



Profiling

Young Feminist



2024



FREEDOM NONKULULEKO 'NOX' MTSHALI

As the daughter of a preacher, Nox Mtshali found it particularly difficult to accept, at the age of 15, that she was a lesbian. She was ashamed, embarrassed and worried that she had been "attacked by demons". She needed support and, in Sebokeng, there was very little immediately available to her. A friend advised her to check online where she found a Facebook group for Vaal Lesbians and Gays.

It was through this initial social media group that she met a community of similar people in her area and became a founding member of the Vaal LGBTI. An organisation that was started to provide much-needed support and mobilisation to the queer community in the Vaal, Sedibeng Region of Gauteng.

"Just because I am lesbian, I shouldn't be worried about going to a government facility. I have to be able to go to a clinic and be treated like a lesbian woman. We need the community to be able to provide for us. We saw the loopholes and we saw the need for us to get involved in the way that the community functions. We saw that a lot of people did not know about LGBTQI issues, that they needed information about the people living around them."

Vaal LGBTI was formed in 2013 by 8 people and formally registered in 2014. There are now only 4 full-time committee members of the organisation catering to the needs of around 400 people in the area. They use social media to support and mobilise, deal with hate crimes and monitor court proceedings, putting pressure on the legal system to represent them fairly.

They also provide workshops that deal with different aspects of life in the queer community. These workshops range from educating LGBTQIA+ groups about their legal rights and the court process to informing the community about the best ways to support others.

As an organisation, they are currently working on a school project to deal with the high incidence of death by suicide of young LGBTQIA+ students. There is a concerning prevalence of discrimination at school between peers, which is often perpetuated through the outdated policies of the schools towards gender and identity.

Through ActionAid, they have been able to be a part of the "Generation G" project which is a space for a variety of grassroots youth organisations to come together, support and learn from each other.

"We are different organisations from different locations so the main objectives are that the youth of South Africa can share experiences and unite and capacitate each other and build a movement."

Run by Sonke Gender Justice, ActionAid and Activate the project provides training on capacitation, policy, justice and austerity measures; teaching its beneficiaries how to fundraise, write proposals, and pitch to funders. There is a strong focus on austerity measures, especially as they apply to vulnerable communities making budgeting and mobilising support important aspects of the programme.

"My dream would be first, a world without any kind of discrimination in every aspect. Where everyone lives freely in holistic harmony, where they are not violated, or discriminated against for their gender, sexual orientation, size, race, religion or culture. With the work we are doing it is possible, I believe, to change one mindset at a time. With enough resources, we can reach enough minds and create a better world."





SELOKELA 'SLU' MOLAMODI

Slu is a self-professed conversationalist. She is the host of Hope Alive Breakfast, an online radio show, a writer, and a passionate advocate for a GBV-free society who has been a leader all her life. A prefect in both primary and high school she now extends her influence towards uplifting and empowering communities to speak up, find a voice and get involved.

As a policy champion at Activate, Slu works as part of a group of young people who host nationwide voter registration workshops. Together they teach communities how government structures work and how they can get involved, alongside the importance of participating in the IDP process, and voting. She does this as part of their change-drivers youth network, bringing young leaders together from across the country through leadership training, and access to different opportunities.

Slu joined Generation G in 2020, a coalition between ActionAid, Activate and Sonke Gender Justice, mobilising young people towards building a GBV-free society. Through research, they found that many young people are not interested in the development of their communities because they do not feel included.

“We needed to get young people involved in fighting GBV in our communities. I was one of the champions based in Tembisa. I was chosen because at the time Generation G was focusing on the hotspots and Tembisa was one of them in South Africa. Corrective rape, homophobic killings and other forms of GBV were common.”

Being the champion meant that Slu became the leader of conversations in Tembisa around stakeholder relations.

She had to rally and mobilise community-based organisations that are working towards the same goals as Generation G. She would facilitate community dialogues where she learned that it is not just GBV organisations that should be in the conversations, it became clear that economic power is an important issue to address, so local businesses had to be brought into the conversations as well.

“As a champion, you are not going into the communities with a solution. I would create a safe space, invite community members and ask them to bring others to the dialogue. Statistically, women are the victims or survivors so mostly it was women who turned up. But after the dialogues, we would just send them home to the same situation. We needed a new approach. We needed to speak to young men in the community and ask them to invite their male friends. The conversations were not about bashing men but about understanding each other and working towards a common goal.”

“Even issues as small as pronouns are a difficult thing for township communities to understand. They are having to learn a new language. My job was always to step in and remind people that this is a safe space. The conversation around respect and compassion, where inclusivity is concerned, is one that arose when we were doing GBV workshops.”

