

**Feminist Leadership Practice:
*Reflections from the South African
Gender at Work Experience***

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June 2017**

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper reflects on Gender at Work's recent South African experience² in two different contexts to concretely illustrate in praxis, core principles of transformational feminist leadership. We explore what such leadership means and looks like and what conditions and practice help it to emerge. We are not working specifically in women's rights or feminist organisations. Rather, we are working with trade unions and in mixed gender contexts, i.e., communities with women, men, and gender-nonconforming persons. These are contexts that can be hostile to feminists and feminism. Our challenge is how to foster feminist visions, values and practices in such settings in a way that minimises backlash, while beginning to create more equal social norms and less violent gendered relationships.

It is worth bearing in mind that South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world; many women in parliament and some in senior positions within government; many excellent policies and a plethora of institutional structures set up to support gender equality, including a Gender Commission. At the same time, we have a culture in which violence is often seen as 'normal' and the only way for disempowered people to be heard. We have one of the highest rates of gender-based violence (GBV) in the world, high rates of HIV infection – particularly among poorer black women – and the euphemistically named 'hate crimes,' in which gay and particularly lesbian identified women are murdered because of their sexual orientation. Considering these extremes, we must ask ourselves: what else is required to eradicate endemic violence and discrimination and achieve gender equality? Clearly, what we have is not enough. For instance, recently, on the eve of the announcement of local government elections, four young black women staged a silent protest by reminding the nation of the woman who had accused the current President of rape ten years before. Three women ministers, including the ANC Women's League President and the Minister of Social Development, were more

¹ Thanks to Rebecca Klaasen and Priya Kvam for editorial support and Rex Fyles, Carol Miller, Aruna Rao, Joanne Sandler, Mary Jane Real and Nina Benjamin for comments on earlier drafts of this paper; Michel would also like to thank Mary Jane Real (ex Global Fund for Women) for sharing some of her own unpublished writing and our many fruitful conversations.

² Readers interested in learning more about the kinds of leadership that has been developed from our past experience particularly in relation to our work with individual trade unions as organisations are invited to read Nina Benjamin, Michel Friedman, Shamim Meer, 2013: *Bringing Back The Heart: The Gender at Work Action Learning Process with Four South African Trade Unions*, Solidarity Centre; *Change is a Slow Dance, Stories of Hope and Transforming power*. <http://genderatwork.org/resources/>

concerned about the breach of security than about the issue the protesters were highlighting, the normalisation of rape culture in our country.³ As Kagure Muro a journalist working with HOLAAfrica, a PanAfricanist queer womanist collective said, such responses show “...that inflated high levels of political representation for women and formal structures to protect our rights won’t, in fact, be our saviours when it comes to bodily autonomy. Sometimes these structures are our greatest threat”.⁴

Considering this context, Gender at Work asks: how can we more effectively work to address the consequences of gender inequality – always interwoven with other inequalities – as it has become embodied in people’s daily lives and practices? In other words, how do we work in a way that will profoundly enable the equality discourses – so evident in political speak and policy documents – to resonate more deeply in the quality of all people’s everyday personal lives, relationships and work? How do we support individuals and organisations in ways that increase agency, facilitate hope and create the possibility of imagining that something alternative – new ways of thinking, seeing, feeling and being – is possible?

From 2013 to 2015, Gender at Work benefited from a Dutch government grant focused on Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW). The South African Gender at Work team used this grant in two different contexts to experiment with ways to foster conditions that support the emergence of democratic feminist leadership and practice. In both processes, participants represented diverse lived experience and identities (including around gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, ethnicity, and race).

In the first context, Letsema, we supported individual community members, community groups and formal organisations to address GBV in their local context⁵ using a collective impact, collaborative approach over 30 months. Our role was to structure and facilitate a process in which women, men and gender-nonconforming participants could claim ownership of the initiative and the actions they were inspired to take. We aimed to create a space in which they could learn to work in ways that began to construct new norms, which were democratic, inclusive, collaborative, supportive of feminist principles and generative of a culture that valued learning.

In the second context, we led an eight-month, time bound process to strengthen the capacity of democratic feminist facilitators and inspire in them greater confidence

³ [TMG Digital](http://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/2016/08/07/ministers-heated-clash-khwezi-protest-shock/) - August 7, 2016, Ministers in heated clash over Khwezi protest shock, <http://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/2016/08/07/ministers-heated-clash-khwezi-protest-shock/>; Simamkele Simamkele Dlakavu 2016-08-14, Khwezi protest: We came as 4, but stood as 10 000. <http://citypress.news24.com/Voices/khwezi-protest-we-came-as-4-but-stood-as-10-000-20160814>

⁴ [Kagure Mugo](http://mg.co.za/article/2016-08-08-00-the-acquittal-of-zuma-did-not-just-endanger-khwesis-life-but-ours-as-well) 08 Aug 2016 The acquittal of Zuma did not just endanger Khwezi’s life, but ours as well. <http://mg.co.za/article/2016-08-08-00-the-acquittal-of-zuma-did-not-just-endanger-khwesis-life-but-ours-as-well>

⁵ See “Meer, S (ed.) 2016, OUR HEARTS ARE JOINED: *Writings From Letsema*. Creating Zero Percent Gender Based Violence in the Vaal. https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7Da5L0N_Qz4VmNvVmNsR2wxWG8/view

and skill in facilitating feminist organizational change⁶. Fifteen participants came from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Nigeria and Jordan and were required to practice what they were learning inside an organisation with which they had strong connections. For many participants, despite that their contexts also reflect patriarchal realities, the word 'feminist' had a negative connotation. The process was therefore important in supporting new thinking and learning on both feminism and facilitation. The intention behind the training aimed to strengthen trainees understanding and practice in feminist principles⁷, facilitation that fosters democratic/participatory engagement, dialogue, control and ownership⁸, understanding and working with organisation and systems⁹ and action reflection/learning. Trainees were given a chance to learn how to use the Gender at Work Framework¹⁰ for working with their own organisations and the Emergent Learning framework¹¹ to develop their own organizational change action experiments.

The G@W Framework is a conceptual tool based on Ken Wilber's integral framework¹². It is designed to help participants think about what they are trying to change in the world, both at the personal and the systemic levels, as well as help clarify what assumptions are being made about how we think these changes take place. In using the framework participants are asked what they would like to change in their own organizations and in the communities where they work. At the personal levels, we consider invisible aspects like a change in consciousness, commitment and attitude of both women and men and visible aspects like a change in behavior and how resources (eg. land, voice, safe space) are accessed and used. At the systemic level we investigate formal/visible rules, laws and procedures (eg. Policies, constitutions, budgets) and informal/invisible cultural norms, ideologies and exclusionary practices (eg. valuing and acceptance of women's leadership, violence free relating). We assume that to create new norms, change is required at multiple levels (personal, organizational, community) and in a way that integrates the head (concepts), the heart (emotions), and hands/feet (practice). All our processes thus weave a mix of exercises that engage participants in a variety of ways simultaneously – personal experience, organizational and community realities, and that access a

⁶ See Michel Friedman and Nosipho Twala (2016).....LRW case study.... For a more detailed and nuanced reflection on Nosipho's work with the LRW campaign during the training process. See Nina Benjamin (2016) Solidarity Case Study; Fazila Gany (2016) Jaw case study – for more detailed reflections on two other organisations and four trainee facilitators participating in the same process. See Kalyani Menon Sen's piece explaining what we mean by democratic feminist facilitation and other pieces in the 'field guide'..hyperlink All these have been written for the Cap Dev web in progress....

⁷ Hyperlink to Kalyani Menon Sen on Challenging Patriarchal Binaries; Intersectionality and Power; Politics of Knowledge Creation. Michel Friedman on Head, Heart, Hands; Bodywork. Nina Benjamin on Body Sculptures.

⁸ Hyperlink to Ray Gordezky on Overview of Multi-Stakeholder Methods; Asking Powerful Questions; Listening at 110 percent. Michel Friedman on Creating Learning Spaces That are Respectful, Inclusive and Transformatory; Open Space; Freewriting handout. India team video on World Café.

⁹ Hyperlink to Ray Gordezky on Whole Systems Approach

¹⁰ Within Gender at Work there is some debate about how to adapt Wilber's framework. See Michel Friedman on The Gender at Work Framework (hyperlink) and Aruna Rao, Joanne Sandler, David Kelleher and Carol Miller (2016): Gender At Work. Theory and Practice for 21st Century Organizations. Routledge, New York for the earlier use and Kalyani Menon-Sen on Feminist Experiments in Integral OD (hyperlink) for a more recent rendition.

¹¹ See Introduction to Emergent Learning, Fourth Quadrant Partners (2015); Hyperlink to Michel Friedman on Emergent Planning.

¹² Ken Wilber (2007): The Integral Vision Shambhala, Boston.

spectrum of analytic, creative, conceptual, and intuitive capacities. Woven throughout the process were exercises that supported facilitators to deepen their own self-awareness and reflection, to work in a more integrated way with body, mind and spirit, to be less reactive¹³.

The Emergent Learning framework¹⁴ includes a core framing question, hypotheses and regular reflections on what groups are learning from their actions and based on new insights they adapt future actions. Its tools help to support thinking, planning, sharing assumptions and reflections before and after any action. It helps keep the process alive and participants more conscious of how they learn as well as responsive to what is emerging. It helps participants break the habit of “*over-investing in solutions being “right” by asking groups to see solutions as hypotheses that need to be tested and refined, and recognizing that there may be more than one hypothesis*”¹⁵.

The case from the training experience, to which we refer in this paper, the Labor Rights for Women (LRW) campaign, is an example of one participant using what she learned in the training to support feminist leadership practice and outcomes.

Michel, a white South African, has been associated with Gender at Work since its inception, and is the South African Gender at Work program coordinator. She was one of the facilitators in both the Letsema process and the feminist facilitator training.¹⁶ At no point in either process did the issue of ‘race’ bedevil learning. Michel feels that in both cases under discussion she and other facilitators gave a lot of attention to how they were with each other and with their positional power. The way they worked in both Letsema and the facilitator training gave participants a lot of control over their own choices in the process. In that sense facilitators were not using authority ‘over’ the participants and this perhaps reduced the potential of ‘race’ becoming a hindrance. Nosipho, a black South African, lives in the Vaal, the region where Letsema took place, and she was a mentor in that process. Nosipho, a Gender at Work Associate, had earlier participated in a Gender at Work action

¹³ Hyperlink to Michel Friedman on Bodywork; Exercise to work with Disturbing energies; Head, Heart, Hands. Nina Benjamin on Body Sculptures

¹⁴ See Introduction to Emergent Learning, Fourth Quadrant Partners (2015).

