

GENDER AT WORK



## CHANGE IS A SLOW DANCE

THREE STORIES OF  
CHALLENGING  
GENDER & POWER  
INEQUALITIES IN  
ORGANIZATIONS

Edited by  
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## PREFACE

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The monograph, “Change is like a slow dance” – integrates the reflections of three organizations which participated in a fourteen month Action-Learning Programme facilitated by Gender at Work in South Africa during 2004 and early 2005. The main objective of the programme was to catalyse and assist in facilitating a change process in three social change and human rights based organizations to deepen their own capacity for improving gender relationships and power inequalities both internally and in their programmatic work.

The bulk of the monograph consists of chapters two, three and four, the three case study chapters that share the reflections of the participating organizations in the programme. The first and fifth chapters (ie. the introduction and conclusion) are written by two Gender at Work team members, the South African programme manager and facilitator with one of the organisations and the team’s documentalist. Chapter one, introduces the change process, its assumptions as well as the three organizations. Chapter five concludes the monograph by highlighting key lessons and insights that emerge from the process.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Michel Friedman and Shamim Meer*

“*Change is like a slow dance*” is a monograph that consolidates the three stories and lessons learned during Gender at Work’s Action Learning Programme (ALP)<sup>1</sup> facilitated in South Africa during 2004. In this first chapter we introduce the three organizations that participated in the process and our working assumptions. From our perspectives as the South African programme manager cum facilitator with one of the organizations, and the documentalist, we situate the organizations in the South African context, their key concerns and their change focus for the Gender at Work Programme.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 present each organisation’s change story, and Chapter 5 discusses key learnings from the process.

### THE PROCESS

In designing and facilitating the Action Learning Programme (ALP) we attempted to develop a flexible semi-structured action-learning process that would provide a container for the change processes that unfolded in each of the three organizations. Our aim was to walk alongside and support the organizations in a change intervention of their choice. To start with each organization was asked to select three people who would carry the process for the organization and who would make up the team that participated in the programme events.

The first event involved facilitating a two-day process in which each organization met separately with the Gender at Work Action Learning facilitators<sup>2</sup> to reflect upon and review their organization, its culture and its programmes in historical context. The review included a critical assessment of the organisation’s work on gender equality and consideration of possible change projects. Through this process participants were able to see themselves and their organization as in a mirror, gain new insights and were provided the opportunity for internal debate and discussion on diverse perspectives.

Soon after these initial meetings, all three organisational teams met together with the Gender at Work Action Learning Facilitators in a three-day peer-learning event designed to plan the change intervention strategy. At the end of this event each organisation finalised their decision on their specific change interventions.

Over the next seven months each organisation worked on implementing their plan, and in the process utilised the services (four days’ worth each)

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<sup>1</sup> Alternatively called the Gender at Work Process. The Gender at Work team consisted of Michel Friedman (South African programme manager and facilitator), Shamim Meer (documentalist), Makhosazana Xaba and Jessie Yasmin Turton (facilitators), and David Kelleher (Gender at Work Co-Director, program designer and facilitator).



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of their assigned Gender at Work facilitator. It was up to each organisation to draw on the facilitators' expertise in ways they felt were most suitable. The facilitators were called upon to act as sounding boards, to provide literature, design structured learning processes which the teams then facilitated themselves, and to facilitate meetings with broader involvement from organisational staff. One year from the inception of the programme, a second three-day peer-learning event was organised. The case studies that follow this introduction were written during the year following the Gender at Work led process.

### **OUR GUIDING ASSUMPTIONS**

As facilitators of the Gender at Work Action Learning process we brought many years of varied experiences and understandings to the process. Much of this experience is deeply internalized in our ways of thinking, our behaviour and our bodies -- so much so that some of our assumptions seeped in unconscious ways into our participation in the process.

As a facilitation team guiding the process, one of our key assumptions was derived from the feminist dialectic – 'the personal is political and the political is personal'. Some of us had been involved in founding feminist organizations where ongoing efforts are made to 'walk the talk', to live feminist, democratic principles in our individual lives and relationships, as well as in our organizations. Our understanding of power, authority, organizational culture and thus of facilitation and organizational change processes is shaped by this personal political experience.

We highly value the importance of reflective space, recognizing that reflection on self and on organisational practice is a key tool for learning. We assume that while having women in positions of structural authority is useful and helpful, it is not a sufficient condition for achieving greater gender equality. Changing informal organizational cultures is crucial if we want to see change that is long lasting and not dependant on personalities.

