

# Empowering Women - Ending Violence in Mauritius



Noelette Simirone talking to the media about Gender Based Violence (GBV).  
Credit: Anushka Virahsawmy

“I have known so many problems in my life,” **Noelette Simirone** told journalists at a media workshop during the Sixteen Days of Activism campaign in 2015. “But I am now an independent woman doing my own business. I urge

women to follow your dreams, to fight for your rights and STOP abusive relationships. I did it, you can do it.” Before joining the Gender Links (GL) entrepreneurship course for survivors of GBV, “I was already involved in a small business which involved selling cakes and other foods which I made myself. But it did not work as expected. One reason was that I did not know how to manage a business.” Now Simirone rears chickens and ducks, sells meat, eggs fertiliser and caters for tourists. “Today I am a skilled breeder and I possess twenty laying hens, fifty hens and ten ducks. With their manure I even manufacture compost for sale. I learned how to make full use of my resources and capabilities.” She is now a mentor for other women in her area. She speaks her mind in front of an audience, in meetings and to journalists. “The Gender Links course has helped strengthened my backbone. It made me gain confidence in myself. No one can step on my toes again and I will not let anyone be violent towards me as I deserve respect.”

## KEY FACTS

- 195 survivors of GBV in 10 councils trained as entrepreneurs.
- 81% completed a business plan and 64% followed through on the plan. 29% added new products and 28% found new markets; 26% indicated starting a new business and 28% increased the size of their business; 4% opened a bank account and 28% grew their business.
- The average monthly income for participants was Rs195 before and rose to Rs1128 after the project (average increase of Rs933, a 478% increase). The overall increase in income over one year is Rs974,501.

- 92% of participants said they now experience less or much less GBV. Overall, the relationship control index that measures power within intimate relationships increased by three percentage points to 68%.
- Gender attitudes are measured by the Gender Progress Score (GPS). The GPS for the community rose from 56% to 57%. The average score for participants (82%) is 25 percentage points higher than the community average (57%). This shows a high degree of awareness on the part of the participants, but need for councils to continue to work on community attitudes through GBV campaigns.
- Participants gave the project an overall rating of 92%.

*Gender Links (GL) is a Southern African NGO committed to an inclusive, equal and just society in the public and private space in accordance with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development that is being updated in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, Beijing Plus Twenty and Africa Agenda 2063. GL coordinates the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance and works to achieve the 2030 targets of the Protocol in its core media, governance and justice programmes.*



## Why this project?

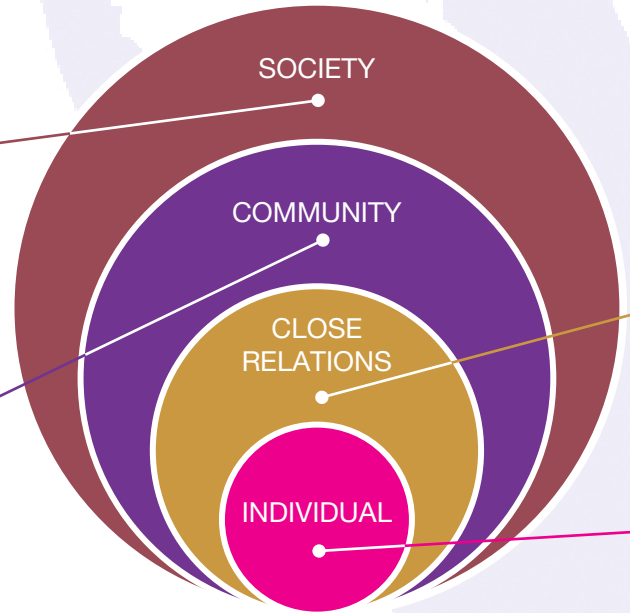
Since its founding in 2001 GL has worked with over 2000 women in documenting their experiences of Gender Based Violence (GBV). GL has also conducted GBV prevalence surveys in Mauritius, Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho that that one in four (Mauritius) to four in five women (Zambia) have experienced gender violence. The most likely forms of violence are also those least likely to be reported to the police - economic, psychological and verbal abuse. Many women spoke about staying in or returning to abusive relationships because they lacked economic clout independence or experienced financial control as a form of abuse. GL set out to test the links between economic empowerment and ending GBV.