Being a facilitator is one of Slu’s most important roles. And one that demands understanding and patience.

When you are dealing with a diverse group of people you have to understand that a single conversation is not going to make a difference. Sometimes you need to extend grace to the people you lead and serve. But more importantly, you need to learn to see them and take a moment to understand them. That kind of approach has helped me in my advocacy work in adulthood.”

Slu is currently in her second year of journalism studies at Rosebank College in Braamfontein, driven by the ambition to be the most influential talk radio host in the country. In that position, she says, she will be able to keep the conversation about GBV alive and play a pivotal role in the evolution of the conversation in pursuit of a safer society for everyone.

In addition to all of this Slu is a facilitator and schools outreach manager at [Qrate](#), an organisation that aims to spread period positivity through menstrual workshops across the country.

NTSIKI KHUNJU



"I see myself as a conversation starter. I love having meaningful conversations that change lives, that get young people thinking about things we wouldn't usually think about."

Ntsiki Khunju lives her life in the pursuit of change. Change in the way that young people see themselves and change in the way that the older generations see the youth. Although her activism starts at home, with the education of her young daughter, it manifests itself in all other areas of her life, from paid work to volunteering.

Often the seeds of passion for advocacy are sown at home, through the parents, in the formative years of a child's life but Ntsiki was catalysed into action through a personal tragedy in her early 20's. In 2016 her younger brother died at the age of 18, an event which she now sees as the turning point in her journey.

"Initially I got into activism to blanket the pain I was feeling from my brother's death. I got healing in that space and recognised that if the world wasn't as damaged he would probably still be with us."

This may be the event that lit a fire in Ntsiki but the world had been preparing her for a while. At high school, a friend guided her towards the Afrika Tikkun Uthando a child and youth development centre in Johannesburg where she joined an afterschool programme for girls called the Young Urban Women, run by ActionAid.

Through this programme, she was exposed to discussions about feminism, advocacy and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR).

"I was intrigued by the concept of SRHR to understand the challenges that young people faced at the time; accessing services, the stigma, the judgement and the prejudice. I wanted to pursue the continuation of that advocacy."

At the time the Young Urban Women programme was only for girls who were at high school, so leaving school meant leaving the programme. Seeing her potential, Afrika Tikkun offered Ntsiki a leadership position to study social auxiliary work which, in time, turned into a paid job at the centre. While doing this, Ntsiki was also studying child and youth care work, as well as taking up a volunteer position on the community advisory board at Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Institute (Wits RHI).

"Wits RHI is where I got exposed to the concept of STI management, clinical research into vaccines and HIV prevention. I realised that I could be a person who connects and bridges the community and the science."

It was around this time that ActionAid developed Young Urban Women to include a space for youth who had left school but wanted to continue with their advocacy; a space for active citizens to collaborate and develop. So in 2022, Ntsiki joined them again, this time as a writer, documenting the workshops, conversations and learnings of Young Urban Women and publishing them through [Activate! Change Drivers](#), through their blog and social media.

As a young woman with a passion for change, qualifications and professional experience in social work, child welfare, and sexual and reproductive health rights; Ntsiki has a unique overview of what is important for youth advocacy in South Africa.

It is the current focus of the Young Urban Women that fascinates her the most. This year ActionAid have launched their feminist economy manifesto in order to produce more economically empowered active citizens, activists who would not be at the mercy of others for their survival but who, by virtue of supporting themselves, would be in a position to make informed decisions.

"If you empower groups of young people you are creating an empowered community. A community that is economically empowered can be vocal about the importance of condom use because they are not having to beg for money anymore, they are not at the mercy of men."

It is this idea of economic empowerment that Ntsiki will take forward with her advocacy as it speaks to everything that she cares about through her work.

DUDUZILE XABA & MBALIZETHUKHUMALO

Dudu Xaba and Mbali Khumalo both grew up in Orange Farm, outside Johannesburg, but they took very different paths to the Young Urban Women movement within which they now passionately advocate for more opportunities and a brighter future for the residents of their downtrodden community.

The YUW group runs out of two locations in South Africa but is represented in several African countries and India. In Gauteng, they have two bases, one in the Afrika Tikkun Arekopaneng Community Centre in Orange Farm and the other in the Uthando Centre in central Johannesburg. The programme itself is facilitated and run by ActionAid.

The programme started as an afterschool support group in Orange Farm and Johannesburg, providing activities and engagement around issues that the young school girls were experiencing in their personal lives. More recently the programme has developed to include young women who have reached school-leaving age, but still need support and networks to thrive.