We also acknowledge that transforming existing power inequalities forged along lines of race, class, gender or sexuality is hard work and challenges us all to dig very deeply into ourselves. It requires fundamental change at multiple levels of being –ways of thinking, attitudes and ways of feeling, and actions or behaviours.

Drawing on these understandings and feelings we encouraged participants to reflect personally on their different levels of being, including the gendered, raced and classed aspects of their personal and organisational experiences. In doing this we were conscious of the need to facilitate greater individual and group harmony, and to address and integrate cognitive, emotional, physical and energetic levels of being. Two sets of tools helped us with attempting to achieve this -- a set of tools from Capacitar<sup>3</sup> wellness practices that contribute to healing, wholeness

<sup>3</sup> Capacitar is a spirit of empowerment and solidarity and a network connecting people on 5 continents. It teaches a set of simple wellness practices that lead to healing, wholeness



and peace in individuals and in communities; and the Resonance Repatterning System which facilitates deeper energetic shifts and maximises the potential of interactions among the participants and between the participants and the facilitators in peer-learning spaces. As the founder of the Resonance Repatterning system describes it:

*What we resonate with, or are in tune with, is what we experience. If your radio is tuned to a particular frequency you will get that program. We are tuned to some programs we like and some that we don't like. Parts of our life are working well for us and other parts aren't working so well for us. It is all about what we resonate with. The Resonance System allows us to identify and transform our frequency patterns so we resonate with what is positive and can live a life we love."*

*"Quantum change describes a state in which subatomic particles suddenly resonate together in a new and coherent alignment. This slight change can lead to an instantaneous, system-wide, positive alignment for yourself and everyone else. Quantum change is the power of one: as we change ourselves it automatically changes the cultural hologram.*

*The Resonance Repatterning system enables us to make quantum change an easy and continuous process for ourselves, and others, so that we can, like Gandhi, "be the change we wish to see in the world." (Chloe Wordsworth, 2006)<sup>4</sup>.*

We used the Resonance System to help us resonate with specific intentions. For instance at the second peer learning event, our intention said:

*We create a peaceful and exciting learning space in which all participants feel energised, valued, whole and free to express themselves, honestly and meaningfully in sharing issues, stories, experiences. Participants take full advantage of the situation and make the best of our time together, maximising the great potential lying within. Participants reflect deeply on their experiences and confidently share their learnings.*

*As facilitators we are calm, focused and connected with the group. We are mentally sharp, on the ball and ask questions that will deepen the experience and assist in fostering detailed and powerful conversations. We have a sense of spaciousness and there is enough time to do all we need to. We feel good, have fun and meet all the objectives. We appropriately and warmly close the group interaction.*

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and peace in individuals and in communities. Capacitar teaches "body literacy" to reconnect people to their own body wisdom and their capacity to use their energy for healing... [www.capacitar.org](http://www.capacitar.org), see also Interview with Michel Friedman, March 2004, [www.genderatwork.org](http://www.genderatwork.org).

<sup>4</sup> See [www.ResonanceRepatterning.net](http://www.ResonanceRepatterning.net). See also Chloe Faith Wordsworth and Gail Noble Glanville, 2007: Quantum Change Made Easy.



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## **THE ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THE ACTION LEARNING PROCESS**

Two of the organisations involved in the change process, The Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs) and The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr) have similar histories and are relatively large organisations. Formed in 1978 and 1989 respectively both have their origins within the internal resistance movement against apartheid. Their pioneers were men who had opposed apartheid as human rights academics, and student activists with links with the trade union movement.

Both organizations made significant contributions nationally as part of broader struggles to end apartheid – CALs contribution being mainly in labour law, and legal challenges to apartheid; CSVr's contribution being mainly in dealing with apartheid violence.

Both organisations challenged aspects of the inhuman system of apartheid, which had built on colonial rule to exacerbate the dispossession of black people of land, of the vote, the right to freedom of movement, to education, to jobs, and to their very citizenship. Post 1994, after the first democratic government came into being ushering an era characterized as one of 'reconstruction and development' both CALs and CSVr continued to work at what can be best characterized as contributing to the entrenchment of a human rights culture and to the necessary healing involved in achieving this.

However a serious shortcoming in both organisations was that neither gender equality nor feminist thinking were core underlying principles of either organisation. In some ways this is not surprising given the broader liberation movements focus on race and class to the exclusion of gender inequality. The roots of this lack can be traced in the very founding of these organisations and in the race, class and gender of the founders.

The founding pioneers had brought to these organisations a mix of political activism and a sense of entitled authority, born of their white masculine privilege and shaped the cultures of both organisations as male-centred, professional and distanced from the people on whose behalf they sought justice.

