered and how they have managed to rise. When many young women encounter a problem they think it's the end of everything and their future plans.

I would love it if you continue featuring women who have managed to achieve their goals in spite of challenges. Normally, many women who are featured in different mass media are already known people. We need more ordinary women to act as role models to make other people think differently when they encounter problems as this will be another motivation and a way of inspiring us since different people meet different challenges in life.

Brenda Mwale, Mponela, Malawi

Is it just blood?

Editor's notes: Different cultures view menstruation differently. While some celebrate it as the source of life, others view it as an ugly thing that must be hidden. In this edition, we'll hear the views of Nilima, a young Nepalese woman and Anna, who is based in England.

Nilima may be writing from Asia but many of the things she describes apply to countries all around Africa. And that just goes to show that the world still has a long way to go to accept menstruation. After Nilima's article Anna tells us about a new cup that could save many girls the embarrassment and inconvenience that often comes with accidents related to menstruation. Read what these two young women have to say and then try the activity that follows and let us know what you think!

The Red Tent

By Nilima Raut

Going to school was tough at that time, due to the cold temperatures. Snowy in the winter season, there were hardly very hot temperatures even in the summer. This mountain area called Dolakha is where I was born.

Due to the cold, my cheeks were redder than usual on this particular day; I was 12 at the time. Feeling some strange pain in my belly, I also felt like my underwear smelled. I still remember this day! I was wearing yellow underwear and later at home, I observed a red colour on them. At first, I thought it was a stain I may have gotten while playing. Then I started thinking bad thoughts—maybe I had stomach cancer or an intestinal wound and maybe it would cause death. I was trembling with fear seeing strange things in my life.

I couldn't be sure that it was menstruation because our woman elders used to say, "*Nachhunu bhayapachhi nidharma tika lagchha.*" This means we get a mark on our forehead when we have our first menstruation. I didn't see any mark on my forehead. To this day, I am not sure why they say it like that. I was too afraid to tell my mom so I wore three trousers and went to school. The whole day I was nervous thinking of the heavy bleeding. I didn't know anything about menstruation, except that my mom would not touch anything for five days each month.



Nilima, an advocate for better menstrual facilities in Nepal

I developed my first crush on one of the mountains called Mt. Gaurishankar on a beautiful morning when the sunshine kissed the mountain and it glowed like heaven, as I had heard in legendary stories about it. Named after the Gauri-goddess and Shankar-god from the Hindu religion; climbing this mountain is prohibited because of religious beliefs and respect. But every time I went close to the mountain or saw its heavenly view, I imagined hugging it.

Imaginations and dreams were part of my life when I was growing up. However, as I got older, I noticed changes occurring in my body and this was a very weird experience for me. It was shameful for me to ask my parents about these physical changes and even my mom never told me exactly what would happen in my body as I matured. Back then, our culture didn't allow us to talk freely about physical bodily changes, or reproductive or sexual health. Even now, the custom remains in my country.

The Nepali word for menstruation is *nachhunu* which means untouchable. It means while we are menstruating, we are considered untouchable or impure for five days and everything we touch becomes impure. When we have our first menstruation, we are not allowed to touch any males (including our father and brothers) and are not allowed to enter the kitchen or prayer rooms for 22 days. We also have to use separate utensils. Further, looking in the mirror during menstruation is considered bad luck. Our culture has the superstitious belief that menstruation is the punishment of sins from our previous lives.

So when our house maid noticed the blood on my dress after I came home from school, she immediately told my mom. They packed some of my dresses and told my dad to go out of house so that I couldn't see him. I went with our house maid to her home which was approximately one and a half hours away. While there, I was given a dark room with no sunlight and given one plate and glass to use for eating. People said to me, "*timi aba thuli bhayau*" which means now you are grown up.

"In total, women spend around six to seven years of their lives menstruating."

Oh! Now, grown up means I had to be careful from then on not to play with male friends, not to stay out too long, not to go out often or at all. I used to cry when I was alone for being grown up—all coming from this one simple, natural physical change in my body. I hated that blood which made this sudden change.

At the time, I had to use rags because I didn't even know there were things like sanitary pads. Using rags was unhygienic and I was also unaware of how to wash them carefully. Days were so hard; all of the restrictions were the worst part. On "those days," I was kept away from school and feared what questions my friends and teachers would ask. I saw many of my friends miss school during their menstrual periods; I also saw some friends get married after they started menstruating because they were now considered "grown up" in my culture.

I was supposed to stay away from my home for 12 days but luckily my mom allowed me to come back on the seventh day. That day, I was given new

cloths and new things. I entered our home after they sprinkled gold water (they put gold in water, as it is believed to be pure). I was told that I shouldn't touch my dad for 22 days. This was extremely challenging because I was always "Daddy's Little Girl" and couldn't imagine not talking to or hugging my dad. I cried a lot and hated being grown up. Many people stared at me and scolded me, telling me it was a sin. This depressed me for a long time after that.

"The Nepali word for menstruation is 'nachhunu' which means untouchable. It means while we are menstruating, we are considered untouchable or impure for five days and everything we touch becomes impure."

According to the Monthly Monitoring and Annual Performance Review Worksheet for 2008 through 2009/10 in Dolakha, the estimated target population for health service use was 224,982; the actual users were 235,674, including immigrated people. Female health service takers are increasing by 2% to 4% per day, which can be attributed to awareness of more health problems. In 2009/2010, there was an average of 96 cases of menstruation disorder (in married and unmarried women) per month in the district primary health centre of Dolakha.

"...menstruation is a natural phenomenon that should be celebrated and an important part of the feminine journey."

There is minimal promotional health service through advertisements in TV, radio, and newspapers. They include some information on major diseases, but do not include information on menstruation and hygiene. Hygienic practices during menstruation are of considerable

importance as they have health impacts in terms of increased exposure to various infections. However, due to lack of awareness and this knowledge, hygiene is neglected by girls, especially in the rural areas. Water Aid, the renowned NGO is one of the major organisations working to raise awareness of sanitation, including menstruation hygiene.

A 2009 survey by Water Aid states that the key reasons girls were absent from school while menstruating was a lack of privacy, unavailability of sanitary disposal facilities and water shortages. Girls also avoid going to the toilet during menstruation as most schools do not have separate latrines for girls, meaning that many girls have missed school during the days when they are menstruating.

According to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES), only 41% of schools in Nepal have latrine facilities with only 26% of schools having separate latrines for girls. To avoid humiliation, especially teasing by school boys, the girls would rather stay at home. This is one of the reasons why girls lose interest in going to school and have poor performance results. A study has indicated that girls are also likely to get depressed during their first menstruation.

In the new schools study course, primary health education is included from class 1 to 10. There is a subject called 'Science, Environment and Health' for classes 1-5 and after that a subject called 'Population, Health and Environment'. Although commendable, this course is not enough to provide complete knowledge on basic reproductive health. Though there are some chapters covering reproductive health, due to the course being a new one, and the teachers being untrained in it; it has been ineffective. Also, the girls are too shy to ask about this and teachers themselves do not teach about it due to our cultural barriers.

According to Govinda Raj Sedhai, Secretary of the District Education Office in Dolakha, the education ministry is bringing a new literacy programme to adults. These adult/elders literacy classes will include three days of health education

We talk about girls' right to education. And when we talk about this, we cannot focus only on scholarships or building toilets. We need an integrative approach

which may also help women to know about their menstruation and reproductive health.

The National Health Policy (NHP) was adopted in 1991 to bring about improvements in health conditions of the people of Nepal through extending access and availability of the primary health care system. The primary objective of NHP is to extend the primary health care system to the rural population so that they benefit from modern facilities and services provided by trained health care providers. Under the Government plan there are three kinds of health services: preventive;

promotional and curative. Menstruation hygiene falls under the categories of preventive and promotional health.

In total, women spend around six to seven years of their lives menstruating. A key priority for women and girls is to have the necessary knowledge, facilities and cultural environment to manage menstruation hygienically and with dignity. Yet the importance of menstrual hygiene management is mostly neglected by development practitioners within the water, sanitation and hygiene sectors, and other related sectors such as reproductive health. In many countries like Nepal, women are considered to be "impure" during their menstrual cycle. They are prohibited from taking part in social life and are treated as "untouchable" during this time.

But the truth is menstruation is a natural phenomenon that should be celebrated as it is an important part of the feminine journey. We talk about girls' right to education. And when we talk about this, we cannot focus only on scholarships or building toilets. We need an integrative approach that involves gender sensitivity among teachers and programmes educating mothers on the impact that menstruation has on young girls.

There are many cultures in Nepal. Some of them treat menstruation in a good way and some of them treat it as if it is a big curse. The majority of girls learn about menstruation from their mothers, sisters and girlfriends but what happens when these sources of information don't know about menstrual hygiene? And what happens when they

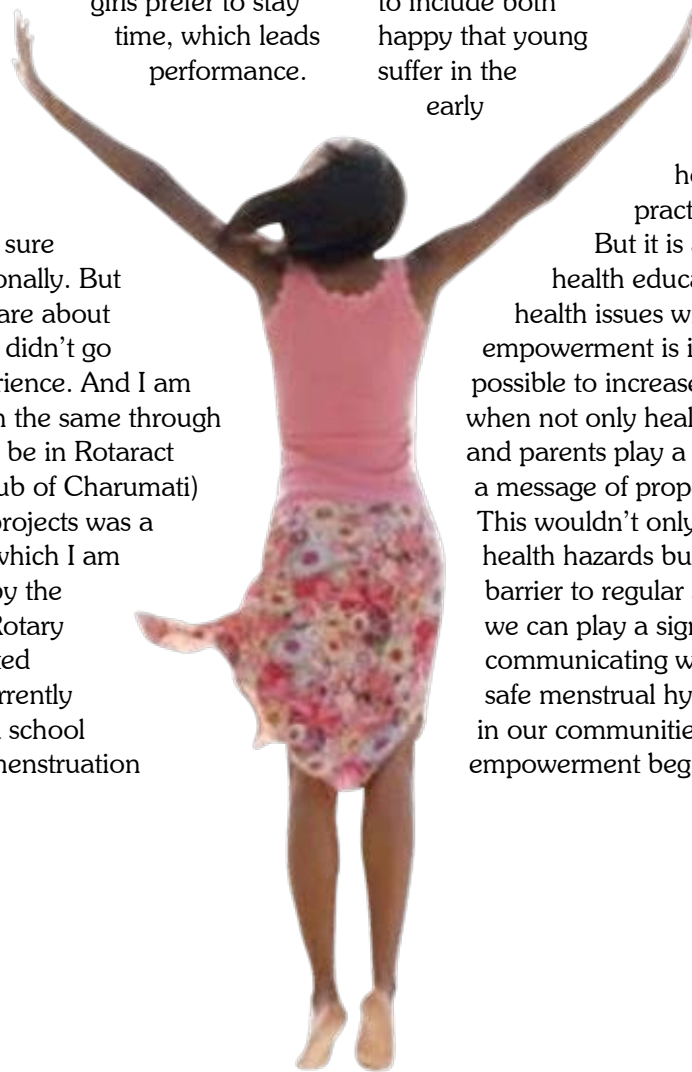
“The majority of girls learn about menstruation from their mothers, sisters and girlfriends but what happens when they don’t know about menstrual hygiene? And what happens when they have knowledge, but they lack proper facilities for their hygiene?”

have knowledge, but they lack proper facilities for their hygiene? As a result, some women and girls suffer from depression and some get various infections. Many girls prefer to stay home during this time, which leads to their poor school performance.