¹⁵ Marilyn Darling, Jillaine Smith and Heidi Sparks Guber (2015): Introduction to Emergent Learning, Fourth Quadrant Partners, p11.

¹⁶ In 2012 I worked with Srilatha Batliwala on a feminist leadership toolkit “Achieving Transformative Feminist Leadership. A Toolkit for Organisations and Movements, CREA”; http://www.creaworld.org/sites/default/files/Final%20Feminist%20Leadership%20Manual%2014-4-14_0.pdf Between July 2013 and August 2014 I worked as a co-facilitator with my friend and colleague Kalyani Menon-Sen in support of a learning journey of four African feminist organisations (from Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Ethiopia) committed to women's leadership. Between Oct 2014 and June 2015, I worked as a co-facilitator with colleagues Tanya Beer and Rex Fyles in support of a peer learning process focused on Womens’ Transformative Leadership with the Global Fund For Women (GFW - USA), The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD - Thailand –SE Asia) and Development Alternatives for A New Era (DAWN – economic south). Although I’m not drawing specifically from or sharing any stories from either of these experiences in this paper, I would like to acknowledge the influence of my colleagues and the participants in these processes in my own thinking and practice.

learning process (2008-2010)¹⁷ and was a participant in the democratic feminist facilitator development training. For her practicum, Nosipho used the Labour Rights for Women (LRW) campaign, which she was helping to coordinate as part of her role in Labour Research Services, an organisation that supports labour movements. LRW focused on supporting women of diverse ages, races, sexual orientations, and ideological and political persuasions across four trade union federations, to campaign for an improvement in women's labour rights in the workplace in South Africa. The campaign involves women's organising independently, within their individual unions, and across the four federations. The stories Nosipho shares in this paper come directly from her immersion in both the Letsema and LRW processes. Her collective experiences demonstrate how democratic feminist facilitation can support feminist leadership practice and outcomes.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 How do we understand transformative feminist leadership?

Feminist transformational leadership, at its simplest, helps to facilitate a change or transition in *form*. That is, a *breaking down* of existing oppressive forms, or ones that contribute to various inequalities - including gender inequality, to make room for *new forms* to grow. The forms we are talking about can include thought-forms, perceptions, patterns, habits, behaviours, attitudes, old emotional hurts, and cultural norms at personal, organizational or community levels.

Some of the characteristics that define transformational leaders include authenticity¹⁸ - being ethical, 'true, open and honest with who you are;' being able to create ownership¹⁹ and support self-organizing and self-governing;²⁰ being willing to share power and serve the needs of others and not only focus on one's own needs;²¹ ²² being open to experimentation, followed by thoughtful and honest

¹⁷ See Nosipho Twala in Writing from the Inside, Stories of Hope and Change, Transforming Power a Knotted Rope <http://genderatwork.org/resources/> and Our Hearts are Joined. Writing from Letsema https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7Da5L0N_Qz4VmNvVmNsR2wxWG8/view

¹⁸ Christopher Baan, Phil Long, Dana Pearlman (2011), THE LOTUS *a practice guide for authentic leadership toward sustainability*, www.thelotus.info.

¹⁹ Chris Corrigan, From consultation to participatory engagement: a concept paper and design plan for creating ownership and activating leaders in community engagement initiatives, www.chriscorrigan.com

²⁰ Dee Hock is the founder of the organisation Chaordic Commons which is committed to forming practical, innovative organizations that can blend both competition and cooperation to address critical societal issues. The Chaordic Commons also develops organizational concepts that more equitably distribute power and wealth and are more compatible with the human spirit and biosphere.

<http://www.griequity.com/resources/integraltech/GRIBusinessModel/chaordism/chaordic.html>

Dee Hock (nd), The Art of Chaordic Leadership,

http://www.meadowlark.co/the_art_of_chaordic_leadership_hock.pdf;

²¹ Margaret Wheatley and Debbie Frieze (2011), Leadership in the Age of Complexity: From Hero to Host, in Resurgence Magazine, Winter.

²² <https://www.greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership/>

reflection on what happens; encouraging individuality of change agents and the effects of interaction among agents²³; and being able to garner trust and respect and inspire followers to change expectations, perceptions, and motivations to work towards common goals.²⁴ Many of these characteristics are relevant to anyone concerned with issues of social justice and transformation and the creation of a more equal world. Debates about women's transformational leadership and feminist leadership attempt to specify what a particularly feminist lens might offer.²⁵ Srilatha Batliwala (2011), for instance, offers a composite definition of a feminist leader. She defines transformational feminist leaders as

Women with a feminist perspective and vision of social justice, individually and collectively transforming themselves to use their power, resources and skills in non-oppressive, inclusive structures and processes to mobilize others – especially other women - around a shared agenda of social, cultural, economic and political transformation for equality and the realization of human rights for all.²⁶

Of course, Batliwala's definition is aspirational. Analysing the world through a feminist lens and developing strategies in line with that analysis is one thing. Creating alternative organizational cultures; supporting what is life enhancing; exercising power in more equal ways and living one's everyday personal, organizational, and movement life where one's ideas and principles, values and feelings and actions are in full alignment, is not always so easy to achieve. Feminists can be as capable as anyone else of abusing their positional power or privilege and in fuelling dynamics of antagonism and distrust.

From our perspective, the kind of leadership that has grown through the work of the South African Gender at Work team reflects many transformational leadership ideas, demonstrates a leadership praxis rooted in feminist values and has included some

²³ Brenda Zimmerman (1998): Nine Emerging and Connected Organizational and Leadership Principles. *Adapted From: Edgeware: Lessons From Complexity Science for Health Care Leaders*, by Brenda Zimmerman, Curt Lindberg, and Paul Plsek, 1998, Dallas, TX: VHA Inc.

http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/316071/Tamarack_New_Website/Zimmerman_Nine_Organizational_Principles.pdf?hssc=&hstc=&hsfp=&hsCtaTracking=a78d8deb-8797-458b-ae9f-97ae2b736c6c|62ab17ca-4a1f-48ee-9cf4-f74a5386f772

²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transformational_leadership,

http://www.academia.edu/239399/Transformative_Leadership_for_the_21st_Century (Thanks to Srilatha Batliwala for these references).

²⁵ Reference – Srilatha Batliwala (2011): *Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation Clearing the Conceptual Cloud*, CREA, Delhi; Srilatha Batliwala and Michel Friedman (2012): *Achieving Transformative Feminist Leadership. A Toolkit for Organisations and Movements*, CREA”;

http://www.creaworld.org/sites/default/files/Final%20Feminist%20Leadership%20Manual%2014-4-14_0.pdf

David Kelleher (2005), *Equality, Institutions and Leadership: A tentative Synthesis*, in *Agenda*, Volume 19, Issue 65, January 2005, pages 96-103; Bruce Kokopeli and George Lakey (1984) - *Leadership for Change: Toward a Feminist Model*, New Society Publishers; *Oxfam International (2014); Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights. An Oxfam Guide. Understanding how Leadership can Create Sustainable Change for Women's Rights*; CREA organised a meeting called - “Building Feminist Leadership – Looking Back, Looking Forward” in Cape Town, South Africa, November 2008. The meeting brought together 27 women from all over the world for two intense days of discussion, analysis and strategizing on the past and future of feminist leadership.

²⁶ *Ibid* (pg 29).

men. It is the kind of leadership that attempts to respond to Batliwala and Friedman's call:²⁷

We must be committed towards creating relationships and organisation cultures that are inclusive and do not reproduce what we are challenging in the world outside... In other words, we need to pay as much attention to the world we are creating in our everyday lives as the world we are critiquing.

Doing so is easier said than done.

In relation to the role of leadership in creating new gender-equal norms, the South African Gender at Work team has, to date, not concentrated on individual women's leadership or feminist leadership capacity development per se. Rather, we have focused on how to create conditions that enable a feminist praxis²⁸ – that is, practices of thinking, being and doing that support a feminist vision and feminist goals. Our work has thus supported the individuals and organisations with which we engage to strengthen their ability in their own contexts, to create what it is they want to change in the world. At the same time, our practice is concurrently asking participants to reflect about change through three mirrors of self, organisation and society. This reflexivity, together with the keen attention we give to working holistically, integrating body, mind, spirit and recognizing the importance of feelings, aims to encourage a form of personal transformation. Thus have we strengthened each participant's capacity to change their context through working towards achieving a feminist goal – and broader social change – and, in the process, feminist leaders who are themselves transforming, have emerged. Whatever leadership skills, qualities and practices are developed in the process are almost a by-product of the work. As Batliwala (2011) has put it: "Leadership is a means, not an end in itself. It is not a product or a service, but is integral to the process/es to change something. Leadership is developed not for its own sake but "for something, to do something or change something". It is a "set of actions and processes" performed by individuals.²⁹

In her recently published paper³⁰ Shawna Wakefield identifies six key strategies for building transformative and feminist leadership. Namely – modelling feminist purpose and principles; inspiring shared vision based on personal and collective reflexivity; empowering and enabling others to act; challenging patriarchal norms and oppressive power and encouraging integration of heart, mind and body. Unfortunately, her paper came out too late for us to properly integrate it, yet the thinking and practices which have been present in our (South African G@W team)

²⁷ Srilatha Batliwala and Michel Friedman (2012:29) – Achieving Transformative Feminist Leadership. A Toolkit for Organisations and Movements, CREA, http://www.creaworld.org/sites/default/files/Final%20Feminist%20Leadership%20Manual%2014-4-14_0.pdf

²⁸ **Praxis** is the process by which a [theory](#), lesson, or skill is enacted, embodied, or realised. "Praxis" may also refer to the act of engaging, applying, exercising, realizing, or practicing ideas

²⁹ Srilatha Batliwala (2011, p13): Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation. Clearing the Conceptual Cloud, Crea, Delhi.

