

MAURITIUS



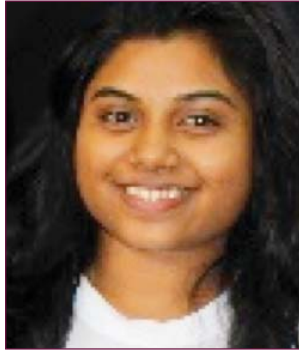
Loga Virahsawmy - Board member



Marie-Annick Savripène - Francophone editor



Anushka Virahsawmy - Country Manager



Sheistah Bundhoo - Programme Officer

15 years of service

- Lobbying for a quota for women in local government that resulted in an increase in women's representation from 6% to 24% in 2012.
- Ground breaking research War@Home.
- COE in 12 councils and action plans in 78 villages.
- Empowering 300 women and their families to be economically independent.
- COE in four media houses.
- Advocacy and training in private companies, schools and universities.
- Training women for political participation.
- Mauritius Qualification Authority approved GL Training Academy.
- **Key partners:** Decentralised Co-operation Programme, LUX*, Young Queer Alliance, European Union, Australian High Commission and United States Embassy, Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family welfare AILES, LEAD, P&P link, PILS, Media Watch Organisation.

The GL Mauritius office dates back to September 2008. It focuses on three main areas of work: gender and governance; gender and the media and gender justice. GL Mauritius' main partner is Media Watch Organisation, which is also the focal network of the SADC Protocol Alliance. The office gets support from different stakeholders including ministries and embassies for workshops and events.

Key Achievements

Entrepreneurship training: During 2014, GL Mauritius completed the entrepreneurship programme in ten councils. Two entrepreneurs represented Mauritius at the SADC Protocol@Work Summit in Botswana in 2015. GL provided back stopping in 2015. Since November 2015, with the support of the EU Decentralised Co-operation Programme, GL has been working with 10 women who completed the course in 2013 and 2014 and are now mentors. Each is training and empowering 10 women in their community. We are now training 100 women to become economically independent.



Sixteen Days of Activism: Break the Silence Workshop: On the 27 November 2015 GL organised a networking and media training workshop on challenging all forms of stigma. Partners included The Young Queer Alliance (LGBT activists), Transgender organisation VisaG, councillors, COE media

houses (Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, La Sentinelle and Defi Media Group) and non-COE media, 10 survivors of GBV who are now entrepreneurs, Global Rainbow Foundation (for the physically disabled), Association of Women with Disabilities, and the PedoStop organisation (for children victim of sexual abuse).

The Madagascar Gender Links Summit 2015 delegation, then on a study visit to Mauritius, also attended the workshop. The delegation comprised women entrepreneurs, Director of National Television and National Radio of Madagascar respectively.

Participants debated the theme: "how can the Media, Advertisers and Activists provoke actions?" The facilitator talked about how the media is a powerful institution defining ways in which women's status and gender inequalities are reflected, understood and potentially changed. How women and men are represented in the media is therefore a key indicator of progress towards gender equality and the fulfilment of women's human rights.

The Board Member of Gender Links in Mauritius explained the need for journalists to expand their contact details; to get new voices, new angles, new ways of writing human stories, balancing opinions and analysis. GL advised that journalists should give voice to new and diverse actors to get more balanced opinions from both men and women. P&P Link advertising firm offered a free spot on social media and at the cinema during the Sixteen Days campaign.

SADC Gender Protocol@Work Summits: The Mauritius National 2015 Summit took place on the 22 and 24 June 2015 at Gold Crest Hotel. The First Woman President of the Republic of Mauritius Ameenah Gurib made the keynote address. Some 188 participants (entrants, judges, chairpersons, government entities and civil society organisations including partners) took part in the three day event. The summit attracted 48 entries and generated substantial media coverage and the in kind support. Gurib commended the summit as a great learning platform for sharing good practices on gender mainstreaming.

Study visit: UNWOMEN, Gender Links, and the Zimbabwe Ministry of Local Government collaborated in a study visit for senior Zimbabwean government officials to Mauritius in May 2015. The success of Mauritius in increasing women's representation from 6% to 26% in one election at local level in December 2012 is significant because this was the first time in the SADC region that a quota has been applied in the FPTP system *without seats being reserved for women*. The only way to get such a quota to work is to field women in safe seats, and build their capacity to be able to run successfully for office. Erica Jones, Principal Director in the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, who led the delegation, noted that with 16% women in local government, Zimbabwe was a long way from achieving 50%. The delegation comprised Ministry of Local Government officials who would be responsible for the implementation of the law; the Ministry of Women

Affairs, Ministry of Justice who would initiate the law and the Electoral Commission. As a result of the study visit, a submission was sent to the Electoral Commission on an amendment to the Local Government Act to include a quota for women in local government as part of the alignment of laws with their new Constitution.

GL Mauritius Training Institute: 2015 proved a turning point for GL Mauritius, challenged by HQ to develop autonomous funding sources. GL Mauritius partnered with Lux hotels in running training on GBV around Mauritius. Lux hotels then agreed to host a fund raising dinner for Gender Links in 2016. GL also registered as a trainer in Mauritius and will offer courses on a cost recovery basis in 2016. GL Mauritius has also canvassed several corporations for possible funding through their corporate social responsibility windows.

On a sunny Saturday in March 2015, a woman came to the door of Gender Links office early in the morning, shaken, in tears and asking for help. I welcomed her in and soon realised that something was very wrong. She was pale in colour and was mentally disturbed. She was barely audible and I was straining to understand what the problem was about, even if deep down I knew. Very soon I understood that she had been beaten up badly by her partner. She showed me the marks on her back, her tummy and her arms. I was in shock, I had to do something. I took my mobile to phone the police, but she told me not to and started crying again. I tried comforting her and told her that I will have to phone an ambulance as I could see she was getting weaker and I did not want anything to happen to her.

Shaking and petrified of being in an ambulance on her own, the woman asked if I could take her to hospital. I drove her to the nearest hospital and in the car I asked her if she had any family. She gave me her cousin's phone number. I phoned the latter while driving and told her to come and join us at Candos hospital.

We got to the Emergency Unit of the hospital in 30 minutes. The doctors speedily provided emergency care as I waited until her cousin arrived. I kept thinking that Gender Links office is usually closed on Saturdays and I was there by chance. This experience and many more remind us why it is so important to do the work we do as an organisation. It is truly a vocation and a calling. We get plenty of phone calls every day from men and women asking for help. Sheistah Bundhoo and I try as much as possible to guide them to the right people and organisation. We believe that through our everyday action we can bring about change and well-being to people. The woman is now much better. She sought legal advice and is under a protection order.

Anushka Virahsawmy



Empowering women: ending violence - Back stopping training session with women entrepreneurs in the GL office.
Photo: Anushka Virahsawmy

Key challenges

- Fund raising activities though necessary take a great deal of time; this has to be balanced against the work and delivery.
- The media enterprises with whom GL has signed need further training.
- Giving holistic help to people in distress coming to the office requires additional capacity and skills.

Next steps

- GL needs to revisit the 12 COEs in Mauritius as the councillors are all new. The action plans should be revisited and reinforced for the Post-2015 agenda.
- GL programme initiatives need to be adapted to suit the specific needs of the country, as is happening with the innovative peer learning and sharing approach to entrepreneurship training for survivors of gender violence.