My parents were unaware of all these issues during the time when I started menstruating, and I am sure they didn’t do it intentionally. But I had to make them aware about it so my younger sisters didn’t go through the same experience. And I am spreading awareness on the same through Rotaract. I am proud to be in Rotaract (sponsored by rotary club of Charumati) and one of our recent projects was a Girls Toilet Project for which I am a coordinator, funded by the Matilda Bay-Australia Rotary Club. We have completed the project and I am currently working voluntarily in a school to raise awareness on menstruation

hygiene, as well as other basic teenage problems. This is the first step of my big mission! I am still learning and seeking new ways and ideas to include both genders. And I am happy that young girls don’t have to suffer in the same way I did in my early days of menstruation.

It depends upon how different cultures practice menstrual hygiene. But it is a very important part of health education, like other major health issues without which women’s empowerment is incomplete. It’s only possible to increase menstruation hygiene when not only health officers but teachers and parents play a vital role in transmitting a message of proper menstrual hygiene. This wouldn’t only save girls from many health hazards but would break a major barrier to regular school attendance. And we can play a significant role through communicating with each other to create safe menstrual hygiene in our families and in our communities. This is where woman’s empowerment begins...



This article is part of a writing assignment for World Pulse’s Voices of Our Future, which is providing rigorous web 2.0 and new media training for 31 emerging women leaders speaking out for social change from some of the most unheard from corners of the world.

The cup that does not overfloweth

By Anna

If anyone had told me back when I started menstruating that in the future, I would be using a cup for 'that time of the month', I would have probably not quite believed them.

Using this cup, commonly known as a menstrual cup, involves manually inserting it into my vagina and pushing it up towards my fallopian



Anna holding up her moon cup.

tubes (but not quite as high as a tampon). The cup that I use is made from soft medical grade silicone, is latex-free and hypoallergenic, which means that it won't cause allergic reactions, or feel uncomfortable when properly fitted.

To empty it, I have to put my fingers up my vagina, squeeze the cup's sides to release the vacuum and then empty its contents in the toilet, rinse it in clean water and reinsert it. After my bleeding stops for the month, I rinse the cup again and then to sterilise it, pop into a pot of boiling water for ten minutes. When I bought my cup, it came with a little cotton pouch, which is where I keep it when I'm not on my period.

To any 13-year-old girl, which is the age I was when I got my first period, or any woman who has never used tampons without an applicator, this would probably seem too invasive, bloody, or even too embarrassing a procedure. But to me and to many others 'converted' to this method of 'menstrual management', it seems like the most natural, comfortable and healthy way to go about our periods.

But then again, I have many advantages. I am currently living in the United Kingdom where I have constant access to clean running water. I was able to pay £20 upfront for the cup, something that I realise not every woman would be able to do. The fact that I can even walk into a store and buy one makes my situation quite unique and privileged. And also, I am not made to feel embarrassed or 'dirty' because of my period - I live with three men, none of whom are my husband, and can freely sterilise my cup even when they are hovering about the kitchen!

But I still think that menstrual cups would be a great alternative for women in developing countries, as only one for each woman would be necessary for a few years: most menstrual cups have a life expectancy of at least 10 years. Having only used the cup for a few months, I have already saved money on sanitary products. A few boxes of tampons or pads would not last nearly as long - it is estimated that one woman will use over 11,000 disposable sanitary products in a lifetime. On average, women and girls use 22 tampons or towels each period. Also, unlike tampons, menstrual cups have never been associated with toxic shock syndrome (TSS). TSS is a rare but serious disease linked to women using tampons.

After a Kenyan research trial carried out by African Population and Health Research Centre in association with Mooncup¹, one of the major brands of menstrual cups, the Centre's report noted significant social (improved health and increased school attendance), economic and participation benefits for the trial participants. The trial involved adolescents in rural Kenya using the Mooncup instead of their usual menstrual management methods².

But apart from great advantages for the trial participants, such as decreased school absenteeism and less shame and embarrassment about their periods, there are some challenges to be considered. One of these is the need for privacy and high levels of hygiene when emptying the cup; both of which might not be possible.

It is important to realise that the menstrual cup will obviously not meet the needs of all women and girls.

Personally, I think that we, as women, have been socialised to find our own menstrual blood and our vaginas something dirty that we shouldn't touch or deal with - literally - first hand. Perhaps I sing the menstrual cup's praises for those reasons

It is estimated that one woman will use over 11 000 disposable sanitary products in a lifetime.

also. One should be comfortable with her own reproductive and sexual body. If you are not, you might find some aspects of using the cup 'disgusting'; your fingers might be covered in blood while you handle it, you will - as explained in my first few lines - have to reach up into your vagina. A few times in the beginning I also noticed the cup made a little suction whilst inside my body, which was uncomfortable. But after a while, the insertion/handling of it becomes second nature. I feel far

more comfortable now than I have ever with other methods of menstrual protection.

If the menstrual cup's accessibility and acceptability is improved across the world, it could become a tool through which menstrual health could be improved, whilst making women and girls more comfortable with their reproductive health. The economic and environmental benefits of the menstrual cup could actually be used in advocacy work for wider accessibility of menstrual sanitary products. Moreover, the intricacies of this type of menstrual management: i.e. using a cup to collect blood internally rather than padding externally of the body, could be a great start-off point for more open, honest and informative discussion and education for women on their reproductive health and their bodies.

I, for one, am glad I changed to the cup. Having, in my opinion, an easier time menstruating, while making me feel empowered as a woman – it's definitely a win-win situation with this cup!

Anna is a development worker currently working in London, doing administrative assistant work on a temporary basis, while on the look-out for more opportunities to work in the field of gender equality and women's rights in South Asia and Africa.

Thinking outside this box...

Now that you have an idea of how sisters around the world deal with 'that time of the month', here is an activity for you to do. You can do this by yourself, or in a group, but write down true and honest answers to these questions.

1. How does your period make you feel about yourself? (Does it make you happy, sad, proud, ashamed, or any other emotion?) Why?
2. When you had your first period, was it easy to talk about it?
3. How easy or difficult is it for you to get access to sanitary ware (e.g. pads, tampons, cotton wool)? What about other girls in your community?

From thinking through these questions, we'd like you to come up with some action points. An action point is something that you commit to doing so that either your own life, or the lives of other young women and girls, can be improved. Let's say in Question 1, you answered that your period makes you proud. Your action point might read something like, "I will aim to inspire other girls to feel proud about their period." Or perhaps in Question 3, you answered that it is hard for girls in your community to get access to sanitary ware. Your action point could state something like, "I will try to raise awareness about how difficult it is for young women and girls to get access to sanitary ware in my community."

You can come up with an action point for each question, but it would be easier for you to focus on just one at a time. After you have done this, begin to think about what you can DO to make your action point a reality. Who can help you? How? What is it that you need to make your vision a reality?

If you feel like you need further help, why not drop us an email or a letter at: youngwomenfirst@safaid.net or write to us at Young Women First!, 479 Sappers Contour, Lynnwood, Pretoria 0081, South Africa and we can share your thoughts on ForUm ForUs. You might even be able to work with other girls from all over the world on your action points!!!

The Mooncup is available over the internet worldwide, even if your country is not currently on the list. See <http://www.mooncup.co.uk/how-to-order.html> for more details. Other menstrual cup brands include: The Keeper: <http://www.keeper.com/> and The Diva Cup: <http://www.divacup.com/>

<http://www.mooncup.co.uk/about-us/news.html>; To access the complete report : 'Research and Feasibility Study to Explore Menstrual Practices and Investigate the suitability of menstrual cups for adolescent girls and women in Kenya', contact the African Population and Health Research Center, website: www.aphrc.org

The colour pink...

By Ntazana Kaulule

Editor's Note: American author, Alice Walker wrote about 'The Colour Purple' and won great acclaim for her novel. In this article, Ntazana Kaulule tells us about his passion for the colour pink, a colour often associated with women and girls, and how he overcomes stereotypes around this and other challenges to his perceptions of being a man. We'd love to know whether you think his thoughts are a best-seller too!



Ntazana wearing one of his bright pink sweaters

OK ladies, how does the average guy you know dress? Is he always in dull colours or does he seem to be wearing the same black or blue sweater every time you meet him?

I must be right!

I would not blame you for painting that picture of many a man. Let's face it, unless the guy is married and his wife arranges his clothes and does all the colour coding for him, men are just not good with colours. They just seem to fall over themselves when it comes to coordinating their dress. So the easy escape is just to wear black and blue - well at least for most of them, or so you think!

See just how easy it is to stereotype people? With the exception of those who are in the fashion industry, most men are presumed to be lousy when it comes to adding colour to their lives. I am no fashion guru, and I'd be terrible at it, but I feel it's important for women to know that men are not as terribly useless with their sense of colour and style as you might suppose us to be. Quite to the contrary!

You could not imagine a man in pink, could you? Of course not completely dressed in pink from head to toe - like you, I would probably question such a man's sanity! But the reason why most of us

could not possibly imagine a guy in pink is because, for some odd reason, the majority of society feels that pink is a feminine colour. I, however, cannot find a dictionary or definition that assigns particular colours to either men or women, let alone designates the colour pink to women only. But the myth goes on because we leave it unchallenged.

You might think I am being trivial with this whole pink thingy, right? But just pause for a moment and think of how many things society allows to be judged on the basis of gender. It could be a simple issue to do with the colour of your clothes, or something more complex like sexual life styles. All the same, our failure to challenge the legitimacy of the ideas by which we define manliness or womanliness acts only to reinforce stereotypes that should have no place in how we look at and treat each other.

Let us take a very practical example here. There is a behaviour usually associated with men that a friend of mine rightly labelled as 'bedminton' (derived from the sport of badminton). 'Bedminton' is basically a game were a man is perceived to be "the man" if he has had as many sexual escapades as one can before finally settling down with that woman whom he dearly loves.

Although no one will come out in the open and applaud such behaviour we as society have generally come to expect it as part and parcel of every man. Like I have said, 'bedminton' is synonymous with men - just let a woman become a 'bedmintonist' (and I am not encouraging anyone, male or female, to become one), and what do we conclude of her? She is loose and promiscuous, and she is described in colourful language! And therein lies the bias for it is okay for males to behave that way but not females.

While consulting on a project a while back, I recall a lady friend of mine being hit with a very shocking revelation of what she ought to expect

from her soon-to-be-husband. She was told by two senior male colleagues whom we were working with not to expect fidelity from her fiancé once they got married. Much to her utter bemusement, she was told that if he had not been a 'bedmintonist' before they got married she ought to brace herself for that to happen in their marriage. But the woman, they said, is expected to be faithful no matter what her husband gets up to.

And even if he had already been a 'bedmintonist', these guys warned her not to expect this behaviour to suddenly stop just because he was now married. It would take time and gradually, at his own pace, he would reduce the number of women. Shocking hey?! But here is the bombshell. One of them even bragged about how he'd found ways to conceal his extramarital affairs from his wife after being caught out once before. While I sympathise with this woman, I also wonder how many more women are suffering in silence within such emotionally torturous marriages. And when they try to leave their 'playful' husbands, they just get thrust right back into the ring by a society that expects them to endure the pain for the sake of the 'marriage'.

It is right to sympathise with women found in such situations where we as society expect them to maintain fidelity but don't, in equal measure, demand the same of men. But while we do that, let us not forget that there is a silent sufferer to all this who is almost entirely ignored due to the effects of such a stereotypical definition of a man. And that is the man who refuses to be thus defined.

