

## IV. COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS FOR GENDER ACTIVISTS



GL Senior Researcher Alice Kwaramba

Media is a product of demand and supply. Strategic approaches to communication by gender activists can make a vast difference to the way stories are shaped and told. This area of work looks at the other side of the coin: those who are in a position to supply the news, and how they can do so better by understanding what news is and how it is constructed.

**Getting Smart: Strategic Communications for Gender Activists:** In partnership with the Cape Town based- Women's Media Watch, GL convened a meeting of regional communication experts to draft a framework for a training manual of gender activists on how to be more strategic in their communications. The manual was tested at a regional workshop of information officers of gender organisations in April 2002 and launched at the Know How Conference in Uganda in July 2002. The Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa, Hivos and NIZA sponsor the project.

### **Sixteen Days of Peace:**

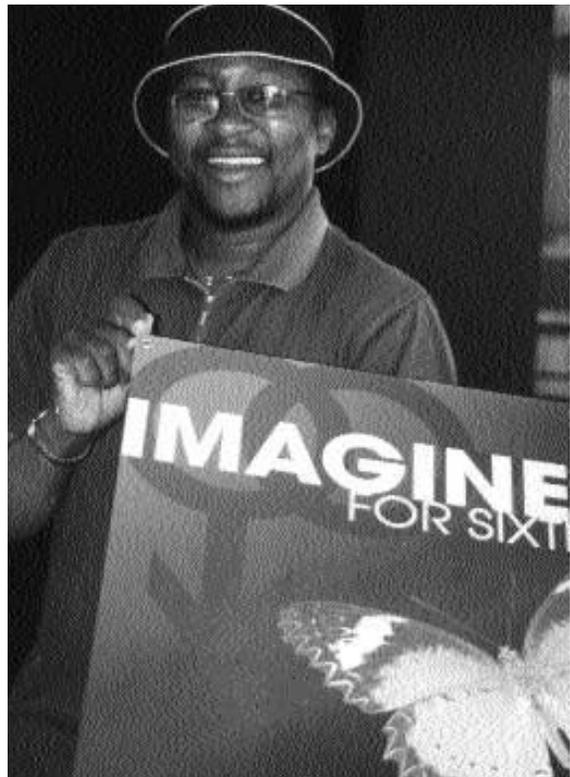
This project involved using "Getting Smart" to help develop effective campaigns for ending gender violence in the three South African provinces of the Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Western Cape during the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence.

The core project, funded by Aus Aid, consisted of consultative meetings; training workshops, close collaboration and monitoring of the campaigns that ran from 25 November – 10 December 2002. Additional funding from Hivos and the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) went towards supporting campaign materials. In addition to the over forty NGOs that GL worked with in the campaign, key partners included the Men's Forum, the City of Johannesburg, Women's Media Watch, Women's Net and Masimanyane. The campaign received phenomenal press coverage as the President of South Africa Thabo Mbeki, and other high-ranking officials signed pledges to fight violence against women and children. This report should be read in tandem with the compendium of press cuttings from the campaign that can be obtained from the Gender Links office.

### **Key outcomes**

These are summarized in the final press release and included:

- ♦ The extent of participation by senior government officials in the campaign, starting with President Mbeki launching the campaign in a school and urging children to "blow the whistle" on gender violence. Minister of Justice Penuell Maduna added his considerable weight to the campaign with a personal account of a close relative who had taken refuge in his home after suffering from domestic abuse. Johannesburg's Executive Mayor Amos



Co-ordinator of the Sixteen Day Campaign in Gauteng Mothibi Mohomane

Masondo paved the way for many others in local government to take a stand. It is especially refreshing that male leaders have been in the forefront of the campaign.

- ♦ A marked increase in participation by men. This year men marched in Johannesburg and Cape Town, and held a ground-breaking meeting in the Mpumalanga legislature.
- ♦ Women survivors of violence also found their voice in the supportive environment created by the Sixteen Days of Peace.
- ♦ Thousands of interactive forum and events at national, provincial and community level gave all South Africans a chance to contribute and air their views. In Alexandra Township, for example, relatives of those who have lost loved ones to gender violence made a display of the shoes they left behind: a poignant reminder of the human pain and misery that gender violence brings to our lives.
- ♦ The peace pledge initiated by the Sixteen Days of Peace consortium captured the imagination of South Africans. It was adapted and distributed far and wide, by the Department of Justice, the South African Revenue Service and Eskom among others. Signatures are still coming in. We estimate that in total at least 100 000 will be received. As the pledge commits each individual to bring at least ten others on board, at least one million South Africans will have been directly touched by the campaign.
- ♦ All Eskom senior executives signed the pledge and donated a R3 million property in the heart of Braamfontein to be called Ikhaya Lethemba (Home of Hope) as a one-stop centre for survivors of domestic violence.
- ♦ The media played a critical role in sustaining the campaign. For example, the SABC had a dedicated correspondent on the campaign trail for the entire period, while the Star ran a series of in-depth features that provided insight on gender violence.
- ♦ The courts sent out a strong message that gender violence will not be tolerated with the 800-year jail sentence for serial killer and rapist Lazrus Mazingane, and life sentence for a father who raped his two daughters.