## What the project involved

The programme focuses on an integrated approach of life skills and entrepreneurship training including confidence building; decision making, business management, use of

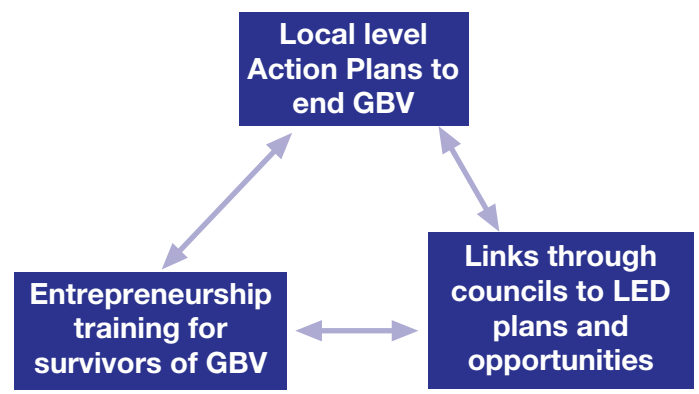
**Public realm of power** - policy/strategy to meet the needs of women in business - access to assets, financial services and business development opportunities

**Community realm of power** - local government, private sector, NGOs and funders support



**Private realm of power** - economic GBV as a form of control

**Intimate realm of power** - creating a belief in ability to achieve economic independence



A newspaper report of the project in Mauritius.

IT, networking and addressing the underlying structural inequalities between women and men. Informed by the ecological theory of change, the project aims at addressing power relations at an individual, personal relationship, community and societal levels.

Key partners in the project included 10 councils in each of ten Southern African countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe) that form part of the Centres of Excellence for Gender in Local Government. The councils helped to identify participants, improve access to markets, infrastructure, finance, mentorship and support. Altogether councils provided Rs4,450,495 in Mauritius and Rs15,431,731 in support of the COE programme across the ten countries in cash and in kind.

## Key results

The project aimed to improve the **personal and economic agency of survivors of GBV**. "My main area of business is supplying decorations and accessories. I make decorative objects with rattan such as chandeliers, vases, bags and picture frames. I have added new products to my portfolio with clothes for babies and toddlers. I am a chef by profession and I used to work in a hotel as a sous-chef. This was not sustainable as the job is offered on a contract basis for two to three months at a time. However, the training has provided me with important knowledge on how to tackle this problem. I have learned to set my priorities and act accordingly."

*Francesca Ramdeal from Curepipe council*

Before the project started some of the women were already running small businesses and have said they have been able to **improve how they run the businesses**. "Before the training I was not interested in doing business as such. I was teaching swimming but after the training I learned that I could also earn extra money. I am still doing my swimming classes but with an added twist. I prepare snacks and sell this to those who come to swimming lessons. Thanks to the training I have been able to develop this idea. My family especially my daughter really appreciates the fact that I have been able to get a chance to make the most of my old age."