³⁰ Wakefield, Shawna, "Transformative and Feminist Leadership for Women's Rights." Oxfam America Research Backgrounder series (2017): <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/research-publications/transformative-feministleadership->

support to community level activism and the training of a new generation of facilitators are congruent with her framing. These strategies overlap with each other and many of them are visible in the stories and examples we share later in the paper (section 2.2.3). We have chosen however to frame our stories in relation to what, in our two case studies, has contributed to creating conditions supportive of feminist and collaborative leadership. The four principles and associated practices we illustrate are developing a common vision, prioritising diversity and inclusivity, self-organising within a context of working collectively/collaboratively and creating cultures of care.

2.2 Feminist Leadership in Action: Two Case Studies

As noted in the introduction to this paper, the two case studies we are using derive from Gender at Work's experiences made possible by the FLOW grant. In the next section, we outline the change process at the heart of each case study, to provide a context for understanding, in greater detail, how we feel we've modelled transformational feminist leadership and achieved some of our intentions.

2.2.1 LETSEMA: What Happened (September 2013 to December 2015)

2.2.1.1 Initiating the process and establishing a core group and shared vision

In mid-2013, Gender at Work and LRS initiated a series of meetings with partners from previous collaborations; together, we decided to support marginalised groups in the Vaal, Gauteng, to take the lead in developing local and more collaborative responses to GBV. Frustrated by the problems of working in isolation, we were inspired to experiment with a **collective impact approach**. This approach invites actors who represent different interests to commit to a common agenda or purpose for solving a complex social problem. As described by FSG:³¹ "...the underlying premise of collective impact is that no single organization can create large-scale, lasting social change alone. There is no "silver bullet" solution to systemic social problems, and these problems cannot be solved by simply scaling or replicating one organization or program".³²

The Vaal is an area that is relatively under-resourced in terms of NGOs, especially those focused on providing services to survivors of GBV. It has high rates of illiteracy, informal employment and unemployment. Letsema participants³³ have said that unemployment leads to high rates of crime, drug, alcohol and sexual abuse. They have talked of high rates of rape, intimate partner violence and abusive relationships with children. Girls have problems with respect to early pregnancy, sexual abuse and bullying; there is a high rate of school dropouts; old people are vulnerable to abuse and often have their social grants abused by others. There are few recreational

³¹ FSG is a global consulting firm, headquartered in the United States, that specializes in developing innovative and collaborative approaches to drive large-scale social change.

³² See FSG website: <http://www.fsg.org/OurApproach/WhatIsCollectiveImpact.aspx>

³³ Minutes from Fundraising workshops (2015) and August evaluation meeting (2015).

facilities; women struggle to break the silence around issues that are considered private, such as domestic violence and sexual abuse, and the Vaal in general has a reputation for people being reluctant to speak out for fear of reprisals. There are many illegal initiation³⁴ schools and many stories of young boys who have been abducted for initiation without their parents' consent.

After two formative meetings in September and October 2013, a core group³⁵ was shaped and started to claim ownership of the process. For many of the newer participants, this was the first time they were working on this issue; for everyone, it was the first time they were working on GBV with such a diverse group of people.

The initial partners developed criteria against which to evaluate potential community representatives and other stakeholders, to expand the initial small base. Together, they generated a core framing question to guide the initiative: *How can we create a Vaal with zero per cent GBV?*

2.2.1.2 Expanding into the wider community, refining and identifying key issues

To increase its reach, the core group planned and managed community level dialogues in each of the six participating districts. In March 2014, the Gender at Work/LRS team helped to facilitate six community meetings/dialogues of forty to sixty people each. A total of 280 diverse participants, ages 17 to 90, participated in different areas of the Vaal.

After these district meetings, the core group reflected on what they had learned from the experience, what was changing for them in their lives and communities and what new questions had emerged. They reflected on who attended, what it took to get them there, and the issues that had been prioritised. They were surprised that for roughly seventy per cent of participants, the discussion on GBV was new. Women, men, LGBTI, HIV positive and differently abled people, health workers, church pastors, *shebeen*³⁶ queens, taxi associations, traditional healers and hawkers were all represented.

Three months after the district community dialogues, in June 2014, the core group organised a large open space³⁷ meeting in Sebokeng which brought together about 280 participants, sixty-five per cent of whom identified as women, from across the six districts, as well as representation from educational institutions (schools and *technikons*), health clinics, the South African Police Services, and the government (including from the departments of Safety and Security and Social Development).

In response to the framing question – How can we create a Vaal with zero per cent

³⁴ Male initiation is a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood for some ethnic groups in South Africa. Ritual male initiation includes circumcision and in the traditional form, initiates spend about a month or longer in seclusion in the bush. <http://theconversation.com/changes-in-gender-norms-are-making-initiation-safer-for-south-african-boys-46488>

³⁵ 20 female: 6 male participants

³⁶ An unlicensed drinking establishment

³⁷ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Space_Technology and for a short video clip from the meeting see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_AGxCurGIw

GBV? – participants generated a preliminary list of ninety discussion topics, which became the basis for the action plans they developed on day two of the workshop. The open space method was deliberately chosen to ensure that the participants would have as much control over the direction of the meeting as possible and would discuss whatever it was that they felt was urgent in answering the question³⁸.

2.2.1.3 Building networks, developing action experiments and growing a sustainable learning culture

After every major event, the core group would consciously reflect on its experience, including what it was learning and how it was creating conditions in which Vaal citizens could solve their own problems. In August 2014, leaders from six³⁹ of the initial twenty action groups, along with the core group and six mentors/coaches⁴⁰ arrived to participate in a three-day learning process facilitated by Gender at Work. The workshop focused on how use action learning⁴¹ as a way of working and assisted the groups to clarify their thinking and working assumptions and define their agenda more specifically.

From then until mid 2015, six of the initial action groups met monthly for group mentoring sessions with the coaches/mentors. The core group and action groups have met quarterly for collective reflection, sharing, learning and planning meetings facilitated by Gender at Work. The Gender at Work team has also organized reflection sessions rooted in the theory and practice of Emergent Learning about three times a year. These sessions have been led by Tanya Beer, a Gender at Work Associate and strategic learning facilitator.

Between November 2014 and September 2015, the groups, through their own commitment and enthusiasm, have organised community-wide spaces for further

³⁸ See Michel's description of what kind of preparation it took from her to feel confident to facilitate the open space, with so little facilitator control, in Friedman, Michel (2016). Transforming Cultures of Violence. Ploughing the soil, planting the seeds of new social norms. A story of the Letsema Collective Impact Process focused on "How can we create 0% Gender Based Violence" in the Vaal, Gauteng, South Africa – see weblink ref

³⁹ **Vegetable growing group** – aims to make the vegetable garden a safe space that allows the building of relationships of equality between men and women, and enables them to work together
Dialogue group – creates spaces for community members to dialogue with each other and break their silence about GBV

Traditional Healers Group – aims to stop and prevent the abduction/kidnapping of persons (male/female) without their permission/consent.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse group – aims to address the lack of open communication among young boys and girls

Each 1 – Teach 1 group – aims to provide information to young people (through schools) on LGBTI issues

Men's Calabash – seeks to strengthen male involvement in creating a tolerant society

The Core group – aims to sustain the initiative, continue to create new partnerships and attract more stakeholders that can contribute.

By June 2015, the Men's Calabash group and the Each 1 Teach 1 group were unable to continue. Interested members from these groups have joined one of the other groups.

⁴⁰ Two of the mentors had been working with G@W for some time in the GAL peer learning processes; four of the mentors had recently participated in a 6 month G@W led democratic feminist facilitator capacity development process. This particular kind of mentoring or coaching process was however new to all the coaches. Ray Gordezky, a G@W associated supported the workshop from a distance and Shamim Meer facilitated it.

⁴¹ See Marquardt, M (2011): Optimizing the Power of Action Learning, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, Boston.

dialogue and engagement, involving new stakeholders. They have either facilitated these themselves or drawn on the expertise of the newly trained coaches/facilitators. The idea behind this strategy was to facilitate local participants' agency and control as much as possible. Whereas initially, Gender at Work facilitated the community dialogues, now we only provide reflection and thinking support. The community events included: five World Cafés⁴²; a Heritage Day event; a workshop on gender, culture and tradition; a sports tournament for young girls and boys; a policy discussion with Contralesa, the traditional leaders' authority, to discuss controls for illegal initiation schools; a large public gathering (of over 350 members of the community) to discuss the abduction of children for initiations, as well as bullying and gangsterism; and a memorial walk in honour of a local woman who was stabbed to death by her partner.

In addition to these larger events, action groups have initiated dialogues in places where they have influence and have built relationships with additional change agents and authorities in their communities.⁴³ The police, for instance, has voiced interest in joining with Letsema in community-led events. The Vaal University of Technology (VUT) has also sought to become involved as an interested stakeholder.

The grant supporting this program ended in December 2015. Since July 2016, the action groups have been busy working on their own fundraising proposals and, with other funds, have run a series of dialogues on xenophobia and its gendered aspects. The Letsema process lasted just over thirty-four months, with the bulk of the on-the-ground work having happened since the large cross-district meeting in June 2014. During 2016, Letsema did not have sufficient resources to continue working at the same pace. However, action groups have continued doing what they can within their own resource constraints and an action research project has been working on developing an evidence-based report to raise awareness of GBV and of the positive outcomes of these change projects and to secure further funds.

⁴² With focus areas ranging from Tradition, culture and gender, to alcohol and drug abuse, to gangsterism in schools or general dialogues answering the core framing question. See stories in ""Meer, S (ed.) 2016, OUR HEARTS ARE JOINED: *Writings From Letsema*. Creating Zero Percent Gender Based Violence in the Vaal, https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7Da5L0N_Qz4VmNvVmNsR2wxWG8/view

⁴³ For instance, – families, neighbourhoods, with mother's groups, in churches, schools, taverns, sports clubs

2.2.2 The Labour Rights for Women (LRW) Campaign⁴⁴

2.2.2.1 Women's Labour in Context: Precarious Employment, Elusive Rights and the Burden of Care Work

The LRW Campaign was funded by the International Trade Union Federation (ITUC) and initiated in South Africa to address barriers that women continue to face to their right to decent work; their right to freedom from poverty; and their right to freedom from discrimination. South African women are disproportionately affected by both poverty and inequality. Large numbers of women are the sole providers in female-headed households, with more than half of these living in poverty. Large numbers of women make up the ranks of the unemployed, with young women school-leavers having little hope of accessing further education or securing decent work.