These manifestations of organizational culture ran deep and although at the time of the Gender at Work Programme the majority of staff in CALs and on the CSVr management team were women, these organisations were defined by practices and priorities that valued patriarchal ways of being and seeing. Examples common to both organizations were the silo – that is, separated ways of working that did not value relationships and interconnectedness and that accepted a mind-body split in which rationality is valued above all else.

For both organizations it was easier to deal with gender equality in separate programmes rather than in the whole organization and in the



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1990s attempts were made to address gender equality by establishing separate units. In 1992 CALS established a Gender Research Project (GRP) and in 1998 CSVr established a Gender Unit (GU). Both the GRP and the GU made significant contributions in bringing gender equality considerations to policy and law reform, post 1994. The GRP in addition played a significant role in advancing gender equality during the period running up to the 1994 elections, including contributions to the country's constitution. However the GU and GRP operated separately from other units within each organisation and at the start of the Gender at Work Programme, gender inequality was not prioritized by either CSVr or CALS as a whole or by programmes other than the GU or GRP.

The key issues tackled by the two organisations as part of their involvement in the ALP was the question of how to ensure that all projects in the organisations address gender equality concerns, and the related task of ensuring that the human rights the organisations were advancing, included women's human rights. In the case of CSVr the main challenge was how to situate the GU in relation to these tasks, and this involved shifting organizational culture so that working for gender equality was seen as a legitimate and valued goal integral to the task of promoting human rights. In the case of CALS, the challenge included realigning the management team, and in integrating the separate projects into a more coherent whole, which would include a concern for gender equality.

Justice and Women (JAW), by contrast was founded in 1998, after the end of formal apartheid. JAW's organizational culture is shaped by its being founded and led by people gendered as women; by its main *raison d'être* being to serve women as a service delivery organisation with close links to its constituency; by its mission to ensure that women themselves take up their legal rights; and by being staffed by women across the race and class groups of South Africa, most having themselves experienced the issues the organization takes up -- violence and difficulties with respect to child support.

JAW's project within the Action Learning Program was to build the organisation's governance system, its formal procedures and systems, while at the same time staying congruent with its value base of valuing emotional realities, holding on to core humanizing values, dealing openly and skillfully with power and authority, and maintaining flexibility and sensitivity.

### **SUMMARISING THE CHANGE PROCESSES IN EACH ORGANISATION<sup>5</sup>**

Each organization developed its own change process in accordance with its own rhythm and style of working. The two larger organizations (with staff numbers of 35 in the case of CALS and 70 in the case of CSVr)

<sup>5</sup> Please note, this section is based on the Organisational Report from the second peer learning meeting – Nov 2004, which sometimes talks more about plans than actuality, and the case studies (finalised two years later) reflect more nuanced detail about what actually happened from the author's point of view.





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were dealing with almost mini-bureaucracies. This meant that it was harder for participants from these larger organizations to take back and act on what they were gaining from the Gender at Work process. For JAW by contrast, in addition to being smaller (with a staff of 7) the timing of the Gender at Work Process overlapped with an existing organisational change process involving staff and Board members and JAW was able to draw on the ALP processes to support their internal process in more direct ways.

### CSVR

During the first peer-learning workshop the CSVR team<sup>6</sup>, made up of the Gender Unit programme manager, the Human Resources programme manager and the Gender senior trainer recognized that the Gender Unit's role needed to be clearly redefined as one concerned with Gender Based Violence Programmes. This meant that its role was focused externally and would not include responsibility for mainstreaming within the organisation – that is for ensuring that the entire organisation and all its programmes advanced gender equality and equity goals. There had been an organisational expectation that the Gender Unit would play this role but in the course of the workshop the CSVR team were struck by the realisation that CSVR programmes dealing with race issues were not expected to deal with race diversity issues in the organisation as a whole and were free to engage in externally focused programme work while race diversity internal to the organization was addressed by the management. Following this realisation the CSVR team asserted that mainstreaming needed to be defined as the responsibility of management.

The team saw the need to redefine the role of the Gender Based Violence Programme with regard to mainstreaming so that it would provide strategic support to management to ensure that politics are kept at the centre of a mainstreaming agenda; and to provide tools and build staff capacity for mainstreaming within programmes and within the organisation. In order to present this redefined position to all staff, and thus locate their redefined role within the organisation the team decided to develop a concept paper setting out strategic objectives of the GBV Programme within an overall vision of CSVR.