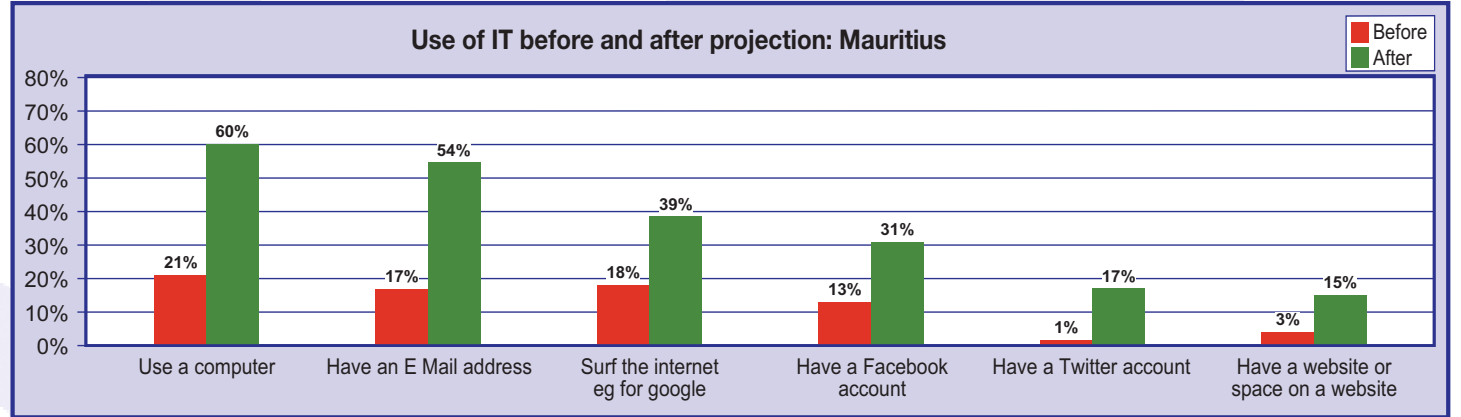
*Dorine Volafite from Beau Bassin*

Many of the women have expressed having **more self-confidence** because they have learned more about GBV

and running a business. This has given them more status in their homes and the community: "From this training I learnt that money is not the only important thing in life. The love and affection I receive is much more important than the happiness of having plenty of money. The training has been a turning point in my life. My most memorable experience was when I was a runner up as emerging entrepreneur at the National Summit in Mauritius in 2015. I was thrilled to the core. I have the will power and strength to achieve what I want from life. I want to set an example for all women who are in distress and show them that with hard work and determination one can improve one's situation and achieve success and fulfill one's dreams."

*Ketty Perichon from Black River Council*

The winner of the entrepreneurship category for the Mauritius SADC Protocol@Work Summit, *Maria Rosa Jasmin from the Black River council* said, "I want to help other women in need and make them realise that they are not alone and that all problems do have a solution." She is now economically stable thanks to her catering business. Her daughter also participated in the entrepreneurship course as she has also experienced Gender Based Violence. Today both mother and daughter are doing wonders to influence other people and make them aware of such issues. She is **helping other women who have experienced violence** and are living in poor conditions. She is a field worker and counsel's women in need and guides them on how to get help from the government.



Source: Gender Links.

The programme brought about a improvements in **IT skills**. As illustrated in the graph, 60% women now use a computer compared to 21% at the start of the project. 54% have access to E Mail (compared to 17% at the start). 39% surf the internet (compared to 18% at the start). 17% now have a website or space on a website, compared to 1% at the start. This increase in IT usage is a significant step forward for this group of women.

The programme has helped Centres of Excellence for Gender in Local Government **to put their gender action plans to work**. According to Odoye Ashvin from Savanne

Council: "From the action plan generated during the gender training workshops, the council has learnt a lot from Gender Links and we have put a gender budget in place. The council has also been proactive in helping women to find job opportunities in markets. This action has come as a result of the COE training we got and a change of attitude in the council due the training."

This project has shown that possibility of ending GBV through the combination of life skills and entrepreneurship development within a framework of community and local participation to change lives and mainstream women.





Participants learning to use computers during an IT session. Introducing survivors to computers has been a key aim of the training.

*Credit: Anushka Virahsawmy*

GL Mauritius is taking the project a step further by training the most committed entrepreneurs to become mentors. They have been equipped with a training of trainers' course on life skills, developing a business, IT training and basic accounting. Their task now is to find 10 more survivors of

GBV in their localities who are willing to start a business. The GL mentors will mentor the women chosen to be economically independent and to regain their self-esteem.

## Lessons learned and how they will be applied

- Choosing councils more carefully and locking in their commitment for better results.
- Identifying potential sources of funding from the outset and linking the project to economic empowerment and the post 2015 agenda for women in SADC.
- Cascading the project through the mentorship programme with the support of the Decentralised Cooperation Programme (DCP) of the European Union.
- Choosing participants more carefully and supporting them holistically for the workshop period to maximise impact of the training.
- Strengthening links with potential support for the women in councils.
- Introducing of communities of business women and peer mentorship for learning, sharing and networking.
- Finding private business willing to partner with the women to help start their business.