Personally, I don't think that society should define my manliness by how many sexual encounters I have had. I find that downright absurd. But because of all of the stereotypes, you almost find yourself having to explain your motives for wanting to befriend a female, sometimes even wanting to apologise for being a man. We have allowed society to tell us that a man and a woman cannot just be friends without sex coming into the picture. And that means that we men are viewed as hormonally-charged beasts waiting to pounce on the next unassuming female that allows us to get an inch close.

One has to endure the near-mocking tone of fellow men who find it impossible to believe that you do not associate the practices of 'bedmintonists' with your identity as a man. Upon moving to the UK for my studies, I was asked by a male colleague from Zambia how English women 'tasted'. I was like, "Dude what are you talking about?!" He was of course referring to the sexual

exploits of women here. When I told him I do not go sleeping around, he registered disbelief at the fact that I hadn't 'scored' any 'chicks'.

I should like my manliness to be judged on the nobler qualities of what it means to be a man – worthy traits such as honesty, integrity and the ability to withstand adversity.

And yes I will readily admit that I do quite like the colour pink, much to the applause of some ladies and the scorn of some of the male folk. I am not speaking of an obsessive liking for the colour, but in moderation. Worn in the right shade - depending on your complexion - it adds a sense of grace, elegance and refinement in appearance. It does for the ordinary fellow what purple did for royals in ancient times.

I have a thing for bright sweaters. I just love them and feel very confident and good when I wear them. To other men out there I say, don't be afraid to try something that's got pink in it just because the colour is predominantly worn by women. And also, don't be afraid to be part of the process of redefining what manhood means.

So the next time you see a man dressed in a pink sweater or shirt, do not frown. Just smile because bright colours rock!!!

Ntazana is a young economist and entrepreneur from Zambia, currently studying at the University of Reading in the United Kingdom. He'd love to get your comments about this article at: ntazanak@yahoo.co.uk

Chatter box

Do you think it's okay for men to wear pink?

How do you think that ideas about which colours are meant for boys and girls come to be? Are these ideas true?

What other ideas about boys and girls exist in society? (An example is that boys don't cry). Are these ideas true?

In the article, Ntazana mentions the double standard that allows men to have many sexual partners and be unfaithful, but that then condemns women with similar habits. Do you think that these beliefs have any links to the way that boys and girls are taught how to behave and dress?

OneVoice South Africa: Using Poetry for Change

OneVoice South Africa (OVSA) is a vibrant and unique non-governmental organisation which uses innovative and creative ways of actively involving young people in HIV and TB prevention. Launched in 2009 in Durban, South Africa, OVSA partners with young people between the ages of 13 and 19 years in school settings. At this age, young people are in a stage of transition from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, which is a time of vulnerability and risk, but which also provides a great opportunity for behaviour change and youth leadership.

Background: South Africa is a country battling devastating dual HIV and TB epidemics, with 80% of TB cases occurring in people who are also HIV-infected. Amongst its nine provinces, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) has the highest HIV prevalence and greatest TB burden. As such, we have developed an age-appropriate and contextualised Schools Programme, which is being rolled out in 30 schools in KZN, and 14 schools in the Eastern Cape (EC).

Our vision is to support a safe and creative environment where young people are part of the collective voice to develop positive lifestyles in the HIV and TB response. Our mission is to promote meaningful participation of young people in making informed decisions about their health and lifestyle; including sexual and reproductive health within our communities. We also aim to expand target audience knowledge on TB and TB/HIV co-infection, and promote early detection. Approximately 4,400 young people will be reached in this school calendar year.

At the core of the Schools Programme are a series of 12 workshops, which engage learners on a number of health-related topics. Fun, yet in-depth, the Schools Programme focuses on HIV and AIDS, TB, life skills, sexual and reproductive health, gender and human rights issues. Engaging with young people in a meaningful way supports a high-energy, informative and connective experience. At the end of the workshops learners are encouraged to take action and tasked with developing an advocacy project to take what they have learnt in the classroom out into their own community. By providing them with a platform to discuss and address health issues that affect their lives on a daily basis, OVSA supports learners to become active participants in promoting healthy behaviours and mobilising peers and communities to do the same.

Underpinning the programme is a group of young, dynamic, community-based facilitators. Raised in the communities we work with, OVSA facilitators are very familiar with the challenges faced by young people – and

committed to supporting their ongoing development. Bolstering their innate contextual understanding is an internal programme of ‘refresher’ trainings. Working with HIV and TB, and supporting young people with many critical issues – on an almost daily basis - does bring its own stresses. Hence ongoing staff development and meaningful expression by staff is taken very seriously.

At the recent Facilitator Refresher Training, emphasis was placed on re-familiarising oneself with some of the workshop elements learners are exposed to. Aside from developing technical skills, facilitators were supported in addressing their emotional wellbeing through the acquisition of new skills and communication outlets. In particular, facilitators were asked to focus on the concept of EXPRESSION.

Poetry: Facilitators were then asked to write poetry on ‘what it meant to them to be working in the HIV and TB field’ and ‘how they see this integrated epidemic’. Through this medium, facilitators were compelled to question their own views, address issues of stigma and discrimination, and to recognise the positive aspects of the work they are doing in the field. This form of expression is exceptionally personal and reflects their experiences, in their own words. It also provides an outlet for any issues they might be dealing with; such as issues of stigma and discrimination, ignorance, dealing with the loss of a loved one to HIV, TB or any other infectious disease, and other crises.

Writing poetry is a known stress reduction tool, and a practical alternative to expressing anger, frustration and anxiety in ways that might be harmful. This intellectual and emotional stimulation exercise was aimed at enhancing self-esteem and communication skills. Additionally, facilitators were exposed to new writing skills and a creative form of communication.



I AM the New Generation

By Nothile Sibiyi, OVSA KwaZulu-Natal Facilitator

New Generations of today
New Minds of today, New Information
Together we can fight the world of stigma
Together we can fight the world of discrimination
HIV you no longer have the power to destroy us
You will no longer take decisions
On how, On when, and where,
You are going to affect us. We know your tricks.
New Generations. New Minds
Together we can put and end to this



Nothile, how did writing this poem make you feel?

It made me feel sad to do this exercise as it made me think more about HIV and AIDS and how it

affects the people around me. It also really made me think about people that I have lost through HIV and AIDS. Writing a poem like this was like off-loading and being given the time and opportunity to express what I felt, in a creative way. There was not enough time though as I would have liked more time to express myself. There is so much to say and not enough time to say it.

Have you written more poetry since?

Yes I did actually write more. I did it for myself, while I was teaching the learners.

What is your vision for yourself?

I would like to become a social worker and help people in need. I would also like to help orphans. However, I need to study and learn more – especially about HIV. I will need to go to university to get the concrete educational grounding that I will need to achieve my vision. If I can't go to university, then I will make sure that I get my experience in another way. Then I will try to go to the orphanages to volunteer and if I can't do that, then I will try to set up my own NGO and I will set up support groups in the community.

Working in the HIV and AIDS field

By Pamella Nongila, OVSA Eastern Cape Facilitator

It's a motivation. I do it with passion.
..being part of the People;
who are responsible for Change.
It is a blessing.
It ploughs growth and maturity within me.
It's an eye opener - my reason for living.
I'm a soldier of the nation,
and I am glad to be part of this army,
Reaping...
...and helping, young people make informed
decisions about HIV and AIDS
It makes me bubble
with pride.
I don't care what
you say, I AM a Role
Model.

How did writing this poem make you feel?

Writing this poem made me feel like I was being given a platform to share how I feel about working in the HIV and AIDS sector. It was like telling a story to someone who wishes to know the importance of my job and the role that I'm playing.



Have you written more poetry since?

Not yet - I've never written a poem before. This was my first time to write a poem.

What is your vision for yourself?

The vision that I have for myself is to become an independent and educated young woman who is achieving all that I wish to achieve in life. I see myself owning my own organisation some day. As a person who's self-motivated I also hope to motivate other young women, not by words but by my actions

Partnering on HIV and AIDS: a Poem

By **Nosiphiwo Thuthu,**
OVSA Eastern Cape Facilitator

It is very interesting work. Being a young person
working in this field.

I learn new and different things, every day, and
For other people
I am a role model.

This kind of work has changed the way I see things
The way I behave around my friends and family

The way I live my life.
Now I am a positive person!
Now I can motivate others!
Now I am eager to help!
..Especially the younger ones.

Nosiphiwo, how did writing this poem make you feel?

I was very proud because some of the things I wrote; I was not aware of them. For me, writing this poem revealed things that I did not know about myself.

What is your vision for yourself?

I want to be a successful, independent woman.

What is your vision for other woman in your community?

I grew up in a rural area, and am still living there. There are lots of young women who fall pregnant because of poverty and they end up not getting an education. I have been having this vision for a long time to start clubs, where we will spend time motivating each other and doing different activities with both boys and girls. The skills that I have received from OneVoice South Africa are skills I want to share with them and others.

Lessons Learnt

Facilitators enjoyed being able to portray their point of view and deliver a positive message in the face of the substantial hurdles associated with HIV and AIDS. Equally, it is important to support our facilitators with intellectually and emotionally challenging trainings, which address their holistic wellbeing. Lastly, writing poetry is a great tool facilitators can draw upon when working with the learners. Creative writing and opportunities for creative expression are an important tool for promoting HIV prevention and getting young people to talk about other critical sexual and reproductive health issues. Tools such as poetry and creative writing can “inspire young people to cultivate and communicate a more truthful and inclusive perception of HIV and AIDS; promote prevention and compassion through a creative and honest medium.” Whether they are facilitators or learners – personal expression provides a wonderful opportunity to pass on a powerful and very real message that commands attention.

Tools such as poetry and creative writing can “inspire young people to cultivate and communicate a more truthful and inclusive perception of HIV and AIDS; promote prevention and compassion through a creative and honest medium.”

OVSA is funded by the Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-operation (ICCO), Oxfam International through the Oxfam HIV and AIDS Program (OHAP), the D.G. Murray Trust and the Belgian Development Agency.

For more information on OVSA, please go to www.onevoice.org.za



Focus on Sexual and Reproductive Health Programmes in Southern Africa

The Ford Foundation dedicates its work to strengthening sexual and reproductive health and rights, and encouraging comprehensive sexuality education and evidence-based public discourse on sexuality by supporting organisations working to ensure that young people are empowered to have access to the information and services they need. The organisation's focus is on addressing the needs of young women from poor and excluded communities because they bear the greatest burden of violence and disease.

Below is a synopsis of some of the programmes and interventions which the Ford Foundation is supporting in southern Africa.

The Web for Life Network: SAYWHAT's strengthened and coordinated responses to young women's sexual and reproductive health challenges

By SAYWHAT Staff

Young women's active participation in lobbying and advocating for their sexual and reproductive health and rights has made a difference and contributed to national improvements in addressing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and HIV and AIDS challenges. Zimbabwe-based Students And Youth Working on reproductive Health Action Team's (SAYWHAT's) key strategic focus is promoting the active participation of students in reclaiming their sexual and reproductive health and rights through lobbying and advocacy activities. Advocacy remains critical and is at the centre of active and meaningful responses to the sexual and reproductive health and rights needs of young women in tertiary institutions.

As an initiative of SAYWHAT, the Web for Life Network promotes and strengthens the active participation and involvement of female students in SRHR advocacy at national and regional level, offering them platforms to continuously share experiences and practices around SRHR advocacy. Over the years, this advocacy has seen an increase in women's access to SRHR services, among them contraceptives, sanitary wear and improved uptake of voluntary counselling and testing services.