Working women make up most low paid workers. They also make up most unprotected workers – for example, many are migrant workers. Additionally, they make up many of the workers engaged in precarious forms of work – for example, work in the informal economy, domestic work, farm work and sex work.

Women's disproportionate burden of care work, or reproductive labour, further restricts their access to employment opportunities as well as their exercise of rights to paid labour and to active participation in trade unions. Cuts in social expenditures have affected services such as home-based care, placing an additional burden on women to manage care work in the home, while increasing unemployment among women, since these public sectors employ overwhelming numbers of women.

While there have been advances in legal rights, including those codified in the country's constitution and in other legislation to advance women's rights, these 'paper' rights have yet to be translated into real rights.

Despite a constitution widely known for its protection of rights to equality, women and LGBTI people continue to face discrimination in all sectors of society, including in the workplace and within trade unions. Constitutional protections of the rights of workers to fair labour practice, freedom of association and collective bargaining also have not guaranteed protections to all workers, and especially women. Women workers experience additional difficulties in relation to men workers because of the sectors within which they are employed and because of the double burden they have as paid workers and caregivers. Lastly, despite constitutional protections to the rights of all workers to health care services, including reproductive health care, and to sufficient food and water, unemployed women, women in precarious work, and women in low paying jobs are often unable to access such services and meet these basic needs.

While acknowledged in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and Labour Relations Act, women in precarious work, such as domestic work, often struggle to

⁴⁴ This summary has been developed from various LRW documents including the Nov 2015 LRW ITUC evaluation report, the Oct 2015 LRW proposal, the LRW case study, the LRW 2012-2015 activities profile.

have provisions in the labour legislation enforced, largely because they are unorganised. Even among unionised workers, protections of women's rights are lacking; this is evident, for example, in the barriers that women face to exercising their right to maternity leave and employment protection, which are codified in trade union collective agreements and in national legislation. Within trade unions, which are largely male-led and male-dominated, women often find themselves in subordinate positions, with limited leadership opportunities and with issues directly affecting women – such as maternity protection – marginalised in collective bargaining processes. In addition to social attitudes that discriminate against women, organisational norms within trade unions tend to reinforce such forms of discrimination against women.

In sum, women workers in South Africa are engaged in an ongoing struggle to secure decent working conditions; combine work and motherhood; be treated as equals; and to work in places free of violence and sexual harassment. Women workers continue to struggle for equal pay for work of equal value and for decent maternity protection.

2.2.2.2 Building the campaign infrastructure

The Labour Rights for Women (LRW) Project was set up in June 2012 by the Gender Coordinators of the four national labour federations in South Africa, who united despite their political and ideological differences, to advance the rights and material condition of working women. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) is an alliance partner, along with the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party. Membership is primarily black⁴⁵. Another member, the Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA, is non-aligned politically, with a mixed race (majority black) membership. The National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) comes from a black consciousness tradition, and has a predominantly black membership. The Confederation of South African Workers' Unions (CONSAWU), has the smallest membership of all the federations, a mixed race (majority white) membership, and does not form part of the trade union federation representation at NEDLAC.⁴⁶ Nina Benjamin, the Gender Coordinator at LRS, claims the LRW as the “only space she knows of where all four federations come together where they can collaborate despite differences in their histories, organising strategies and political approaches”.⁴⁷ At the time of LRW's launch, all four federations were facing similar challenges in shining a spotlight on women's rights within their federations and within regional and international networks of labour organisations.

As part of an ITUC initiated campaign, (with the support from the FLOW fund), the LRW in South Africa was launched with initial coordination support from the Labour Research Service (LRS), the international Solidarity Centre and the Gauteng

⁴⁵ In South African terms, black refers here to Indian, Colored and African.

⁴⁶ National Economic Development and Labour Council is the vehicle by which government, labour, business and community organisations seek to cooperate, through problem solving and negotiation, on economic, labour and development issues, and related challenges facing the country. <http://new.nedlac.org.za/?p=92>

⁴⁷ Written and verbal communication with Michel Friedman, Feb 2016

Community Safety Labour Sector. Nosipho Twala was the LRS staff person responsible for supporting this campaign; by the start of the democratic feminist facilitator capacity development program in April 2014, Nosipho had been coordinating the South African component of the LRW campaign for just under a year.

The main objective of the campaign was to increase diverse women's capabilities to promote and protect their right to decent work, their right to freedom from poverty and their right to justice and equality. Nosipho, having been inspired by her experience with Letsema, knew first-hand the power of building collaborative relationships and the use of a collective impact approach.

The LRW is deliberately inclusive, seeking to improve the lives of young women, LGBTI women, migrant women, women in the labour force and unemployed women. The LRW seeks to promote the organisation of unorganised women workers and to build the capabilities and agency of women in trade unions. Among women in employment, the LRW focuses on women in precarious work, such as in call centres, the retail sector, domestic and farm work, and women in the informal sector. Due to the history of apartheid in South Africa, most women working in these low paid sectors are black African.

The LRW is a two-pronged operation. One prong is devoted to developing an organisational infrastructure that can sustain and support coordination and collaboration between diverse women union federation members. This includes increasing the consciousness and agency of trade union activists around gender inequality and women's labour rights and increasing the participation of women activists in union activities and in leadership positions within individual workplaces and union structures. The other prong aims to support the conceptual and practical implementation of specific campaign activities around the foci of maternity protection and reproductive rights; sexual harassment in the workplace; the rights of domestic workers to decent work; and the rights and needs of young women workers and of LGBT workers. Activities have included the provision of clear guidelines, information, statistics and referral resources on the central issues affecting women workers; challenges to bargaining agreements, laws and policies, and increased alignment of national and international⁴⁸ labour policies relating to women's rights and entitlements so that these address issues of concern to low-income South African women.

The LRW practice focuses on empowering women leaders with feminist political, analytical and planning skills and improving women's participation in social dialogue

⁴⁸ S.A has not ratified 62 conventions – of the ones most relevant to the LRW work:

C156 - Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156)

Convention concerning Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women Workers: Workers with Family Responsibilities (Entry into force: 11 Aug 1983)

C183 - Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)

Convention concerning the revision of the Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952 (Entry into force: 07 Feb 2002)

http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11210:0::NO::P11210_COUNTRY_ID:102888

and bargaining. The LRW organizational culture gives great attention to how the four federations work together and to how women members relate to each other – with the aim of building a greater sense of sisterhood.

Between June 2012 and December 2014, the LRW was launched in all nine provinces of South Africa, with campaign teams set up to lead the work. In total, the teams comprised representatives from COSATU, FEDUSA, NACTU and CONSAWU. Nosipho works collectively with the team and has introduced methodologies, and ways of working that build confidence and deepen team members' ownership of the campaign. Through the support of Nosipho and other facilitators and leaders, the teams have initiated, budgeted for, led and managed programs and projects to improve the working conditions of union members. After each stage in the process, teams have engaged in deep reflection, sharing what they are learning, what is working well and what is not working and where they need to improve.

During the time Nosipho was participating in the facilitator training, she used what she was learning about feminist democratic principles and principles and methodologies of adult education to strengthen both these pillars. Nosipho introduced to the LRW, practices intrinsic to Gender at Work's holistic model of organizational change, practices such as storytelling; appreciative inquiry; 'whole person' approaches; and confronting with respect and deep listening. These practices have helped to affirm team membership, ownership and cultivate relationships based on mutual respect and appreciation. As such these practices support participants at an individual level to become the change they want to see, while at an organisational level they support the creation of a different culture of how to work together and slowly start to cultivate new more equal norms.

In the change processes it supports, the LRW draws upon the Gender at Work Framework in asking members to consider what needs to change at both personal levels (including in their own homes), as well as at more systemic levels in their unions, sites of employment and broader communities. In this way, the LRW intentionally facilitates greater integration between the trade unions and the community and between personal and social transformation. In essence, the LRW encourages 'working women' in all forms of employment as well as those seeking employment, to engage with all their identities and roles and to give value to both productive and reproductive work.

By the end of 2016, the organisational infrastructure for LRW included:
a national coordinating team made up of the national gender coordinators from the four labour federations, with coordinating support from LRS, Solidarity Centre, and the Gauteng Community Safety Labour Sector; provincial teams, made up of the provincial gender co-ordinators and gender activists from member unions, community groups championing women and LGBT rights and unemployed women. Team members represent the target groups and are in regular contact with these groups.⁴⁹ In the more rural provinces, such as Limpopo and the Northern Cape, team

⁴⁹ Namely - women working on farms, in call centres and as domestic workers, young women, women in community formations, and LGBT people

members are particularly committed to advancing the rights of rural women. Both the structures and ways of working within the LRW are significant because they embody, strengthen and give life to the notion of 'worker control' and moreover women workers' control. They facilitate greater ease of implementation, involvement, communication and feedback with members as well as in dealing with leaders at national level.

2.2.3 What conditions, approaches and practices nurture feminist and collaborative leadership?

In this paper, we have chosen to explore four principles and associated practices that contribute to creating conditions supportive of a feminist praxis of leadership. The future we create through our activism is influenced by the way we confront and challenge oppression and unequal power relations. In practice, these principles and practices often emerge together and/or intersect; therefore, isolating individual examples feels somewhat misleading. The way individual leaders operate and the ways in which organisations and teams create cultures of working are, for example, interlinked. We see both as relevant to discussions on feminist leadership. Both Letsema and LRW have been influenced by similar practices; however, the way these practices have been translated into action has differed because of local context.

Examples demonstrating the four principles in practice.

2.2.3.1 Common vision

The first important principle is that participants **develop a common vision** as guided by feminist values. Participants reflect on what is present in their daily lives and agree on a deeper purpose that motivates them to work collectively and collaboratively in creating something going forward. We have found that focusing on what it is we wish to create is more potent as an energising force than focusing on what it is we wish to critique. From the discipline of Emergent Learning, we have learned that constructing this vision in the form of what is known as a 'framing question,' rather than a straightforward goal, helps to stimulate curiosity and keep it alive.⁵⁰ It also helps to create space for multiple possibilities to emerge as viable responses to a problem, and for participants to feel the freedom and responsibility to respond from the vantage point of their own reality.