“Young Urban Women brings together a group of young ladies all looking for a shared safe space to talk about our daily lives which have been greatly affected by our socio-economic status. Together we discuss and advocate against social injustices applied by government departments by implementing austerity measures, which often mean budget cuts on the social grants that we depend on.” - Mbali

It is essentially a support group that facilitates dialogue and creates bridges between young women who all too often are in competition with each other rather than respectfully working together for a better future for all.

As part of the YUW programme, Dudu and Mbali are on a mission to create a new vocational school in Orange Farm, one that could teach much-needed skills like plumbing, electrical work, carpentry and boiler-making to unemployed residents. Seeing how many people come into the IT department at the Africa Tikkun centre every day, they realise that there is a great need, and want, for people to be trained with skills that can make them money whilst also contributing to the upliftment of the community. There is so much need for skilled labourers with the ability to run their own businesses that Dudu and Mbali are sure that a vocational school will be the answer to many of the community's problems.

“Orange Farm is the last undeveloped township. Many young boys and girls drop out of school. They can't read and write. They are not passionate. A vocational school will decrease crime. There are many young people who want to do something.” -Mbali

“Everyone needs a fair chance in life. Let's break protocols, rules and regulations that the government is putting on us and let us thrive in doing what we want, doing what we are passionate about. There is a young group of women who are pushing, advocating and want to be out there and heard. Not being at the back but being in the front. We have fresh ideas.” -Dudu

The school isn't going to come quickly, it will take a lot of hard work to pull all of the necessary parts together, but the YUW are passionate and well-supported. They are starting by involving community members, the local council and other possible stakeholders. In time they want to start the school informally, asking local tradespeople to come and teach their skills to others in the community.

In a country with so much unemployment and infrastructure that is rapidly aging it seems like a sensible plan to focus on the jobs that are needed to provide basic needs to the growing population. If it works, they could be creating a blueprint for change all around the country.

“As young people can we collaborate, hold hands and support each other to make things happen.” - Dudu





“We suffer the greatest as young people and we suffer from the mistakes of the elders. We suffer from the promises that they made and it's in our hands to craft our future. I know how it is to be unemployed and to worry about whether you will be able to support your family.”

MAMIKI MASILO

In grade 10, Mamiki was given a challenge at school to get involved with a community project for Mandela Day. Like many people around South Africa, she set about trying to find a way to ‘donate’ her 67 minutes to a good cause. Little did she know that this would be the turning point in her life, setting her on a path towards community activism.

She discovered the AfriKa Tikkun Centre in downtown Johannesburg when she approached the children's hospital next door to donate her time. After volunteering in the library, and working with the child and youth development beneficiaries, she joined as a beneficiary herself at the age of 16.

“I wouldn't be who I am today if I wasn't given those opportunities. That's where my love for community began. The manager at the time was very passionate about youth development. I learned all about advocacy, development and community.”

Interested in current affairs and the development of communities, she chose a course in public management and governance at the University, furthering her education with a master's degree in monitoring and evaluation.

At the same time, she joined the ActionAid Young Urban Women programme. The support groups operate through the Afrika Tikkun Center, and this is where Mamiki was introduced to them. It was the perfect place for her to further her networks and get involved with advocacy around the country.

Through a twice-monthly meeting with over 150 participants, they discuss sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), decent work, GBV and economic development, focusing on empowering the individuals and running campaigns as a group.

Mamiki has now taken on a leadership role at YUW, looking for opportunities for young people to learn.

“I care because I exist within this environment. I care because the people I engage with are also facing the same troubles that I am facing. I care because if we aren't going to try we are going to be despondent. You can't change the world but the little you do can impact one person and a few people.”

In recent years ActionAid has shifted its focus towards economic development and the importance of developing an understanding of economics for young people so they focus on austerity and how it affects people daily. Low-income workers often don't get a chance to understand austerity so they run workshops that teach about tax justice, public budgets and the tools needed for more effective advocacy.”

“We suffer the greatest as young people and we suffer from the mistakes of the elders. We suffer from the promises that they made and it's in our hands to craft our future. I know how it is to be unemployed and to worry about whether you will be able to support your family.”

It's through her family that Mamiki came to care so much about the people around her and develop a deep-rooted passion for community and empowerment.

“My dad was a person who cared so much about education and current affairs. He used to preach the importance of developing community. I feel like any work I had done that didn't pertain to community development would have made me miserable.”

“Knowing that the next person has gained something. I think that is the basis of human happiness. I don't think it comes from your selfish desires. I think seeing the next person gain something brings the ultimate happiness.”

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