The Web for Life Network also implements behavioural change activities which are mainly targeted at female students engaged in multiple concurrent partnerships; HIV positive students; female student activists; students living with disability and married students. These have improved assertiveness, empowerment and enhancement of skills among these women to protect themselves.

The Network allows for the amplification of the voices of female students through national coalitions advocating for improved SRH service delivery for women in Zimbabwe. The views and concerns of female students are critical to these forums as they, and others in their age group constitute the majority of women experiencing a number of SRH challenges in a unique socio-economic environment. The participation of female students in these platforms and spaces has increased understanding and knowledge of the links between young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV and AIDS, and ensures that these issues are part of the core business of youth and women's organisations and movements.

Through the Web for Life Network female students also engage with legal experts who simplify content and raise awareness on SRH-related policies that have a particular bearing on young women which they can influence. Young women have been actively involved in the review of the Zimbabwe National Youth Policy which is currently going on. Through their engagement, young women are ensuring that issues peculiar to their needs, such as the need for access to comprehensive SRH services; including HIV and AIDS services, are met.

Advocacy is not complete until it is able to bring about change and this can be achieved by supporting and encouraging the determined urge by young women to be the change they want to see.

The Web for Life Network is an active and dynamic platform for female students in tertiary institutions who are leaders and advocates for sexual and reproductive health and rights; the network works to build on female students'

perceived strengths and opportunities. Currently SAYWHAT is expanding the Network to cover issues around the greater socio-economic needs

of young women through supporting sustainable livelihoods and advocating for enabling policy and institutional environments.

***SAYWHAT – Students and Youth Working on reproductive Health Action Team is a student based organisation with a vision to ensure a gender-just nation with empowered, healthy & responsible students who enjoy their full reproductive health & rights in tertiary institutions**

Gender, Sexuality & Politics: Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights of Young Women

*A research programme at the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town
funded by the Ford Foundation.*

Dr Tanya Bosch*

Introduction

One of five action research projects implemented in five university campuses in southern Africa, this article explores the University of Cape Town's (UCT) action research project which is aimed at building young women's leadership and social organisation to confront sexual, raced and gendered inequalities within the university. Although universities are constructed as imagined democratic environments, "they are subject to dominant notions of identity, and consequently they expel and reject outsiders through dominant notions of authority" (Pullen, 2010: 23). The project at UCT aimed to create public awareness and debate over 'the line' of convention, which controls women's autonomy and choice, particularly as young women face intensive challenges in universities. Despite new (since 1994) political language around gender equity and the consecration of sexual and reproductive health and rights in South Africa's legislative and policy framework, there is fierce gender hostility and a sense of powerful instability concerning gender and sexual norms. On the one hand, the discourse of gender equality is alive, and yet, on the other, sexism, racism, classism, gender based violence, and homophobia are rampant – sending a very particular message to women about their vulnerability and political impotence. The project was conducted collaboratively between the university's African Gender Institute and Centre for Film and Media Studies.

Methodology

The project utilised the methodology of action research, with five young women students and two lecturers forming the core of the team. An action research approach is vital when attempting to engage with and transform unequal power relations amongst women and men, especially in the arenas of gender and sexuality. The methodology attempted to promote young women's agency and leadership, providing them the process and the space to analyse their lives, identify their problems and collectively define solutions or actions which attempted to change and/or address the problems.

Feminist action research (FAR) is a conceptual and methodological research framework that explores and actively pursues opportunities for social justice (Reid, 2004). Participatory research involves a social action process that is biased in favor of dominated or socially marginal groups. Participatory researchers work 'with' their research subjects, breaking down the divide between researcher and researched while legitimising the knowledge people are capable of producing (Fals-Borda, 1991).

New methods do not necessarily result in more 'valid' forms of feminist research, but certainly raise issues of voice and reflexivity, and encourage a research ethic that involves creating and nurturing reciprocal relationships to create empowering forms of 'knowledge' and sees interpersonal interactions as key to political transformation. In this context, the collaborative

nature of the group composition meant that students and lecturers were co-researchers, in an attempt to limit the usual power dynamics. This followed the feminist communitarian model which suggests that participants have a co-equal say in how the research should be conducted, which methods should be used, how findings should be implemented etc (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Crossing the line

Following a series of conversations and activities, which included mapping the campus and conducting informal qualitative interviews, the core team decided on the theme of 'Women Crossing the Line' as the key focus of the project. Through a series of dialogues and sharing of personal experiences, the theme of 'crossing the line' emerged several times, and the group moved forward with this as the central theme of the project. 'Crossing the line' refers to the sexual double-standard applied to women, and the notion that behaviour not considered to be 'acceptable' for women is a way of crossing the invisible line of gender norms. In a pamphlet distributed on campus during the project, this was further described as follows: "The line is made up of society's rules when it comes to how you should live your life as a man or a woman. The line tells you what to do, when to do it and how to do it, how to think, feel and act. The line is everywhere – on campus, in your home, at the mall and in your mind. The line makes you look at yourself through the eyes of others. The line gives men systematic power over women. We want to talk about how we can cross the line and organise for a world that looks different, a world in which women are not constantly watched and judged, where we have the power to control our lives and bodies."

Although the theme of 'women crossing the line' emerged organically from the group through the collaborative activities of sharing and reflecting on personal experiences, the project acknowledged the original use of the term or concept by Just Associates (JASS)¹ an international community of scholars and activists.

Body art installations

Several activities followed on after the emergence of a central theme of focus, and these were conducted on the UCT campus. Firstly, the group chose the medium of performance art to stage a series of body art installations on campus. The

use of performance art to express resistance is not new, particularly for gender activists. In the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States, women used performance as a "deconstructive strategy to demonstrate the objectification of women" (Forte, 1988: 218). Similarly here, the body was recognised as a site of resistance with three acts to a staged installation.

The body art installations comprised three acts, each performed in sequence. Act 1 was entitled Slut versus Virgin. The two women playing the roles of slut and virgin were dressed identically with labels pinned to their shirts. They were dressed identically to deliberately and symbolically strip them from any identifying characteristics – they are just women – before society assigns any stereotypical labels based on their behaviour or dress. At the very beginning they pin the labels on each other – this is representative of society assigning labels even though the audience cannot see any evidence of these labels – and to show how the meaning of these labels are social constructions that communicate society, not the bodies or persons of the women involved and can and should be deconstructed. The second part of the installation aims to illustrate this deconstruction as these women then proceed to kick down a wall of boxes with stereotypical notions of the "good" and the "bad" women written on them. This wall is built around them by two other actors in construction gear as the women were pinning the slut and virgin labels on each other during the first part of the installation. The conflation of roles prevents the viewer from neatly creating the traditional binary oppositions of 'good' versus 'bad' girl. As MacKenny (2001) has argued, "women are plagued by their representation, their symbolic functions and their roles in society to such a degree that it is these that are seen rather than the individual" (18).

Stage 2 was entitled 'health and wellness' and featured two actors here side by side. One marks her body – the parts she doesn't like – while looking at herself in the mirror, positioned next to a pile of fashion magazines. The second actor 'eats' a string of paper then purges into a wastepaper bin and weighs herself obsessively in-between. Here we clearly see feminist notions of the personal being political, with this 'position of intimacy' as one of the most noteworthy characteristics of women's performance art (Forte, 1988). The deliberate blurring of art and life assert and explore personal, lived experience.

¹ www.justassociates.org

Stage 3 was entitled ‘Who owns this body?’ and comprised one woman bound and gagged in the centre. This actor represented all women – voiceless and unable to act. She was surrounded by four actors, each representing religion, the state, the media and ‘my partner’. They take turns to pause in front of the bound woman as each of the four calls out a different slogan that represents the demands made on all women by the institution the actor represents e.g. The actor representing the media says “You need to be thin to be pretty!”

This was accompanied by a physical line laid down in tape and leading through the building to each installation in the week leading up to the event. Various statements were printed and stuck on the line by way of introduction. This process developed over several days, starting off with only negative messages on the one side of the line, followed by the question “Let’s talk about this, how can things be different?” placed on the line, and finally positive messages all over. Through the installations, the group showed how women ‘write’ the body in order to speak their subjectivity. Through foregrounding the personal self within the political and public frame, the pedagogic action is challenged and reformed by individual storytellers in a process of self representation, within diverse narrative forms (Pullen 2010: 24).

Sexuality dialogues

The next phase of the project involved the creation of large posters featuring images of ‘ordinary’ looking individuals accompanied with a series of questions related to sexuality. The posters were block mounted and strategically placed on easels around campus. The individuals featured were intended to represent campus personas or characters (the average student) and the questions raised a number of issues related to sexuality for all sexes and genders, and amongst others dealt with issues of autonomy, full and active consent, safe sex, HIV and AIDS, equitable relationships, self and body-esteem, safety, happiness and pleasure. There were three sets of questions that were placed next to different sexes and genders to show that these questions don’t ‘fit’ with any one particular person, but may very well be the concerns of anyone on campus.

Members of the team engaged with students on campus during this period and invited them to the sexuality dialogues held on campus. The posters were also used to advertise this series of women’s dialogues at which women were invited to join a conversation about their sexuality and experiences

on campus. The themes that emerged here included young women’s experiences of ‘the line’ and the policing of gendered and heteronormative norms on campus, as well as multiple forms of violence. The response to the sexuality dialogues showed an overwhelming need for women on campus to have a safe and open space to regularly get together and have discussions and develop projects to challenge sexual norms on campus.

Other activities

During the process, the team also engaged with the campus newspaper and radio stations, and several interviews were held to discuss the issues and promote the events. The team also worked on the creation of a song promoting gender equality and raising issues of ‘crossing the line’, which was also aired on UCT Radio. A final event brought all the activities together – the body art installations and posters – together with an open mic format event, which created a platform for music and spoken word performances by women making the audience a key component of the event. The final event also offered participants an opportunity to perform their sexualities in ways that crossed the line. The aim was to create a wider and more inclusive leeway for participation. Those who participated were offered a range of props and fancy dress items, and as they were photographed the printouts were pinned to the wall. Those who agreed to be photographed will write captions explaining the ‘performances’ of their sexuality, and the team is exploring publishing these as a book.

Conclusion

This action research project was an attempt at both cross-generational dialogue and a way for older researchers and more established academics to pass skills to younger emerging student researchers. However, the mainstream ‘neutral’ academic culture and institutional approach often does not support research that aims to promote democratic action and social justice or social change. This is one of the main challenges as the project moves forward and explores academic outputs documenting the process. The impact of the project was at a micro and macro level. Students and the academics indicated a high level of personal and intellectual growth during the process. At an institutional level, the project started a conversation that many others express a desire to take forward in the shape of a formal campus student organisation, more research and further actions.

Dr Tanya Bosch is Senior Lecturer: Centre for Film and Media Studies at the University of Cape Town*

From Sister Dee to Me!

Hello!



Thank you all for the letters that you have sent through! I really appreciate the amount of courage that it takes to open up and I will do the best I can to respond to your questions fully. And please do keep your questions and comments coming. Remember, no question is ever too big or too small to discuss. Together we can find a solution! Just send an email to sisterdee@saf aids.net and Sister Dee will answer your question.

Sister Dee

Dear Sister Dee,

I have a problem which I hope you can help me with. My friend had a crush on this guy at our school. She was deeply in love with him. By his actions and words, it was clear that he had no feelings for her. She was forcing herself on to him, until finally they had unexpected sex together. And now he has lost interest in her. He dumped her and he is dating another girl who is a good friend of mine in front of her eyes. He is going around telling people how stupid my friend is. The thing is, we told her to take things easy. She didn't listen and now that things have gone bad she is very cross with me. What can I do to help my friend and to get our friendship back on track?