2.2.3.1.1 Example from Letsema: developing a framing question

⁵⁰ See Darling, Marlilyn, Smith, Jillaine Sparkes Guber, Heidi (2015): 4QP Guide to Emergent Learning, Fourth Quarant partners, LLC, Boston.

Early in the Letsema story, I, Michel was leading the Gender at Work team facilitating a meeting with the thirty people who became the initial members of the Letsema core group. The first day was spent creating conditions in which the participants could get to know each other better, sharing personal stories and reflection about gendered violence and using the Gender at Work framework to collectively deepen their analysis of their personal stories and existing strategies for addressing GBV. On the second day, I divided people into groups of four – mixed as far as possible by gender/age/sexual orientation/kind of organisation. The question they were asked to discuss was framed as follows: *What is the question that, if explored deeply, could give us a real breakthrough? That, if explored with others, could make a difference to the future of violence against women and against people who don't conform to gender stereotypes?*

To give groups a chance to see what others had done and to take their own thinking a little deeper, after one round, the groups were changed to create a different mix of four. The groups were asked to answer the question again. The answers that the previous group at that table had written were available for them to consider. The range of questions generated through this process covered a wide terrain and were sorted into themes and placed on the wall. The themes reflected the intersectional perspectives of participants at that time, covering both personal and systemic aspects. Some examples are given below:

- *an awareness of economic inequality and poverty* (e.g., Why do DNA test results take so long to come back to the rape victims, especially the poor, but for people who have money it's quick and easy?; Not only poor people commit crime – we need to find the root to try to find out: what makes someone kill or rape?);
- *sexual orientation* (e.g., What is the reason for discrimination against gays and lesbians?);
- *lack of community cohesion* (e.g., Why are people no longer interested in voluntary work to help people through their problems in communities? Do we have enough support groups? How do we convince the politicians and churches to come to the party?);
- *masculinity* (e.g., Why do men seek pleasure in the wrong places? What happens in the perpetrator's (men's) mind when they commit these evil deeds?);
- *institutional inefficiencies* (e.g., How do we enforce a dysfunctional justice system to be functional?);
- *culture* (e.g., Why do people hide these issues? Why is it difficult for people to open up? How can we use religion and culture to fight against women violence?);
- *Strategies and what can make them work more effectively?* (e.g., What strategy can we use to help women to come out of abusive relationships? The government has hosted so many workshops. Manuals are being issued but no action is being taken on GBV issues, why is that? How can we bring GBV to zero percent?)

The discussion that led to choosing the final, collectively agreed-upon, question was long and complex. I wanted participants to feel that their questions had been considered, as well as recognize that, to be a framing question, the final question needed to be as inclusive and inviting as possible. Through conversation, it became clear to everyone that the question “How can we bring GBV to zero percent?” was the one that could include many of the others; it was also forward looking. It was slightly edited to be more specific to the area we were focused on – namely – **How can we create zero percent GBV in the Vaal?** In discussion, GBV was preferred to violence against women, because it was more inclusive of violence against gender-nonconforming persons. In the end, this question has led to participants asking themselves about how violence is used to maintain inequality of various kinds including sometimes by women, for example as parents. As the facilitator, I learned how important it is not to prescribe or predetermine how a vision is developed. For participants to own the question, it takes time and it is not advisable to take short cuts. Furthermore, I eventually realised how my own history and experience of the Vaal was part of the story. Even though I was living in Cape Town, I was as much an active participant in the process as the people living now in the Vaal⁵¹.

2.2.3.1.2 Example from LRW: Nosipho’s framing question for her action experiment as a trainee feminist democratic facilitator

Nosipho’s action experiment, which was grounded in her coordinating and facilitator role at LRW, was to support women gender coordinators to be more effective as union leaders and more able to implement transformative actions that would make it possible for us to reshape our society and make it inclusive, fair and just.

After grappling with the issue for a considerable time, Nosipho developed her core framing question, which aimed to shift both the consciousness and behaviour of women union leaders. This question would guide her both during her time in the action experiment as well as subsequently, in her role at LRW:

How can the Labour Rights for Women (LRW) campaign team leaders be best supported to unleash their potential and become confident, ethical feminist political leaders who are able to speak their truth and feel respected and comfortable in their roles (whether as leaders, gender coordinators, shop stewards or organizers)?

The main activities Nosipho implemented as part of her experiment were linked to the way she worked and the ideas or concepts she was using. Nosipho emphasized a different way of working in her design and facilitation of campaign meetings, which utilized powerful questions, integrated a regular reflection practice with team members and emphasized the importance of good relationships at multiple levels.

⁵¹ See my story “Memories and New Connections” in Meer, S (ed.) 2016, OUR HEARTS ARE JOINED: *Writings From Letsema*. Creating Zero Percent Gender Based Violence in the Vaal. P124. https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7Da5L0N_Qz4VmNvVmNsR2wxWG8/view

Nina Benjamin who works closely with Nosipho, clarifies further. “From my experience the idea of “feminism” is perceived as a white issue and as something against men. In the union the notion of “solidarity” is key, so feminism would then be seen as dividing the membership”.

Nosipho managed to challenge the coordinators’ resistance to feminism by encouraging them to think deeply about the motivations for their work and by introducing them to conceptual models such as the Gender at Work Framework and feminist concepts that clarify the relationship between the private and the public, the value of women’s reproductive labour and the need to value both body and mind. Nosipho utilized more dialogic methods in her workshops and consciously built a sense of ownership among the team members, challenging their victim thinking and supporting a notion of sisterhood among different union federations. The campaign teams also included diverse representation, not only from the different federations, but also across a range of ages, sectors (including farm workers and domestic workers) and gender and sexual identities. The methodology used enabled the campaign participants to engage with and value this diversity.

Nosipho shares her experience in sharing what she had been learning and the resistance to feminism:

“I explained to the LRW participants that, as a participant in the feminist capacity development process, I would apply what I was learning in the design and facilitation of my work. I also invited them to learn from the process as it would build their capacity to facilitate programs in their different workplaces and organizations. Because people [appear to] have an allergy to the word ‘feminism’, they heard facilitation and democracy and chose to block the word feminism. Every time they would refer to this as ‘your democratic lessons’ and I had to include feminist principles and values every time until they felt comfortable to say the word. This, itself, was a highlight for me. To have them experience feminism and understand that this was broader than the way it had previously been introduced to them”.

Through the process, participants managed to create a shared vision around feminism that was more connected to the complex realities of their everyday lives.

2.2.3.2 Diversity and Inclusivity

The second principle is that of **diversity and inclusivity**. This principle includes both the practice of ensuring that as diverse a range of participants are included and represented in whatever process is being undertaken, as well as creating cultures of inclusion that facilitate maximum participation. We have found that creating learning and organising spaces that welcome diverse people (who represent different identities, perspectives and lived realities) to learn from each other and to find ways to strengthen the quality of their relationships is key. Leading systems thinker Fritjof Capra has suggested that, to promote systems’ change, its necessary to foster community and to cultivate networks. In his words, “...lasting change

frequently requires a critical mass or density of interrelationships within a community”.⁵²

Many of the people with whom we work have been socialised in cultures and systems that rely on oppressive measures that divide, devalue, humiliate, demean or diminish others; many have learned that using violence to make a point or to ‘get one’s way’ is ‘normal’. Studies have shown that societies that are generally violent and unequal are more likely to have higher levels of all forms of gender based violence.⁵³ Learning how not to reproduce such practices in our own organisations and movements is thus key to building gender-just futures – and is easier said than done. Learning how to understand and transform the classic trauma responses, described as “fight, flight or freeze⁵⁴” into proactive, positive, creative and non-violent strategies of activism is thus a necessary feminist leadership skill. It is also critical for building cultures of collaboration. Very often, traditional activists respond in ‘fight’ mode. The anger that often underlies the ‘fight’ response can so quickly move into reactive responses of revenge and attack, which can undermine collaboration – as well as one’s own sense of wellbeing. The fear that often underlies the ‘flight and freeze’ responses can lead to numbness, passivity and silence, which can isolate people and prevent them from joining with others to work collectively (and in healthier ways) for change.

Fostering maximum inclusivity requires that attention be given to how participants engage with each other in body, mind and spirit; to their multiple identities and relationships to power; and to their modes of communication, including the ways they listen to and learn from each other. In the process, we build relationships of trust. However challenging it may be to do so, it is critical to learn how to create ‘safe’, open and caring spaces that enable participants to be as fully themselves as possible – or, as Laloux (2014) puts it, “to feel safe to show up whole”.⁵⁵ When participants feel safe enough to be vulnerable with others and to face themselves with honesty and compassion, they can gain embodied experiences of responding in new ways. They also gain the skills and confidence to pursue positive behaviours and can act as role models for others. As Haylock et al. (2016) point out, “individuals have to believe in their own ability to change in order to be capable of changing and willing to do so”.⁵⁶ The assumptions underlying these practices of inclusivity include that both personal (or internal) and social transformation are required for lasting gender-just change, as well as changes in the practices we employ to challenge oppressive structures and ways of working.

⁵² Centre for Ecoliteracy (2011), Seven Lessons for Leaders in Systems Change, <https://www.ecoliteracy.org/article/seven-lessons-leaders-systems-change>

⁵³ See for example, Wilkinson, Richard (2010), *The Spirit Level: Why more Equal Societies Almost Always do Better*, Bloomsbury Press.

⁵⁴ For more on ‘power under’ see Wineman, Steven, 2003: *Power-Under. Trauma and Nonviolent Social Change*. Available at no cost www.TraumaAndNonviolence.com.

⁵⁵ Laloux 2014: 151

⁵⁶ Haylock, Laura; Cornelius Rukia, Malunga, Anthony and Mbandazayo, Kwezilomso (2016), Shifting negative social norms rooted in unequal gender and power relationships to prevent violence against women and girls, in *Gender & Development*, 24:2 p.236.