The Sixteen Day of Peace Campaign took on regional dimensions with a workshop held in partnership with Women's Media Watch and Women in Law Southern Africa to train information officers in the six Southern African countries that WILSA works in strategic communications. Many regional partners have indicated an interest in taking part in the Sixteen Days of Peace Campaign in 2004, as a tangible example of how activists and the media can work together for change.

GL has documented the Sixteen Days of Peace Campaign as a case study on gender and strategic communications. This case study has been presented at several forums including the UN Commission on the Status of Women and the South African National Editors Forum.



## Sixteen Days of Peace leaves its mark

By Kubeshni Govender-Jones\*



When I looked at the long empty hall in the heart of the Johannesburg Council three days before the launch of the Sixteen Days of Peace Campaign a wave of anxiety passed over me. How would we ever transform this cold space into something conducive for the drama we hoped to stage in just a few days time? This was a first for council, the first for the newly established Visitor and Resource Centre (V&RC) and there was no gap for failure.

The partnership between the City of Joburg and Gender Links in the launch of the campaign was an important one. The Executive Mayor was to sign the pledge of peace, the Speaker to welcome and the City Manager to lend his leadership as the head of the administration calling for peace in all spheres of our lives.

During that week, when the array of other events for the 16 Days of Activism started to unfold we were not sure what kind of attendance we might get at ours. The Sunday before the GL team posted an impressive selection of publications around the Visitor and Resource Centre, transforming it into a site of activism, a display not only of what needed to happen for the sake of gender equality but a record of what had already been done by an organization barely a year old.

On the day as our guests rolled in we began to breathe easy. Reflecting on similar events in the past what overwhelmed me was the strong presence of men in the room. Not just observers either, men who came to testify, to speak, to hear, to be seen and be associated with a campaign that had the potential to change minds and behaviour.

After the main event guests went downstairs to watch the drama by the Xing Tring group called: "What kind of a man are you?". The lights were low and the audience waited in anticipation. What I saw blew me away ... this group of young men and women performed with such passion, it was hard not to feel with the woman who lay on the floor groaning after a beating but also to feel the overwhelming frustration of a man misled and misguided by society into believing that his power lay in his fists and not in his heart and soul.

When it was all over I was relieved and thrilled at the level of enthusiasm and commitment that the partnership between the City of Johannesburg and Gender Links brought. I looked at those around me and could see that they felt the same way and for me there could have been no better start to a campaign that moved beyond the rhetoric of gender based violence into an area where every one felt they had a stake and pledged as much as they committed to Sixteen Days of Peace.

**Xing Tring drama group**



(\*Kubeshni Govender-Jones is Manager, V and R Centre and a GL Board Member)

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- ✓ **Communications training for gender activists:** This is a critical area of work. GL will seek to provide at least three training workshops each year in different SADC countries to assist gender activists in developing communication strategies. GL will especially seek to work with regional networks such as Women in Law in Southern Africa (WILSA), that have indicated their desire to develop more strategic approaches to communication. In addition, GL seeks to build on the modules developed by the SADC Gender Unit for training women decision makers in gender analysis skills to include communication skills relevant to this important category of communicators (e.g. campaigning, debating, dealing with the mainstream media, using new information and communication technologies). This training would be offered to women parliamentarians and decision makers, as one of the follow ups to the “Beyond Numbers” research- see gender and governance.
- ✓ **Sixteen Days:** Building on the cross-sector campaigns in 2002, GL will seek to conduct such campaigns each year, using these both as an opportunity for training and for advocacy.
- ✓ **Rights Journal:** The gender violence training included the production of the first issue of Rights/Writes, conceived as a quarterly journal on gender and the media in the SADC region. Funding is being sought to sustain production of this journal - a key tool for analysing trends, monitoring progress and providing a space for reflection for those working in the gender and media area.
- ✓ **GEM Opinion and Commentary Service:** In partnership with the AWC, and as part of the African Gender and Media Initiative, Gender Links will set up a commentary and opinion service to train and encourage gender activists, as well as women in decision making, to make their voices heard through these important spaces in the mainstream media. GEM will serve as the bridge between the activists and the mainstream media, helping to shape the pieces in a way that is topical and marketable. Hivos has already committed funds in 2003 and 2004 to assist in getting this process underway.



Farayi Samhungu, Africa Director, IPS