From, Trying To Help

Dear Trying to Help;

I am sorry that your friend is going through a hard time right now. It's not easy being young and we sometimes make mistakes, which is what your friend has done by moving too quickly into a sexual relationship with a boy without knowing how he felt about her. Hopefully she has learnt from this mistake and will be more careful about who she gives her body, and her heart to in the future. You can't trick or force someone to love you.

I think that your friend is very hurt, and that she is acting as if she is angry with you because she is embarrassed by what has happened and is really angry at herself. She may also be struggling with accepting responsibility for the situation. Your friend is responsible for her part in this 'unexpected sex' and is not a victim in this situation. That seems harsh, but it is important to understand that young men are not famous for telling woman 'no' and that if they can have sex, they usually will, whether they have feelings for the girl or not. This, of course is not to generalise that all men are like that. I am confident that once she understands this and forgives herself for this mistake, she will let go of her anger and want to be friends again.

Well done for being a good friend, and for trying to be there for your friend, and to restore your friendship. The best thing you can do for your friend is to continue giving her love and support and to listen to her as she tries to forget this boy. If you cannot face each other right now, or feel that she will not listen to your advice, try and write her a note telling her that regardless of what happened, you still love her and value your friendship, and that you are there for her.

You don't say whether your friend used a condom with this boy. Casual sex or one night stands increase the risk of contracting HIV as it's likely that condoms won't be used due to the 'unexpected' nature of the sex, and that you won't know the other person's HIV status, even if you have known them for a long time. Also, remember that parties and the consumption of alcohol often put young people at risk of having casual sex. Remind your friend to be more careful in the future, and if need be, to go to the clinic to be screened for sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Dear Sister Dee,

Why is it that always when I find a boyfriend, it happens that my friends judge him? This has been happening since I started dating.

From Noma

Dear Noma;

You are finding out the hard way that it can be hard balancing family, friendships and romantic relationships. It is good that you are thinking about your relationships critically and trying to come up with the best answers.

There is judgment in every relationship. It just depends on what kind of judgment you are talking about. If your friends are always judging your boyfriends negatively, there are two things you need to do. The first thing is to look at your boyfriend and try to see if there is any truth in what your friends are saying. The second thing is to look at your friends to make sure that they really do have your best interests at heart. You chose your friends first, and depending on how long you have been friends and how much you value their role in your life, my bet is that they may see things in your boyfriends that you don't because you are in love and may overlook certain important things about your boyfriend's character.

It is quite normal in the first stages of a relationship to see only the good in your partner and you may not be seeing the negative qualities that your friends see. It is useful to listen to true friends who just want what is best for you. Listen to your friends, but the ultimate decision about whether you will carry on with the relationship is yours. Do not be pressured into leaving, or into staying.

You could also try and spend more time in a group with your friends and your boyfriend. Maybe they might change their opinions once they get to know him like you do.

Dear Sister Dee,

I am a 20 year old girl who is a virgin and both my friends and my boyfriend are pressurising me to have sex and I feel that I'm not ready yet. They say I'm now old enough and that I will not get a husband in the future if I don't. I want to keep my virginity till marriage and my friends say it's not possible. I keep defending my opinion, but they think I am not normal. Am I?

Can I become pregnant if I am having sex for the first time?

My dear one,

BRAVO TO YOU! You are the best person to know if you are ready to have sex. If you want to wait until you are married, there are plenty of wonderful men out there who will appreciate with all their heart and body and soul that you did. Your friends may say it is not possible for you to keep your virginity because they found it difficult, but that doesn't mean it is impossible. If your boyfriend is not willing to respect your decision after you have explained it to him then he doesn't have your best interests at heart.

So many times when sex happens for the first time, for women it isn't something planned for and fully enjoyed because of pressure to just 'do it'. Condoms may not be used as well because sex would not have been planned, this can lead women to contracting HIV, STIs or to becoming pregnant before they are ready. The risks are not worth rushing into sex before you are ready.

With sex, it does not matter whether it is your first time, or your millionth time – you can get pregnant as long as you are a woman or girl who has started to have her periods. It is always advisable to use condoms as they protect against both pregnancy AND HIV and other STIs. If you are going to have unprotected sex (sex without a condom) and opt for other forms of contraception (pills, injectables, foams or gels), make sure that you and your partner have both gone for an HIV test and that both of you are HIV-negative. When both partners are infected with HIV and have unprotected sex, there is the risk of re-infection with a different strain of HIV which can lead to problem such as drug resistance (where HIV may change, mutate, become stronger and more resistant to HIV medication).

When you set your own goals and decide the right time to have sex for the first time together with your partner, it can be a beautiful act and declaration of your love and commitment. Don't let anyone set goals for you, especially when it has to do with something this precious and this personal, it's a decision you will not regret!

Dear Sister Dee

I want to ask, do you lose sexual interest after child birth as well as experiencing pain? I really love my partner.

Afraid of the pain

Dear Afraid of The Pain

Pregnancy does not mean the end to sexual desire, before or after childbirth. Yes, women do experience pain during the labour. However for some time after delivering a baby, some women experience pain and this can be very distressing. This is particularly so for first and second babies.

Painful sex after childbirth varies from woman to woman and can even occur if you've had a caesarean (C-section) delivery. Some of the pain is caused by the general trauma to the vaginal area during childbirth, or the fact a woman may have had stitches after a tear or cut during the delivery, but it can also be caused by hormones. The key is to know that it's normal and that it won't last forever.

If having sex after childbirth is painful some women find that they can get over the discomfort by talking with their partner about it and working through the issue together. If the discomfort is serious however, women should be encouraged to talk to their gynaecologists to get their opinions and help. Sex should be pleasurable and when it is not, it is time to seek help.

Dear Sister Dee,

I have missed my period for two months and I am still a virgin. What could be the cause of it all?

**From
Worried and Confused**

Dear Worried and Confused,

If you missed your period this could be due to a number of things, for example, stress can make you miss a period and also being underweight (if you are too thin) this can affect or even stop your menstrual cycle in some cases.

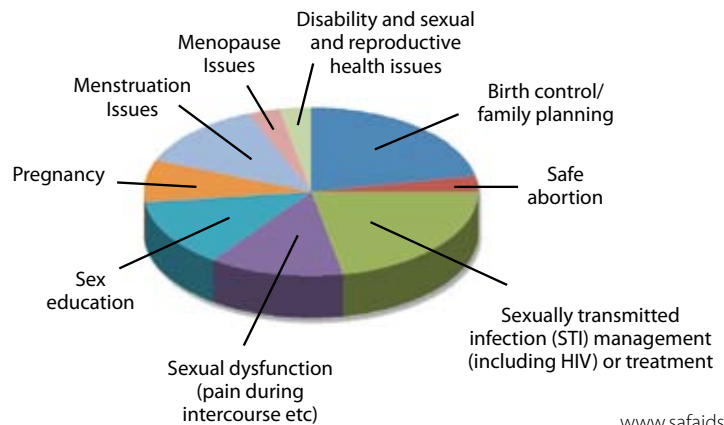
I would suggest that you consult your doctor or the nearest health centre for an examination if you have missed more than one period, and if you have other symptoms.

You don't say how old you are, and if this is your first period. Usually when a young woman starts their period, it is very common to skip a few months between the very first period and when the period re-starts as your body may need more time to adjust to the regularity of your periods.

SRHR POLL RESULTS

How do your sexual and reproductive health concerns, needs and practices compare? Check out the responses from women below.

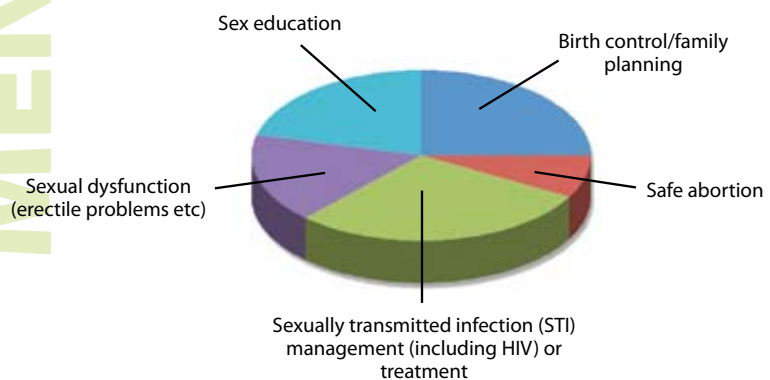
I am a woman and my main sexual and reproductive health information needs are:



SRHR POLL RESULTS

How do your sexual and reproductive health concerns, needs and practices compare? Check out the responses from men below.

I am a man and my main sexual and reproductive health information needs are:



WE are UN Women!

At the beginning of 2011, a new United Nations (UN) agency that will cater just for the needs of women was created. Its name is United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women - or UN Women in short. Here are a few fast facts about UN Women that should get you thinking a bit more about what role the agency can play in your country.

Who leads UN Women?

UN Women is led by the former President of Chile, Michelle Bachelet, who is UN Women's Executive Director. Bachelet was the first ever female president of Chile.

Where is UN Women based?

UN Women has its headquarters in New York and will work worldwide, with offices in more than 50 countries.

What will UN Women do?

UN Women's main roles will be:

- to provide support in terms of money and skills to governments of countries that are not doing so well to support the interests of young women and girls
- to create partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other groups involved in advocacy for women and girls' rights
- to make sure that countries that are member states of the UN can hold the UN system accountable for its own commitments on gender equality

UN Women will also be working to make sure that the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, which we talked about in the last edition, can be achieved.

But ... there is still a long way to go.

In 2010, World Health Organization (WHO) revealed that global maternal mortality rates had fallen by just over a third between 1990 and 2008, meaning that deaths due to pregnancy-related complications fell from 546,000 to 358,000 during that period.

While this is good news, the rates are still too high when we consider that Millennium Development Goal 5 aims, by 2015, to have brought down maternal mortality rates by 75% of their 1990 levels.

UN Women will also be central to making sure that The Agenda for Accelerated Country Action for Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV 2010–2014 (Operational Plan) is taken to as many countries as possible. The Agenda supports the implementation of the UNAIDS Action Framework:

Addressing Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV which focuses on three areas:

1. Strengthening support for countries to know the type of HIV epidemic that they have, and how to respond to it effectively so as to meet the needs of women and girls.
2. Helping countries to ensure that their national HIV strategies, plans and budgets address the needs and rights of women and girls in the context of HIV.
3. Building advocacy and making sure that resources to address the needs and rights of women and girls in the context of HIV are available.

The Agenda addresses the rights and needs of women and girls and shows opportunities that exist for women's groups to work together with men and boys

What does UN Women have to do with YOU?

While UN Women is set to receive at least US\$500 million annually, some analysts say this will not be enough to cover the costs of all the activities that it wants to carry out. Volunteer Services Overseas (VSO) believes that a more realistic budget for the entity should stand at US\$1 billion every year.

This means that **unless we shout enough about this**, UN Women might not be able to do all the things that it hopes to achieve. Perhaps the women's organisations in your own country don't even know about UN Women yet. Why not pay a visit to a few and ask them if they have heard about UN Women and what it hopes to do. Together with these organisations, you might be able to write advocacy letters to your local government representatives asking for more information to be given out about UN Women to all women and girls in your area.



Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda, Secretary General, World Young Women's Christian Association (find out what else she has to say about UN Women on page 28)

Refugee women and girls need SRHR services too!