2.2.3.2.1 Example from Letsema: ‘taming’ the traditional healer and his snake

Letsema participants have learned various techniques that help to create an inclusive and safe space, including bodywork,⁵⁷ paying attention to emotion, careful listening and reflection, and cultivating curiosity and questioning rather than blame and judgement.⁵⁸ In the context of the trauma and violence in which they are operating, Letsema participants have learned the significant leadership skill of how to reduce what is seen as an innate human capacity to be reactive and, instead, strengthen their capacity to connect.⁵⁹

In early 2015, during a community dialogue meeting in Bophelong, the Letsema group demonstrated a beautiful example of what it takes to create such a safe space. The meeting took place in one of the Vaal townships in which there had been a recent bout of horrible violence led by young gangsters. The meeting was Letsema’s response, which aimed to address the interrelated issues of bullying, gangsterism, GBV, and harmful aspects of tradition and cultural norms. We all knew it was going to be an extremely challenging and potentially even dangerous situation. I was very moved by and struck by the positive feedback I received after the meeting was over and was curious to know more. Nosipho was responsible for facilitating this fairly large meeting – which attracted about 100 people – of diverse community members, including adult men and women, traditional healers, young girls, mothers of initiates, young men from initiation schools and LGBTI representatives.

In the following section, Nosipho describes how she, as facilitator of the community dialogue, negotiated a rather tricky power dynamic brought on by the entrance of a traditional healer carrying a snake and two monitor lizards.

During this meeting, one of the traditional healers arrived with a big python around his neck and two monitor lizards. People freaked out. As the facilitator, I was the one who was expected to go speak to him.

First, I greeted him and then I commented on the colour of his snake and how pretty it looked. He looked at me and smiled. However, then I told him that unfortunately, even though your snake is gorgeous, there are people here who are afraid of snakes. I asked him if there was anywhere he could put the snake in the meantime, until the meeting was done. After he protested and insisted that the snake was not a problem, he finally took the snake to his car. However, he returned with the two lizards and I told him that he couldn’t keep the lizards either, because people are afraid. He looked at me and smiled again and then proceeded to put the lizards in the hall

⁵⁷ hyperlink to piece from cap dev writing

⁵⁸ For more details see Friedman, Michel (2016). Transforming Cultures of Violence. Ploughing the soil, planting the seeds of new social norms. A story of the Letsema Collective Impact Process focused on “How can we create 0% Gender Based Violence” in the Vaal, Gauteng, South Africa – see weblink ref

⁵⁹ ⁵⁹ See Neill Baker, 9/18/2014: *Hard-wired to react. Hard-wired to connect.*

<http://www.neilbakerconsulting.com/brief-articles/category/reactivity-and-reflection>

outside where the meeting was being held. At this point I figured the gentleman had tried and I decided to continue with the meeting.

Sometimes, as a leader, one must make unexpected, last-minute decisions and be non-confrontational, but still send the right message across. If I had been rude to the man with the snake and told him to leave, it would have turned ugly. The man was friendly and started telling me about his passion for snakes and lizards and how they have taught him a lot in his profession as traditional healer. However, even after he had removed the snake and the lizards, people saw him in a different light. It was important for me to make all the participants see him as an equal in the space rather than the bad guy. So, when I was facilitating, I was extremely conscious of involving him in the group to make others relate to him as a human being. When we did the check in, he didn't say anything and just sat there quietly. His aura and energy made people very uncomfortable and fearful, so I decided to ask him to share about his expectations and what had what brought him to the meeting, and to tell everyone something about his reptiles. I felt I needed to speak to him as if I was joking but still giving him a chance to share. In response he respectfully acknowledged that while some people may be scared - for him the snakes are harmless, they are his good friends and he doesn't see them as threatening. The tension immediately changed in the room – not only had he taken the snakes out he showed that he could respect other's views. This situation put me on the spot as a facilitator, but as a leader, I had to make a decision and still make the space safe for all participants.

This experience changed my life. Because now I try very hard to really listen to participants. When you walk into a space, so many things could happen. You need to trust your instincts and to start exactly where people are at and hold the space in a manner that frees and allows others to feel supported for them to be able to speak.

It is also illustrates how important it is to start with where people are. We started with Capacitar Tai Chi, which both opens people to engage productively and connects them to each other. Then I spend a long time on the check-in, which allows each person to be heard. Together, the two activities help to bring individuals into the space, to allow everyone to participate and to feel valued.

In effect, Nosipho skillfully helped deflect a situation where the participants did not need to give up their power, nor did the traditional leader need to use his power over them. This incident speaks to the need to create a safe space. It also speaks to an idea that challenging people to listen and respond rather than get defensive can yield productive dialogue and nurture relationships within the community.⁶⁰ Nosipho first wrote about this idea in a story titled "Seeing with Kind Eyes/Confronting with

⁶⁰ See Neill Baker (2014). Respect an ongoing Practice. <http://www.neilbakerconsulting.com/key-articles/respect-an-ongoing-practice>

Respect”.⁶¹ Nosipho has herself cultivated and taught others the art of confronting power with respect, whether that power is being held by men or by women. I understand Nosipho’s position as being rooted both in the African value of ‘ubuntu,’⁶² which literally means ‘a person is a person through other persons’ and which encourages a certain respectful reciprocity – as well as the feminist principle of non-violence. For some feminists, this practice might be controversial, as it supports traditional or more conservative notions of femininity rooted in a model of a feminine peacemaker, ‘the well behaved respectful (and non-aggressive) woman’. Nosipho, however, feels that this practice is not about being submissive, but rather respectfully assertive, and in her experience, it can mitigate against some forms of backlash.

Nosipho’s ability to behave inclusively, rather than (ab)use her power as facilitator by acting in a blaming or attacking way, takes practice and skill. It requires one to cultivate the capacity to be less reactive, to transform one’s own instincts for aggression and laying blame on others. Nosipho says that regular self-reflection is what has helped her to grow this ability. Learning to understand the journey she has taken, and to notice where she is being challenged and where she is changing, is key to this reflection. Her willingness to unlearn what is not helpful and to learn what is needed to practice inclusivity, has been critical to success in this area. At the same time, she has learned to recognise that as a leader you are human, you get affected by situations and you feel, sometimes deeply. A leader is not required to perform Herculean tasks, but instead to act with thoughtfulness, focus, and respect toward others. Finally, Nosipho has relied significantly on bodywork to support her in transforming difficult emotional and physical states so she can be calm and present in moments such as the one described above.

2.2.3.2.2 Example from LRW: making space for LGBT participants

The LRW has sought to include LGBT workers in its efforts to address workplace discrimination and make the workplace safe for all workers by challenging homophobic sentiments amongst union members and within structures. The LRW – supports LRW participants to challenge their own prejudices, ways of stereotyping but also the power they have to create/or not to create inclusive spaces (Benjamin, pers.com. 2016). In the following story, Nosipho explains some of the complexity behind making this intention real for the LRW. She explores the role she played both formally and informally in helping to facilitate greater inclusivity, both of LGBTI workers as well as those who are resistant to the idea.

⁶¹ Nosipho Twala, 2012: Seeing with Kind Eyes/ Confronting with Respect, in Transforming Power A Knotted Rope, edited by Shamim Meer, Gender at Work. <http://genderatwork.org/resources/>

⁶² Literally means “a person is a person through other persons”. Bishop Tutu describes a person with ubuntu as “open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are”, In Desmond Tutu, 1999. No Future Without Forgiveness, Doubleday, Univ. of Michigan.

In our LRW annual planning meeting we agreed to take forward issues of LGBT workers. As the coordinating team we agreed to take this discussion forward in one of the provinces. I then facilitated a planning meeting on handling discrimination in the world of work, not knowing that one of the campaign team members was struggling with this issue. During the discussion, she kept asking questions and inquiring about the subject. I noticed she looked worried. Soon after that meeting, we organized a workshop focusing on handling discrimination of LGBT workers in the world of work. As a group, we noticed that the aforementioned campaign team member was struggling with the issue and was uncomfortable. When the participant and I were alone later that night, I asked her about the meeting and how she felt. She was open and confirmed to me that she was struggling. That evening, we were then invited by one of the participants to a 50th birthday party. Most of the people at the party were from the LGBT community. We were then invited to join the dance floor and we all joined, except for the struggling campaign team member. She stood there in the corner and refused to dance or sit in the tent.

The following morning, the campaign team member approached one of the coordinating team members complaining that she received a strange message from one of the people at the party. She was worried because she knew that she did not give her details to anyone at the party. She couldn't understand how they found her. When I spoke to her later that morning, I knew that I had to create a non-judgmental space for us to have a direct conversation without making her uncomfortable. I first asked her if she was comfortable with us discussing this issue with the team. When she agreed, I had to think of a respectful way to do it.

I decided that the most strategic way to open a respectful conversation was to ask for a reflection and review on the workshop from the day before. While evaluating the meeting, she indicated that, as a Christian, she was feeling seriously conflicted about the LGBT issue. I later organized a follow up workshop with the team, focusing on our role as gender advocates. As a collective, we identified the role we play as change agents and leaders, as well as our individual issues and concerns. We addressed why it's important to be inclusive and how necessary it is to protect the space and make it safe so all participants can feel equal; how the personal is political and that it's better to be honest and to say that you are struggling so we can deal with it. As social justice and general activists our principles and values, including [our] religious affiliation, cannot supersede the rights of others, including minority groups. In this meeting, the campaign team member who was struggling was the one who identified that religion can be divisive. She said, 'As activists we need to see all our struggles as connected. My religion and my principles cannot be more important than the other person's right'. Recently, I encouraged this same campaign team member to take responsibility for leading a discussion... on the legislation prohibiting discrimination [against LGBT communities]. I assumed that the task would

give her an opportunity to learn about discrimination and the law. That, in reading stories of victims about how discrimination makes them feel, she would develop a clearer understanding of why we needed to defend these rights. Subsequent events have shown this to be true. Not only did she lead the discussion, showing respect and consideration to all participants; she has since established a forum for LGBT workers in her union.

As a leader, I would not have been able to create this enabling space without learning the facilitation skills in the democratic feminist facilitator training. The training helped me hone my skills to confront with respect, using kind eyes and a light touch to handle very challenging and sensitive feelings, norms and stereotypes.