### KEY INDICATORS

| Indicator  | Botswana  | Lesotho   | Madagascar | Mauritius | Mozambique | Namibia   | South Africa | Swaziland | Zambia    | Zimbabwe  | Regional total or average |
|--|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------------------|
| Survivor participation (in Phase 3)  | 109       | 130       | 154        | 105       | 220        | 128       | 81           | 140       | 133       | 150       | 1,350                     |
| Completed a business plan  | 100%      | 99%       | 96%        | 81%       | 80%        | 95%       | 79%          | 81%       | 98%       | 98%       | 91%                       |
| Followed a business plan   | 56%       | 92%       | 90%        | 64%       | 72%        | 89%       | 54%          | 72%       | 87%       | 96%       | 79%                       |
| Average monthly income before the project (Rupees)                           | 244       | 616       | 1,287      | 195       | 29         | 273       | -322         | 537       | 1,984     | 1,596     | 702                       |
| Average monthly income after the project (Rupees)                            | 1,307     | 1,542     | 2,473      | 1,128     | 34         | 1,589     | 1,383        | 910       | 5,156     | 5,101     | 2,070                     |
| Increase in average monthly income after training (Rupees)                   | 1,063     | 926       | 1,186      | 933       | 5          | 1,316     | 1,708        | 373       | 3,172     | 3,505     | 1,368                     |
| Overall increase in income over one year as a result of the project (Rupees) | 1,236,768 | 1,386,871 | 4,152,221  | 974,501   | 79,037     | 2,534,064 | 1,411,519    | 852,696   | 7,484,474 | 7,940,712 | 28,052,864                |
| Personal agency at the start   | 74%       | 72%       | 81%        | 83%       | 76%        | 69%       | 74%          | 71%       | 76%       | 77%       | 76%                       |
| Personal agency after the project  | 79%       | 76%       | 84%        | 83%       | 73%        | 73%       | 77%          | 74%       | 77%       | 80%       | 78%                       |
| Increase or decrease in personal agency                                      | 5%        | 4%        | 3%         | 0         | -3%        | 4%        | 3%           | 3%        | 1%        | 3%        | 2%                        |
| Relationship control at the start  | 70%       | 49%       | 65%        | 65%       | 69%        | 65%       | 65%          | 63%       | 50%       | 52%       | 62%                       |
| Relationship control after the project                                       | 82%       | 60%       | 70%        | 68%       | 73%        | 64%       | 65%          | 68%       | 60%       | 54%       | 66%                       |
| Increase or decrease in relationship control                                 | 12%       | 11%       | 5%         | 3%        | 4%         | -1%       | 0            | 5%        | 10%       | 2%        | 4%                        |
| GBV less or much less  | 96%       | 93%       | 94%        | 92%       | 66%        | 81%       | 74%          | 86%       | 97%       | 91%       | 85%                       |
| Gender Progress Scores in community (baseline in brackets)                   | 62% (61%) | 73% (66%) | 65% (65%)  | 57% (56%) | 67% (56%)  | 60% (59%) | 62% (65%)    | 64% (57%) | 59% (61%) | 61% (59%) | 63% (61%)                 |
| Gender Progress Score of participants  | 75%       | 66%       | 73%        | 82%       | 64%        | 65%       | 72%          | 70%       | 71%       | 70%       | 70%                       |
| Contribution in kind from councils (Rupees)                                  | 1,868,693 | 338,867   | 881,210    | 4,450,495 | 83         | 427,289   | 26,000       | 1,406,340 | 939,226   | 2,537,358 | 15,431,731                |
| Rating of council support  | 44%       | 38%       | 70%        | 50%       | 70%        | 50%       | 38%          | 56%       | 52%       | 76%       | 54%                       |
| Overall rating of the project  | 92%       | 84%       | 87%        | 92%       | 95%        | 82%       | 84%          | 84%       | 89%       | 90%       | 89%                       |

Source: Gender Links.

### CONTACT

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