By Angelique Gatsinzi

I looked in awe at the lanky girl as she expertly plucked a mango from the crooked branches of the neighbours' tree which leaned across the wall separating us from the rest of the world. We sat cross-legged, in a circle, on the grass; six girls, aged between nine and 13, waiting impatiently for Anita to declare the start of the meeting. At 13, Anita was the eldest and tallest - and thus naturally the leader of the pack.

Lately, the meetings, which took place in the middle of the maize field, had been happening frequently. It seemed most of the girls were noticing changes in their bodies and did not know what was happening. This day's meeting was about the mysterious internal bleeding that two sisters had experienced the previous week.

"When blood comes out of your vagina it means you can now sleep with a man," Anita told us matter-of-factly. Even I who was never satisfied with simplistic answers did not dare question her, instead choosing to sit in silence until the meeting was over, my teeth ripping through the stringy and sweet flesh of my mango.

A few weeks later, in the same camp, a girl was sexually abused. But because of the information Anita had given us, she kept quiet until one sunny afternoon a year later. I sat down next to her on a wooden bench under the shade of a jacaranda tree. It was just another school day for us in our open air classroom, although we felt it was unfair that all the boys had been sent home early; apparently we had to stay behind to talk about 'girl stuff'.

The teacher told us about personal hygiene, periods and the physical changes on our bodies. Then she wrote onto the chipped blackboard the word 'rape'. The first image that sprung to my mind was of the green leafy vegetable that I heard vendors calling out about to disinterested customers at Mbare Musika, Harare's largest fruit



Angelique, once a refugee herself, gives insight into the SRHR challenges young women and girls fleeing conflict face

Not only do wars and conflicts cause a breakdown in the relationships that were once in place to prepare girls for puberty, they also overshadow important issues that need urgent attention in other areas of the sexual and reproductive health of young people.

and vegetable market. She went on, our heads nodding, beside me a soul being shattered piece by piece, until eventually she fainted. That was the end of our first sex education.

As the sun rose, the clanging of hoes overturning infertile soil woke you up. There, in a field a few metres away, a row of women with babies on their backs would be singing hymns of praise, only stopping to breastfeed their malnourished children. In the afternoon men and women in the camp stood in a messy queue - a bucket in hand - waiting for the camp chief to dish out the weekly rations and late at night, while children slept, adults whispered their fears of the enemy getting close, of their children going hungry and of people smugglers who, for a small fee, could get you across the border where it was safe. The camp never slept because we all feared that if we surrendered to the ghost of sleep, we would remain in this squalor forever.

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the number of refugees worldwide stood at 10.3 million at the beginning of 2011. Of these refugees, 80% live in the developing world. In 2008, South Africa received 207,000 individual claims for asylum, which was the highest number, even beating the United States.

War breaks down families, with men and boys being sent off to battlefields, and sometimes dying in the process. Many women become widows or are left to head their households and earn a living. Not only do wars and conflicts cause a breakdown in the social systems and relationships that were once in place to prepare girls for puberty, they also overshadow important issues that need urgent attention such as the sexual and reproductive health of young people. For girls, the shift in mothers' responsibilities and authority means that they are increasingly becoming 'secondary' mothers in their households; they cook, clean and take care of the home and their siblings. They are robbed of their childhood so much so that even their entry into adulthood goes unnoticed. And they are left to guide themselves into this new phase of life, very often seeking advice from peers who - like Anita at the beginning of the article - know very little themselves.

According to a 2008 report produced by Plan Canada entitled 'Because I am a Girl', there are now more than 200 million girls worldwide living in countries that are either at risk of, in the midst of or emerging from armed conflict. Some of these girls experience rape and prostitution to name but

a few; situations which in most cases put them at a high risk of getting HIV and/or becoming pregnant. But their side of the story is very rarely heard.

There is a massive gap in support systems which needs to be filled. Young girls are often prone to difficulties during their pregnancies as well as during the birth which may result in infant or maternal mortality. The health facilities in refugee camps are generally poor. In my experience, the one room which we called our clinic, run by one nurse and furnished with one hospital bed and a few stethoscopes, was inefficient for our population of over 1,000 people.

Access to contraceptives, condoms and HIV tests should be available and there should be at least one nurse/midwife per 500 patients - WHO's recommendations. Where resources are limited, refugees who are willing to be trained to provide some of the services should be given the opportunity to get training in counselling and peer education. Their motivation would generally be much higher anyway knowing that these skills will also be for their own benefit. Often, the international community pumps refugee camps with food and clothing aid, rushing in to dig wells or connect taps. They seldom acknowledge that despite the hardships, refugee men and women like any other people have sexual desires which they find a way to fulfil. Reports from Amnesty International tell us of the staggering rate of rapes in refugee camps in Haiti where around 250 rapes of females as young as 12 were reported from various camps 150 days after the earthquake in January 2010, and these are just the tip of the iceberg.

Through peer education, young women can be trained by social workers or development agencies to understand the importance of giving out correct information to other young girls, in such a way that will protect and empower the girls while respecting their cultures. The role of peer educators is very crucial in situations where parent or adult participation is low. The trauma that cripples some of these young girls after experiencing war may at times stop them from seeking help. Therefore, in each camp or community where there is a large concentration of refugees, there should be some trained individuals who do home visits, or gather young girls to talk to them, advise them and encourage them to come forward with any concerns about their sexual health. The international community should be supportive of these initiatives because they are crucial to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

Youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services for young women and girls should be available on camp sites to allow easy access to condoms, and other information about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy. Local and international aid agencies should commit to giving funds for income-generating projects to stop girls from venturing into sex work. The camp I was in had a successful arts and crafts programme for young girls and women. The money we earned selling our products was used to pay for children's school fees and buy more materials. These programmes are not just about generating income, they are also about bridging the distance between women and girls, bringing them together to share experiences and learn from one another.

This article is not an answer to the million questions that surge in the minds of young women who have been victim to sexual exploitation, but it provides steps that can be taken to empower and support them. Also, it provides suggestions about how we can protect young girls before the sexual crimes even happen.

Girls' needs are being ignored and they are suffering immensely because of this. As a young women's rights activist, Graça Machel once said, "To discriminate against girls is not only morally indefensible, it is also economically, politically and socially unsupportable." As future policy makers, doctors, and development workers, refugee women and girls' contribution

to the reconstruction of their countries and well-being of their respective communities must never be downplayed.

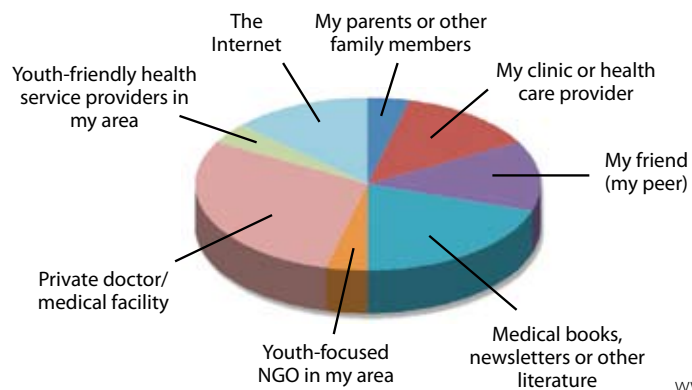
Angelique Gatsinzi is a graduate of International Relations at the University of Birmingham and Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris. She fled Rwanda with her family after the genocide and found herself in a refugee camp in Zimbabwe where she stayed for almost a year.

SRHR POLL RESULTS

How do your sexual and reproductive health concerns, needs and practices compare? Check out the responses from women below.

I am a woman and when I have a sexual and reproductive health problem or concern (for example symptoms of an STI, sexual dysfunction or need sex education) I am most comfortable seeking help from:

WOMEN



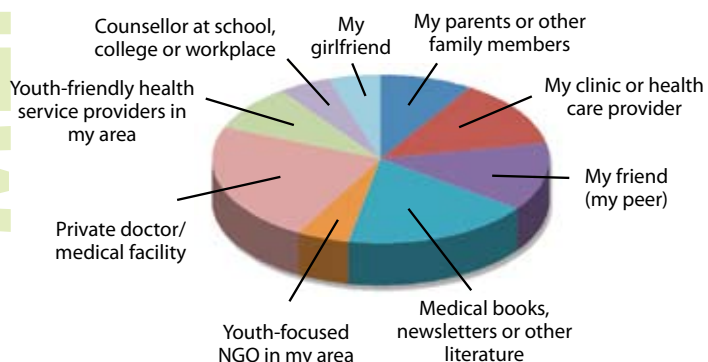
www.safaid.net

SRHR POLL RESULTS

How do your sexual and reproductive health concerns, needs and practices compare? Check out the responses from men below.

I am a man and when I have a sexual and reproductive health problem or concern (for example symptoms of an STI, sexual dysfunction or need sex education) I am most comfortable seeking help from:

MEN



www.safaid.net

First class – making a difference!

By Fungai Machirori

Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda is the Secretary General of the World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA), a global network of women and young women leading social and economic change in 125 countries. She is a trained human rights lawyer with extensive experience in conflict resolution and mediation. For some twenty years, she has been working on issues of women and children's human rights, with a special focus on crisis countries. Active in the women's movement, she has more specifically focused on issues of violence against women; peace with justice; property rights; sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and HIV and AIDS.



I recently caught up with Nyaradzai to find out her views on 100 years of commemorating International Women's Day, and also what her hopes are for the newly formed UN Women. (Find out a bit more about UN Women on page 24). Nyaradzai was one of the candidates short-listed for the position of UN Women Executive Director, so she has a very clear vision of where UN Women should be going in the coming years.

Going into 100 years of commemorating International Women's Day, what are your thoughts?

We have to honour our mothers and grandmothers who invested in the wellbeing of their daughters. Before a girl can go to school she has to come from a family that sees value in sending her to school and investing in her education. So we should celebrate the many unsung heroines who are doing everything to ensure that the future generation has a different experience to their own.

From a cultural perspective, we have always had a notion of inter-generational mentorship (young women talking about issues with older women like aunts and big sister). A hundred years down the line, it is important to assert that it's important for women and girls to have their own safe spaces so that they can continue to have crucial conversations about issues that affect them

We also need to continue to have an inter-generational perspective because we, as human beings, transmit values and ideas based on our own experiences. And in the context of HIV, a fairly new epidemic, we can no longer talk secretly about love and sexuality because our statistics tell us that young women are at highest risk to HIV and STIs.

We therefore need to speak openly, looking also at how young people born 30 years ago, when HIV was first discovered, are dealing with issues around love and relationships. We can't pretend they don't have sexual issues.

But nowadays, the family structure is not as strong as it used to be. Many times you will find that mothers, aunts and older sister live very far away from the young women who need their guidance. How can this intergenerational mentorship still take place?

Yes, we need to recognise there is a fracturing of our social institutions. The family is fragmented but what remains important is that young women and girls be in a social support network. The network does not have to be your family, just as long as there is trust, respect, openness and understanding. The network could be a circle of friends, or a church support network. What is important is that the network is empowering. The space needs to be a listening space and not a moralising space where young women are judged or blamed.

What if the network doesn't support openness about sex and sexuality issues?

Sexual issues will always have a measure of privacy, no matter how much we talk about condoms or the right to abortion in public places like workshops and conferences. When it is about you being raped yesterday or being touched by your boyfriend in a way you didn't like, you can't talk about it publicly. You need someone you can trust to share your emotions with. You need somebody to talk to in confidence and to get the support and advice you need.