2.2.3.3 *Self organising in the context of working collaboratively*

The third important principle is that of **self-organising within a context of working collectively and collaboratively**. For many feminists, creating conditions in which members of organisations, movements and networks can break free from authoritarian and even bureaucratic modes of control or decision-making, and can work more democratically, has long been a central aspiration. Creating conditions in which participants are empowered and enabled to act; where they can find ways to simultaneously collaborate and feel a sense of ownership over their actions is thus an important feminist leadership skill. This is also a central concept in the systems view of life. Fritjof Capra suggests that the pattern favoured by life "is a network pattern capable of self-organization...Life constantly reaches out into novelty, and this property of all living systems is the origin of development, learning, and evolution."⁶³ Giving close attention, therefore, to who makes what decisions; how information flows; how everyone can be powerful and have space to lead or take initiative; and how people reflect on their practice and share what they're learning about themselves, each other and their relationship to the world are important parts of creating more equal movements, networks, and organisational cultures.

2.2.3.3.1 Example from Letsema: theme-related action groups and collective impact approach

In the Letsema case, participants have become active and involved either in their own right or affiliated with other organisations. A turning point in the Letsema process happened during a large community gathering, the two-day 'open space' meeting alluded to in section 2.2.1.2, above. Open space meetings create time and space for people to engage deeply and creatively around issues of collective concern. They also maximize democratic participation and support inclusivity, while challenging authoritarian forms of control. Each open space meeting requires participants to take responsibility for their own engagement. The agenda is self-

⁶³ In Centre for Ecoliteracy (2011), *Seven Lessons for Leaders in Systems Change*, <https://www.ecoliteracy.org/article/seven-lessons-leaders-systems-change>

generated by participants, who raise topics about which they feel passionate. Participants self-select the discussions they wish to join and for how long they wish to engage; they are also free to rove between discussions as they wish. I facilitated this meeting, which demanded from me enormous capacity to trust and cede control.

After a day of in-depth discussion and reflection on the core question – how can we create zero percent GBV in the Vaal – participants were asked to initiate actions that they cared about and that they thought would go some way in answering the core question. Then, others who were also attracted to the same theme could join the initiator to form an action group. At the time, twenty different topics were generated, but in the end only six of the groups sustained their commitment. The action groups became self-organised and continued to initiate, manage, reflect upon and organise their activities over the duration of the change process. New members who were drawn to the theme of the group are welcome to join. The action groups require no outside management. For the period of the FLOW grant, the groups met monthly as individual groups with Gender at Work coaching support and on a quarterly basis as a collective to share experiences, reflect on what they were learning and cultivate a collaborative culture. In this way, through the action groups, women, men and gender non-conforming people could take the lead on issues they cared about. Through the collective meetings, they were all able to practice relating to each other in new, more inclusive ways and to confront difficult issues respectfully. Given the focus on GBV, working together challenged all of us to practice working in ways that did not reinforce hierarchy or that perpetuated either overt or subtle forms of violence. My role as facilitator, and the role of other Gender at Work facilitators in that process, was to create the conditions under which such autonomous action and collaborative practice could flourish despite the diversity and differential power relations. Central to our mission was our effort to create a culture that valued and encouraged individual and collective reflection and learning.

Nosipho was a coach in the Letsema process. Together, we were all learning the importance of maximizing collective impact and collaborative practice, while developing the skills to do so most effectively. Nosipho also drew on this experience in her role as support coordinator for the LRW.

2.2.3.3.2 Example from LRW: building a culture of collaboration and enhancing capacity for self-organising

At the first session of the Democratic Feminist Facilitator Capacity Development Program, in April 2014, Nosipho described her perception of the organizational culture within the unions, from the perspective of the LRW campaign, as being strong, structural, bureaucratic and patriarchal.⁶⁴ Moreover the LRW campaign was initiated at a time of great tension and factionalism. Issues such as sexual harassment were side-lined; women experienced a sense of powerlessness and were afraid to speak out. Budgets for gender programs across the four federations were

⁶⁴ Reference the full LRW case study paper for the cap dev work– hyperlink -

limited and initially gender coordinators and campaign members, found it difficult to work with each other across the four federations. It was in this context that Nosipho was influential in helping to build sisterhood which created a different ethos and way of working as a campaign.

The organizational processes of the LRS campaign have changed in the years since its founding in 2012. In the beginning, national gender coordinators drove the campaign: in addition to creating provincial campaign teams and setting these teams' agendas, they helped to codify organizational processes and leadership structures. They also provided direct support to newly elected leaders. By July 2012, the provincial teams had been established, and were used to working in the hierarchical and bureaucratic union culture so they had little autonomy. Some provincial activities had to be coordinated with help from the national offices. Over time, however, leadership of the provincial teams has devolved to the regions themselves. Provincial LRW teams plan and facilitate their own meetings and manage their own budgets. National coordinators are participants in provincial processes, not drivers. At the constituency level, these changes have produced tangible effects: people are re-energized. Participants in regional activities are excited, taking more initiative and exercising ownership over the campaign.

In the sections below, Nosipho describes some of the practices she has encouraged (both at the federation level and at the level of provincial teams) to grow a knowledge-sharing collaborative and invite more self-organising across the LRW. A positive outcome of the new ways of working has been greater acceptance and influence of the LRW in the union movement as a whole. Nina Benjamin (pers com. 2016), adds that "in a context of increasing retrenchments and loss of union membership, splintering of unions, a struggle for resources and where internal political differences has led to sharp divisions, factionalism and so on, the LRW has been an important "beacon" of solidarity and support." She sees it as significant that that there has been no major "split" within the LRW and that women across federations have shown they can work together, and find issues that are unifying.

Collaboration

The LRW teams have developed a deliberate practice of collaborating across the federation and generating buy-in from individual unions to the LRW vision. The national LRW campaign team meets twice a month, either in the Solidarity Centre or in different federation offices. In the provinces, the teams also alternate among different union or federation provincial offices. This practice is deliberate; we aim, through the rotation, to increase our visibility as gender leaders. We want every federation and union to know about this campaign and to increase the buy-in from office bearers in each of the trade unions, who endorsed the campaign at the time of the national and provincial launches. When meetings are held, we always request that the general secretary or other office bearer from the host union (who are usually men) welcomes the LRW team and re-pledges the organization's support for the campaign. We have found that giving office bearers this platform significantly

increases their enthusiasm for LRW: after participating in the official welcome and meet-and-greet, office bearers have been known to get so excited that they volunteer to sponsor catering for subsequent reflection and planning meetings. The interaction between LRW teams and union officers has facilitated a feedback loop between the unions and the campaign – in meetings, LRW teams take the opportunity to provide general updates as well as share insights and lessons learned – and has contributed to the LRW gender coordinators' reports being well received.

The trade union movement is a movement needing healing and transformation (from the LRW perspective especially in relation to the challenges facing the women in the trade unions). Building reflection spaces and nurturing them in a gentle and supportive manner has allowed participants to feel free to express themselves and speak their truth. This has also inspired them to be open to experiment and has taken away the language of failure by allowing organizations that rarely reflect on change processes to address their fear of change.

Nina Benjamin suggests that the strategy at play here “of transforming power relations in a slow, purposeful way, perhaps offers a different experience of feminism. One that is not about male hating or about destroying the union”. She sees it as part of a “slow” journey of dealing with power relations in the unions where the General Secretaries are mostly men and hold a great deal of power. “By inviting them in the way the LRW has, their positional power is acknowledged while they are simultaneously being subtly exposed to alternative practices. For instance, the use of bodywork such as Tai Chi; a respectful space; mixed federation groups; a trade union campaign with a vision and goal and very little infighting”.

Self-organising

Regular planning, reflection and learning meetings have become key to helping both the provincial and national teams to cultivate practices of information-sharing, or consultation, and of self-organising. At both provincial and national levels, the campaign teams have initiated regular planning meetings that have prepared them for specific actions. As leaders, we have taken time to clarify our intentions and assumptions as well as identify expected results. The reflection meetings, held during and after direct actions, have enabled us to articulate and share insights and lessons about good practices and what hasn't worked well, and identify immediate next steps. This way of working has empowered us to model leadership and social change in a new and more inclusive way.

In the following passage, Nosipho reflects on her role in encouraging a space for self-organising:

As the LRS support person, a big part of my role is to support the provincial campaign teams... According to the campaign rules, each province team must have representation from each federation, two members from each. One of the elected members must be a union official. The second must be a worker or a shop steward serving in the union gender structure. Officials are familiar

with union culture and protocols and have greater access to union resources – They assist to organize “time offs” for workers and coordinate activities from the union office; therefore, it is beneficial to have an official on board. The contributions of both team members are, however, invaluable, especially when nominees demonstrate not only sensitivity to gender issues, but also a willingness to try out new strategies or experiment with new processes in the union or workplace. During elections, nominees have shown passion and interest that has generated support from other union members and inspired a culture of self-organising.

My role as the LRS facilitator was to work with and support provincial teams. After they are elected, myself and [my colleague] Nhlanhla⁶⁵ visit them in their provinces and assist them to understand their roles and how to create a relationship of sisterhood as gender coordinators of the four federations. We support them in developing and strengthening a working relationship based on mutual respect and a non-judgemental approach. We also revisit the key issues identified in the provincial launch and coach them to develop a program of action that includes reflection and learning spaces. They then identify a joint action under the LRW banner. We then mentor them through regular phone calls. In this way, they are supported and learn to work democratically and collaboratively and to have the confidence to operate in their provinces.

In the [early stages], we also reflect on the importance and relevance of using a bonding exercise at the start of any meeting, which can calm and prepare us for the discussion. We examine why we started the provincial launches with Tai Chi exercises. For all provincial campaign meetings, I suggest they either use the Tai Chi exercises (we share the accompanying music and details of how to do the exercises) or some other kind of song, dance or movement which they think might play the same role in [positively energizing] the group. We continue learning how to work as a team. To get the group into the habit of reflection, I model a sharing exercise. I ask them to share what, for them, was a highlight at the recent launch. Each person gets a chance to share a highlight and to explain why this was important for them. For the individual women members, this process helps to build a sense of individual agency and confidence. It also helps build a sense of accountability, in that each member learns to appreciate that her contribution counts and needs to be accounted for.

From here, we identify four themes on which each federation can take the lead. Giving each federation a focus has enhanced their representatives’ stake in the process and increased women’s participation, leadership and interest in [being active participants in] the trade union. We also realised that in focusing on one theme, it was easier to be thorough, to deepen our understanding and to improve our articulation of the issues. This process is

⁶⁵ Nhlanhla Mabizela was also a participant in the democratic facilitator training and works for the Solidarity Centre, a labour support organisation and partner to the LRW.

giving the federations a chance to learn from each other, while strengthening each federation's own gender department. The ripple effect of the networking and the in-depth focus is striking. At the policy level, for instance, COSATU's gender department succeeded in getting the COSATU Congress to adopt a policy on gender and sexual harassment. In 2016, FEDUSA had its first gender conference and adopted its first gender policy at the Congress.

The LRW has been strengthened by us having frequent conversations as campaign teams, reflecting and learning from our experience. At each meeting, we use a check-in and check-out process which focuses on affirming and acknowledging each other and the different experiences we all bring into the space. This simple practice makes us feel human. We realise that thanking and acknowledging each other helps us connect and build our sisterhood.

Provincial teams testify that reflection as a practice has allowed them to deepen their impact and track what is emerging, including new ideas to try out. In provincial meetings, we often ask questions, reflect and plan as a cross-federation team. Individual members eventually stopped worrying about their own federations' identity problems. Team members could see that we were stronger together. They moved from bragging about individual union or federation strengths to working together as a team, recognizing that this increased our visibility as LRW. Our work began to be seen and noticed by organizations such as the Department of Community Safety, the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), The International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Department of Labour.

2.2.3.4 Creating cultures of care

The idea that 'biology is not destiny' challenges the idea that care work – in other words, work that sustains life and cares for the wellbeing of citizens (children, the elderly, partners, and other family members) – must be done by women. Women do not, then, have to be burdened by this gender role. Care work is often devalued and underpaid in our monetised economy. When it is framed as 'women's work', it helps create hierarchies of gendered power that can confine women and prevent them from engaging fully and more flexibly in the public space. In highly unequal societies, paid care work is often delegated to the poorest women, who are most vulnerable. Feminist leadership practice often seeks to create conditions in which this work is valued as an essential ingredient in sustaining life on earth and persons of all genders are supported to engage in care work. Another aspect of care, which is particularly relevant to the work we have described in this paper, is in creating conditions that help everyone learn to relate in ways that don't cause harm, that are not violent and do not violate the personal or physical integrity of others.

2.2.3.4.1 Care in action: examples from Letsema

Letsema's *raison d'être* is, in a way, about creating cultures of care – within Letsema; within participants' own households; and within the public spaces in which Letsema participants engage. The careful attention given by all Gender at Work facilitators to creating positive learning environments offers a critical opportunity for Letsema participants to experience, in an embodied way, what it feels like to engage in ways that are not violent or otherwise harmful. The story about the traditional healer and the snake, detailed in section 2.2.3.2.1, is a good illustration. During Letsema meetings, both women and men are seen engaging in common care-giving tasks usually associated with women, such as child care, cooking, and cleaning the venue. Other examples are shared by the participants themselves in the edited volume, *Our Hearts are Joined: Writings from Letsema* (2016, p103).⁶⁶ One of these stories, written by a male participant, Simon Lehoko⁶⁷, is entitled "Empowered to Care". He says: "Letsema has given me the opportunity to meet and know people from most of the communities around where I live. The discussion about our different social problems in our societies empower me to try and help with some of our societies' illnesses. I am now more aware of the issues faced by our people....I can engage with community members on matters that affect them and find solutions. As an activist I can help curb further violations. Letsema has changed me from being a silent observer of community problems". His story shows the value, for Letsema participants, of nurturing and modelling a culture of care.

2.2.3.4.2 Example from LRW: reconceptualising maternity rights as parental rights

Having and caring for children contributes, in critical ways, to the economy: it generates new citizens and ultimately, new workers. Creating conditions that will make it possible for all women, men and gender non-conforming persons who are parents to more fully and equally participate in care-giving and child-rearing is not so easy to achieve. Not only do individuals need to be willing to challenge traditional stereotyped roles, but also to actively work to create more balance in the relationship between what goes in economic spaces (the public sphere) and what goes on 'at home' (the private sphere). In the absence of being able to totally transform our economies to facilitate such balance, shorter term compromises are often sought. Seeking the provision to make it more possible for formally employed nursing mothers to be supported is often the starting point for such struggles in the workplace. What is important about the LRW is that it has expanded its framing of the issue to include parental rights more generally.

Below, Nosipho explains what transpired to shift the debate from a focus on maternity protection to parental rights.

Since the LRW started, the union federations had been running a campaign fighting for maternity protection, focusing specifically on women's needs. We

⁶⁶ See "Meer, S (ed.) 2016, OUR HEARTS ARE JOINED: *Writings From Letsema*. Creating Zero Percent Gender Based Violence in the Vaal. https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7Da5L0N_Qz4VmNvVmNsR2wxWG8/view

⁶⁷ https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7Da5L0N_Qz4VmNvVmNsR2wxWG8/view

were not getting sufficient buy-in. There was not enough political will in South Africa to ratify the ILO Convention 183 on maternity protection.

Towards the end of 2015, we were in KwaZulu Natal, in a reflection meeting, one day after finishing a workshop that was part of the campaign. Men in the room were so negative. They told us that maternity protection was costly and we needed to be reasonable as women. The LRW team were tired and drained because we had to fight to be heard, but still, the wage struggle was seen as more important than the struggle to secure maternity protection. The men could not see how their opposition was devaluing maternity protection. After a long conversation, we were discouraged but still motivated to fight.

From the facilitator training, I had learned the importance of analysing the public-private divide. I saw how fighting only for support for women as parents in some ways reinforces gender stereotypes, perpetuating the idea that men cannot be caregivers. The training helped me see the value of changing the norm and the need to be doing something else with men as partners in the movement. This idea was a difficult one to share with others, because it somehow seemed abstract. However, experiencing the men's negativity that day helped me to connect the dots and to use the opportunity to help others to see this as well. From that meeting and various other regional meetings and reflections, together in the LRW we reconceptualised and reframed the campaign. We realised that all working parents – same sex partners, adoptive parents, surrogate and heterosexual parents alike – needed access to parental support. We then identified male champions in the movement and had a discussion with them about this issue. Most of the champions were young fathers and expressed interest in playing a role in their children's development and could support [the idea of] maternity protection as a human right and a development issue emerged. This led us to advocate for male champions for gender equality. The feedback we also received from men when they were addressed by other men on this issue was positive. This unity is very important if we are serious about parental rights and gender equality. When the debate about maternity protection is framed as a development and parental issue affecting all working parents, then generating buy-in becomes easy, as everyone can locate themselves in the debate.

The LRW includes women workers in many marginal sectors of the economy, such as recycling or informal trading, whose babies are often seen sleeping on pavements. These voices led us to discuss how to extend coverage to all working women in society, to all workplaces, including the home and the street, whether employed or self-employed. After all, any one of us can carry the future president!

The debate shifted from the workshop halls and parental leave became an important part of the campaign strategy.

CONCLUSION

A major dilemma in society is that of the relationship between personal transformation and social transformation. One of the advantages of the G@W framework, is that it talks so directly to the necessity for change at both personal and systemic levels. We know that without both personal transformation – changes in individual consciousness and behaviour and capacity to access rights and resources that enable the ability to live differently - as well as the transformation of the formal and informal rules that govern who gets what and how, who can do what we are unlikely to experience the more equal world we would all like to live in.

The challenge for leadership then is exactly how to walk this fine line between the personal and the systemic. Heroic leadership models focus entirely on the individual and assume that they have the power to influence the whole. Collective leadership models can run the risk of denying the individual (such as in a recent debate in South Africa's parliament on whether or not the sitting president should be impeached the ruling party MP's had to vote as a party block, not according to their personal conscience). Feminist leadership theory and practice therefore needs to walk a path of finding a balance between challenging and supporting individuals to do the necessary personal transformational (and often healing) work required for them to be ethical and inspiring role models for others as well as knowing how to create new more equal organisational and social cultures and norms.

Feminist leaders need to demonstrate practices that go beyond their own immediate interests, that show concern and care for others, helping women to claim voice and experience dignity, respect, value – to be treated as full human beings. Interrogating misogyny, and not reproducing what we see as patriarchal practices that divide, devalue, demean or diminish others is easier said than done. These two case studies in different contexts and organizational settings are both experimenting with a way of working and organizing that create conditions and practices which enable a feminist praxis of leadership. In the process, unequal gender power relations are challenged.

The cases illustrate the importance of developing a common vision informed by feminist principles. In both cases, methods are used which seek to acknowledge and value everyone's unique contribution and agency while simultaneously acting to support collective action. Collective leadership, rather than individual heroic leadership, is nurtured. Practices that welcome diversity and that challenge unequal power relations by building cultures and environments of inclusion, active participation, equality, self-organising and collaboration are strongly encouraged. The stories demonstrate the care given to ensuring that individual women and men participants do not feel coerced or controlled to be accepted. Gender power hierarchies which imply that biology is destiny and that frame-care work as "women's work" are challenged. In both cases, non-violence is advocated as a key

practice in opposition to the way that violence is used as a tool that maintains most forms of inequality. Violence against women, in particular, is recognized as a tool that maintains patriarchal power.

We conclude with a reflection from Nosipho:

Through my experience, I have learned that transformation is complex and that leadership is not about using your power to oppress or silent others. If we can build the capacity of gender activists with simple tools like Tai Chi, empathetic listening, respectful questioning, and patience to connect people to their humanness and innate wisdom, a better world is indeed possible.

We have learned that men in the trade unions easily let go of their defences if we speak and engage them as human beings. We still ask the same questions that make them think hard about their male privilege. They are willing to engage and admit that it's hard to unlearn some of the things they were socialised to believe, but [they] commit to working together with the collective to create new norms. We have found that working in this way, has the potential to reduce backlash.

For me, feminist leadership is inclusive. It tries hard to eradicate the notion of 'us vs. them' and creates a responsibility for all participants to equally feel the need to address the problems affecting us and our communities.