At YWCA, we always ask that if you call yourself empowered, you should be able to identify two women older than yourself with whom you have a close relationship; but also two younger women whose hand you are holding. Immediately, you have four women who care about you and love you. These small circles of sisterhood are what make the difference.

What do you think of the International Women's Day 2011 theme, which states, "Equal access to education, training and science and technology: Pathway to decent work for women"?

It's great because it reminds us that while we push governments about education, we need this to be accompanied by programmes that don't just focus on academic outputs so that our women and girls can also develop life skills. It's not just in the classroom that counts, but also access to the wider perspectives of the world. If our local schools or clubs or youth centres had facilities for video conferencing via Skype we could get young people from across the world talking to each other.

If governments invest in technology for young women who cannot get out of the village, they will at least be able to experience a different world through technology. Young people should be a part of the process of shaping what social media should look like. That's what excites me about the theme.

What do you think will be the role of UN Women in the years to come?

I thought about this having been one of the 26 women nominated for the position of Executive Director. My recommendation to Michele (Bachelet) is that UN Women has to be a place for ALL women : girls and young women need to feel that they belong, that UN women is their entity, that they are entitled to be a part of UN Women and therefore claim that space as their own.

Also, UN Women has to be a champion of young women's issues. While the demographics of the world show that the world is 50% women, the majority of these women are young women and girls. Therefore, UN Women has to engage in issues that affect young women. Empowerment has to start early. UN Women needs to embrace an approach that will create a sustained voice for young women and girls for the next 100 or 200 years. If we invest in young women, we will have champions being groomed perpetually.

Every young woman wants to go to school, to be an entrepreneur or get a job. We need to ensure that young women aren't getting married merely as an escape route out of poverty. It's only when they have education, skills, opportunities, income and employment that they can get into marriage out of love and choice.

Finally, I would push for young women to have caucus meetings with UN Women and not to have one young woman at high level meetings standing as the representative of all young women's interests. We need UN Women to create a quality space where women are not just subjects of a discussion, but are actually active participants.

Faith

It had started off just like any other day. My aunt (my mother's sister) had woken up early to go to the river to wash the bed linen, while I combed out my hair and prepared for school. As I looked at myself through the chipped mirror, it appeared to me that the hole in my pleated skirt had grown wider, so much so that my blackened kneecaps were almost in full view.

I had always been embarrassed by them because they made it clear to everyone just how much housework I did. Every girl in our village was known to be a hard worker in the home, but none of them had black crusty knees that looked like mine; like a burnt layer of maize porridge stuck so hard to the base of a pot, forever rendering it damaged.

As I tried to move the hole to a position between my thighs, I thought of Baba. In her last letter, my mother had told me that the money she was making - from selling fruit and vegetables - to meet my school needs was no longer as much as before. Baba was demanding more of the money for the family's own needs and had instructed my mother that less be sent to me.

She wrote the word 'sorry' six times in that one letter.

I am 18; I know that that means that my parents can stop taking care of me since the law now sees me as an adult. But I lost two years of school when I first moved to my aunt's place and don't yet even have my high school certificate. What would become of me if my mother stopped supporting me altogether?

My aunt does not work and relies on her field of vegetables and maize and wheat, and the few chickens she rears as our source of food. Throughout the day she carries out household chores and on some evenings, she walks through the village picking stray logs of firewood to kindle the fire for the night's meal. The few logs that we have left over are used in barter with neighbours, exchanging them for a cup of cooking oil, or a bar of washing soap.

I can safely admit that we are poor. But yet, I have never gone hungry because of my aunt's determination and hard work.

My only real hunger is for my father's love and to see my little brothers, both of whom have not

been near me since I left home all those years ago. Mama's next trip, her only journey to our village every year, is not for another four months. I wish for the mornings and sunsets to merge into one just so that the day of my mother's journey comes sooner.

As I am still thinking through all of this, I hear a shuffle at the door, the sound of rubber soles brushing dust against our thick reed doorstep mat and then finally, that familiar voice that booms and echoes throughout our tiny three-roomed home.

"Mama!" I call out, forgetting about my thoughts and the hole I've been trying to hide. Another hole, the one on my heart, is suddenly patching up.

It's been seven months and 23 days since I last saw my mother and there she stands in the dingy dawn light of our sitting room.

After putting down her light sackcloth bag, we embrace and stick to each other for what feels like an eternity. Unlike me and everything in the house, my mother does not smell of wood smoke, but has a light fragrance of cocoa butter that reminds me of a life I will never live again.

"Why are you here so soon?" I finally bring myself to ask, my face still buried between her neck and shoulder.

"I need to see my sister," my mother says, finally pulling herself away from me. Instantly, I feel a sour taste begin to fill my mouth. Something is not right. Why would my mother make a 300km journey out of the blue if everything was just fine?

"She is at the river, washing the bed sheets", I explain to my mother. "She will be back in a few minutes... What is it Mama?!"

She heaves out a sigh and turns away from my questioning stare to focus her eyes on the lone framed photograph in the room; a photograph of my grandmother, my mother's mother.

A slow trickle of tears begins to form within Mama's eyes, rolling softly from her eyelids down her cheeks, like rain drops sliding lazily across a window. I do not interrupt the moment and brace myself for whatever news my mother has to share.

"Baba." She says the word like it is a complete sentence and then sniffles to cut bluntly through the atmosphere. "Baba ... is sending a man for you ... to come and marry you... He says ... he says he can no longer afford to take care of you and that it is time that someone else does so. Go and get my sister, now!"

Her last sentence is more forceful than anything else she has just said. I want to ask her why she has come, if Baba knows, what she wants to discuss with my aunt, who this man is, where he will take me and why my father would agree to such an arrangement, why she is letting him control me all over again!

I feel my legs carrying me out of the door and into the open, but I no longer believe that I am the one moving them. They seem to be operating

automatically, moving further through the tall maize fields towards the river where my aunt is hard at work. A cockerel, far too late in delivering his crow, clears his throat lets out a cock-a-doodle-doo.

Normally that sounds means the beginning of a new day. But for me, it might mean the end of all of my dreams. Tears begin to sting my eyes. I run faster towards my aunt hoping that the foamy suds of soap rubbing against her palms might cleanse me of this mess.

The Artist's Lounge

My Treasure

By Tolu Tayo Odetola

What I treasure the most, I guard the most

Never will I think of getting it lost

But I've always known I can't keep it forever

Someday, I will have to share it with another

My treasure is fragile and that's why I worry

If I get it broken, I'll forever be sorry

But it will never be complete if I keep it alone

Unless of course I get to find one which is as lone

Another who will value and place it so high

Who will guard and keep my treasure as well as I (do)

If I find that, then I've got all my goals to make

But if not, there's just too much at stake.

Tolu Tayo Odetola

Age: 26

Profession: Student

Nationality: Nigerian

Tolu, please describe yourself in five words.

Reserved, fun, sensitive, passionate and confident

What inspired this poem?

This poem was inspired by young girls in society.

I was a young girl when I wrote this and I was concerned about the way fellow girls gave their hearts away to the wrong things at the wrong time - especially to men, or better put, to boys. I believe that as women, our hearts are really precious and we should guard them with diligence. The majority of women are subjected to emotional traumas because they give out their hearts wrongly and some of them are even pressured into doing so by the society. Being a woman is hard enough without losing your precious heart to a man who wouldn't value it.

What is your dream for your life?

I dream of having a fulfilled life. In my dictionary, that would include a successful career, being a loved and respected wife, a loving mother, and a published writer. I want to see lives changed for God through my writing.



Singing Mazvita's blues

By Pat Chiyangwa-Zaranyika

Indeed the colour of blood is red. Everyone is familiar with its vicious intense scarlet shade. Women know it all too well, as they need not witness a fatal accident. It is the feminine colour of menstruation. Little did Mazvita realise her loss and predicament when the scarlet thick flows poured down her strong well-built legs.

Mazvita's head whirled in excruciating pain as she got off the rickety old 'ngoro*', having left work early due to her not feeling well. She felt very feverish from an overwhelming pain as she meticulously negotiated her way home, taking extremely calculated steps. As she slumped heavily onto the couch she closed her eyes to take moments to listen to the pain ravishing her body.

Regarding affairs with the members of the opposite sex, Mazvita had travelled a 'mixed bag' journey in her personal life. Indeed quite a trip, from teenage infatuation as a schoolgirl, to some degree of maturity of affection in the relationships as she grew older.

Jose had been her 'first love' and the special date she had taken to the final high school leavers' Jacaranda Ball. But he made her weep when he left the country to pursue his education abroad. And then along came George who was never available during weekends; he later wed a girl who was teaching in the rural areas and opened healing wounds with yet another heart break. There was also a Chris who turned out to be a married man who was so smart in managing the affair that Mazvita was convinced he was an eligible bachelor. Paul drew so much attention whenever they were on a date owing to his good looks but he was, to her disappointment, bisexual and only dated her to cover up his sexuality.

The fact that in her community, most women her age - and younger - had had 'talk of the town' weddings and record dowries paid for them made her feel somewhat odd. The boasting of the new madams about their newly acquired names, now being referred to as Mrs so-and-so did not help her

situation much. Of course, having her own beliefs and priorities made a huge difference in her life, in spite of worries raised by aunties and uncles. Mazvita was a career conscious woman seeking further professional enrichment in her life before finally considering settling down.

Mazvita had met Samba from east Africa two years back; a tall, dark and rather good-looking guy. Samba was indeed dark, as dark as coal, even the inner parts of his hands were just as dark, earning him the nickname, 'Blackie'. Mazvita just seemed to be blinded by the colour of his skin for she was head over heels with the dark brother. Samba had splendid ideas of marrying Mazvita and taking her to east Africa for good after the expiry of his term of office in the country with the United Nations. Unfortunately this terrified Mazvita and later became the barrier to discussions about marriage and subsequently caused the end of the relationship. There was also the language difference between their families as Samba's family were bilingual, speaking French and their indigenous language, while Mazvita's spoke the indigenous Shona language and some English. It was a sad ending of yet another relationship.

As Mazvita slowly opened her eyes, the sunrays streaming through the leopard stripe printed curtains energised her weak body. Attempting to stretch, she alerted herself to the soft knock sounding on her door. She reached for her bag, taking out two painkillers and walked across to the kitchen sink to reach for a glass of water before pacing towards the door to open it, quickly gulping down some water and swallowing the tablets enfolded in her hand.

Nkosi had learnt of Mazvita's being home through a phone call. They had now been dating for close to a year. Nkosi was a happily married man and the only missing piece puzzle in his marriage had been a child. Extensive tests both locally and abroad had confirmed his wife's inability to bear children. It was for this reason that Mazvita sometimes felt Nkosi had no love for her but only needed a 'baby making machine' to provide what the love of his life couldn't. Mazvita was one of those women who could be referred to as an independent woman, financially and socially. Extensive discussions with Nkosi had led to the two reaching an agreement to have a child outside marriage. Nkosi however had insisted that Mazvita meet his wife. She had agreed to their affair

* Ngoro is an ox-drawn cart; can also refer to an old minibus used for public transportation

and had even suggested that he marry Mazvita, citing assurance of all party's commitment and safeguarding the three of them from HIV.

Chatter box

What are some of the main issues that this story brings up? (For example, the tension that many women face between getting married and having a career).

If you could extend the story and talk a bit more about Nkosi's wife, what do you think her story would reveal?

Mazvita began sweating and suddenly released two very sharp screams that tore through the house's serenity. She hurled herself onto the carpet in total hysteria. Nkosi, terrified, lifted her up noticing streams of blood staining the carpet. Frantic sharp screams were cutting across the serene atmosphere. Huge chunks of blood clots were making trails with each movement. Nkosi was petrified, as it was inevitable a miscarriage was occurring. He hurriedly grabbed a navy blue coloured blanket, wrapped it around Mazvita and swiftly carried her to the car. The four-wheel drive sped towards the city in the direction of the hospital.

The casualty ward was a fairly busy place with ambulance staff scurrying in all directions performing their duties. Nurses came up briskly, offering their assistance and inquiring on the patient's identity. They looked at Nkosi and Mazvita with evident suspicion in their eyes. It was with no doubt they were suspicious thoughts of Mazvita having undertaken an abortion. The questions asked were a torment to Nkosi's soul, all coming while continuous checks were being made to verify that the miscarriage was genuine.



Pat Chiyangwa - Zaranyika

Age: 38

Profession: Freelance journalist currently working as a Public Relations Officer with a child rights organisation.

Location: Zimbabwe

Pat says she loves herself: both when she's laughing and when she's looking mean and impressive!

Meanwhile, Mazvita seemed to be quietly enduring her pain when suddenly, Nkosi was told to excuse the nursing staff in the cubicle. Mazvita's haemorrhaging had been lethal. She died at exactly 1400hrs that afternoon, much to Nkosi's shock and horror.

Mazita's burial was held up for a long eventful week. Her family would not have it done, citing the need for Nkosi to pay lobola and finally pay for the damages incurred due to Mazvita's loss of life. Huge sums of money had to be paid, together with five head of cattle, as dowry for the deceased. A further two head of cattle with additional cash was also demanded before the burial. The police tried to intervene, but to no avail. Nkosi eventually delivered the demands of the family and Mazvita was finally buried.

A year had gone and Nkosi visited his in-laws to arrange for Mazvita's tombstone. Another surprise was awaiting him. He had to meet certain traditional monetary requirements with one head of cattle. He dutifully obliged, at least happy to be afforded the chance to lay the stone.

'A star sank deep in the horizon
Never to brighten up our lives again
It had been a long bright day
We never saw the night coming

Perchance we could have stopped the night's fall' -
was the message on Mazita's tombstone.

Connexions

In this edition, we have some really exciting opportunities waiting for you! All the best in your applications!

The Amy Biehl Youth Spirit Award 2011

Opportunity closing date: Thursday, July 14th 2011

The Amy Biehl Foundation (ABF) is a non profit organisation based in Cape Town. The foundation reaches out to thousands of children in the townships through After School programmes. The aim is not just to keep the children off the streets and away from negative influences (drugs, crime, violence etc), but it is especially focused on giving them that extra necessary education in crucial areas such as HIV prevention, reading, computers, greening and environment, music, arts, sports and more.

ABF invites nominations for the Amy Biehl

Youth Spirit Award 2011, which celebrates and honours the young people of the Western Cape. Nominations are based on evidence of the nominee's initiative and dedication in service to others. The Award goes to young people who are already making a difference. ABF's hope is to challenge them to greater heights of service through

the recognition of the Award and exposure to Amy Biehl's life and work.

E-mail to info@amybiehl.co.za to request an application form. Application forms should be faxed to 086 611 3189

For more about Award refer to www.thefundingsite.co.za/RFPs/detail.asp?ID=719.

International and Refugee Student's Scholarships

Opportunity closing date: Sunday, July 31st, 2011

The University of Cape (UCT) invites applications from fulltime Honours, Masters' and Doctoral students for the International and Refugee Students' Scholarships. A limited number of scholarships are available to graduates who are not South African. These are awarded on a competitive basis and preference is given to senior candidates. All UCT International and Refugee Students' Scholarships are supplementary. Students who apply must have the means to fund their studies.

For more information, and to apply, refer to www.uct.ac.za/apply/funding/postgraduate/awards/international.

“SiStars”!

Are you a young woman between the ages of 15 and 24 years who is making a difference in your community in some way? We would love to hear your story and feature you in coming editions of Young Women First! Please send through a short email or letter (about 500 words) telling us a little bit about yourself and what has inspired you to make a change in your community. Please also tell us how your contribution is helping to make a difference for other people in your area.

Send your email to us at youngwomenfirst@safids.net. Make sure to type the word 'SiStars' into the subject line of the email. You can also send a letter to the following address: The Editor, Young Women First! 479 Sappers Contour, Lynnwood 0081, Pretoria, South Africa. You can also fax through submissions to +27 12 361 0889. Make sure to clearly mark all faxes to the attention of The Editor, Young Women First!

Pictures of yourself and descriptions of what you do are welcome! We would however prefer to receive your photographs as email attachments as we cannot return physical copy photographs once you have sent these to us. You will also need to fill out a form we will provide which will be for you to confirm that we can use your picture.

ForUm ForUs

Interested in connecting with other sisters from all over the continent?

ForUm ForUs helps you do just that by linking you up with other young women who are waiting to get to know you! Whether you are looking to make new friends or to find someone who is doing similar work or studies as you are, ForUm ForUs is the place for you!

Just send us an email with your name, age, location (city and country), hobbies, interest and contact information (information that you are comfortable sharing with other readers) and tell us what kind of people you are looking to get in touch with.

You can also send a picture of yourself if you want to. You will need to fill out a form we will provide you with to confirm that we can use your picture. Email us at youngwomenfirst@safaid.net with the words 'ForUm ForUs' in the subject heading.

Hi there Sisters, my name is Kimberley and I have been reading your magazine and it is amazing! Here's a bit about myself:

Name: Kimberley Kute

Age: 18 years

Location: Harare, Zimbabwe

Hobbies: reading magazines, cooking, swimming, going out and dancing.

Interests: charity work (I am a volunteer at Fountain of Hope Trust a non-profit organisation which looks after orphans and widows in the Musami District.)

I believe that all orphans are children and deserve equal opportunities if not more like any other child. I am very passionate about my work. I would really love to be connected to other young women who share similar interests in what I do.

Status: 'A' level student studying business studies, sociology and psychology. Contact details: kimiecreamie@gmail.com, and Facebook. I hope that I will get people who want to work with me and are very true to their word.

Hello Sisters, I am Brenda Mwale, aged 17. I live in Mponela, Dowa District, Malawi which is my home country. I like reading books,

watching football, movies and listening to music and I am a God fearing person. Brenda is a young girl interested in helping others to attain their goals. I am looking for interested friends all over the world whom I can interact with and with whom we can encourage each other concerning our future dreams and the challenges we face as youth and how we can overcome them.

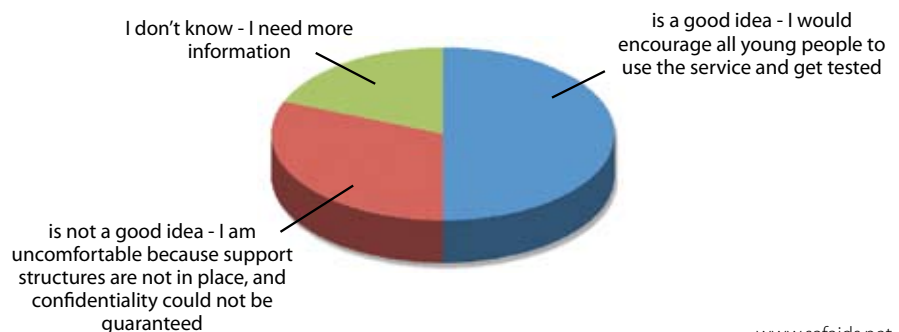
Interested young women should be ambitious, courageous, creative and humble. They can contact me through these contacts: Brenda Mwale, C/O Kasalika Community Development Organisation, P. Bag 35, Mponela, Malawi. Email: mwale.brenda@gmail.com.



SRHR POLL RESULTS

South Africa recently announced plans to roll out HIV testing in schools as part of its national voluntary HIV counselling and testing (VCT) campaign which aimed to test 15 million South Africans by June 2011. There was debate raised around this plan. Below are the results of the online poll we posted, asking if people thought that HIV testing in schools was a good idea.

HIV testing for adolescents and teenagers in school settings:



www.safaid.net



To access more information on HIV, and Sexual and Reproductive Health, contact the following Resource Centres in your respective countries:

Angola-SCARJOV

Sede: Estrada da Camama/Vianda
(ao CALEMBA 2)
Bairro da Paz - Kilamba Kiaxi
PO Box 3085
Luanda - Angola
Tel. 1: +244 912 368 535
Tel. 2: +244 927 713 289
E-Mail: scarjov4@yahoo.com

Botswana-BONASO

PO Box 3129
Plot 767, Tati Road, Extension 2
Gaborone, Botswana
Tel: +267 3170582 / 3908490
Fax: +267 570582
E-Mail: bonaso@botsnet.bw

Lesotho-National AIDS Commission

Maseru Sun Office Block Orpen Road
PO Box 11232
Maseru 100
Lesotho
Tel: +266 22326794
Fax: +266 2232 7210
E-mail: molekop@nas.org.ls
Website: www. www.nac.org.ls

Malawi-MANASO

Chitetezo House City Boutique
Building
Haile Selassie Road
PO Box 2916
Blantyre
Malawi
Tel: +265 1 835046/18
E-mail: manaso@malawi.net
Website: www.manaso.org

Malawi-Blantyre City Assembly

Town Hall
Civic Centre
Private Bag 67
Blantyre
Malawi
Tel: +265 1 670 211

Namibia-NANASO

PO Box 23281
Erf: 1011, 42-44 Ondoto Street,
Okuryangava, Windhoek, Namibia.
Windhoek, Namibia
Tel: +264 61 26 1122
Fax: +264 61 23 4198
E-Mail: nanaso@iafrica.com.na

Swaziland-NERCHA

National HIV and AIDS
Information Centre
Lamvelase Premises
Nkoseluhlaza St / Sandlana St
Manzini
Swaziland
Tel: +268 505 4597 / 505 3313
Fax: +268 505 4425
E-mail: infocentre@nercha.org.sz

Zambia-Afya Mzuri Joint Resource Centre

Plot 10487B Manchinci Road,
Olympia Park, Lusaka.
Tel: +260 11 295124 / 295122
Fax: +260 11 295120 / 295124
Cell No.: +260 977 741223 /
966 249194
Email: resourcecentre@afyamzuri.org.zm
Website: www.afyamzuri.org.zm

Zimbabwe-SaAIDS

17 Beveridge Road
Avondale
Harare
Zimbabwe
Tel: +263 4 336193 / 4
Email: info@safaidns.org.zw
Website: www.safaidns.net



FORD FOUNDATION



SaAIDS Regional Office: 479 Sappers Contour, Lynnwood, Pretoria 0081, South Africa. Tel: +27-12-361-0889 Fax: +27-12-361-0899 E-mail: reg@safaidns.net
Country Office - Zimbabwe: 17 Beveridge Road, Avondale, Harare, Zimbabwe. Tel: +263-4-336193/4 Fax: +263-4-336195 E-mail: info@safaidns.net
Country Office - Zambia: Plot No. 4, Lukasu Road, Rhodes Park, Lusaka, Zambia. Tel: +260-125-7609 Fax: +260-125-7652 E-mail: safaidns@safaidns.co.zm
Country Office - Mozambique: Av. Paulo Samuel Kankomba n.2051, R/C Maputo, Mozambique, Telefax +258-213-02623, Email: safaidns@teledata.mz
Country Office - Swaziland: Office No.2 Ellacourt Building, Esser Street, Manzini, Swaziland, Tel: +268-7-670-9662

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