As the process unfolded however, an opportune moment to influence how CSVR dealt with gender equality goals presented itself in the strategic review, being undertaken within CSVR at the time. The team thus took key questions emerging from the ALP Process to the CSVR strategic review and was able to influence the following organizational decisions:

- The Gender Unit would maintain a focus on gender based violence, but would also blend such work with different programmes in the organisation (eg torture convention).

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Vetten, Shamillah Sing and Kailash Bana. The CSVR case was finalised in June 2007.

- The Gender Unit would politicize gender based violence work more broadly in the sector.
- The Gender Unit would reduce its projects from 15 to 4 in order to achieve greater focus.
- CSVr would set up the gender equity team to appraise performance on race and gender – developing a new structure with elected members, and shed the baggage of the old transformation body. The gender based violence programme would no longer have responsibility for gender mainstreaming in the organization but would rather be a support to the process.

### CALS

The CALS team made up of the Director and the Head of the Gender Research Project<sup>7</sup>, focused on how to ensure questions of gender equality were an integral part of all CALS research. They realized that in order to reach this goal the organization required a different style of planning and managing projects. Their change process aimed to break down silos, and to build a more listening organization. Despite a carefully laid out, more direct, linear change plan, the approach ended up being subtle and non-linear. Recognising that staff did not want extra meetings, and additional processes, the Director used existing meeting spaces to advance the change agenda. She engaged people in discussion and intervened at project planning meetings. She gained staff agreement on the need to break down project silos and to get all CALS research staff to engage with diversity issues such as race, gender, and class. However while staff expressed rhetorical commitment to these goals, most resisted acting on this, claiming that gender equality was already being addressed simply by working with women or that ‘we tried this before but it did not work’. The Director realized the challenge was to translate rhetorical agreement into action by engaging the resistance.

Realising that the simple provision of information does not automatically generate discussion or cultivate cross-project fertilization, the Director democratized staff meetings, and strategized on ways of helping projects share plans.

The Gender Research Project began to make cross cutting connections with other projects by working with projects at planning stages in order to integrate gender equality goals and research methodologies.

The lessons from the Gender at Work process were taken into the organisation’s planning for the next cycle and resulted in significant structural changes within these plans

The CALS strategy is perhaps best summed up in the directors’ response to the question of how CALS tracks and monitors behaviour to make gender equality a performance issue and build equity into programmes. The CALS director responded, “[O]ur strategy is different.

<sup>7</sup> Dr Catherine Albertyn and Likhapa Mbatha. The CALS case was finalised in mid 2006.



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*We deal with gender rather than equity or profiling women. We are trying to get people to think gender seriously in their work”.*

### **JAW**<sup>8</sup>

The dire need to become a recognized legal entity, their emotionally open culture and small size enabled JAW to embark upon a profound and lasting change process. In the first peer-learning event, JAW outlined a detailed plan for developing a new legal governance structure. This included:

- Increasing staff awareness of key concepts such as power, authority, management, accountability – and developing common understandings out of individual understandings of these concepts.
- Involving staff in a process before getting the board involved. This dual process was required because many staff carry a history of abuse, which contaminated their relationship to positional power and authority figures.

Many of the staff had been victims of abuse, including at times by management:

*Staff currently feel a sense of powerlessness at many levels ranging from their personal experiences of being sold into marriage, discarded in polygamy, living in a drug underworld to their experience in the organisation (May 2004).*

*We felt all of us need to understand our personal relationship with power and how these issues played out in the organization, so that we could come to a different way of relating as a group (Nov 2004).*

The change process JAW followed, emphasised staff ownership of the process and utilized a series of workshops and a variety of methods, including photographs, drawing, collages, reflection on experiences of power and powerlessness.

A staff workshop (facilitated by the JAW coordinator) enabled staff to concretely surface their own sense of powerlessness. This workshop aimed to access people’s negative experiences of power and to explore the issue and its meanings in a concrete way. Each person created her own goddess of powerlessness from play dough. In describing this workshop the coordinator explained,

*“I did not realize the depth of power I was dealing with. I felt like a god unleashing a process in other people – I did not realize this power before. Everybody crafted their own goddess without speaking. We looked at what we learned about powerlessness from these images. What people had seen as their own powerlessness, others saw as*

<sup>8</sup> The JAW change team comprised of the coordinator Jennifer Bell, Fazila Gany and two rotating members – Sushie Dev and Julie Aboobaker. The JAW case was finalised in mid 2006.



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*their power. We saw that power and powerlessness are two mirror images of each other. A lesson was that to move to greater power processes of reflection, consulting, taking action, were key whether these resulted in change or not. One can feel powerless and still take action. The stuckness is about your own relation to your powerlessness. Something changed in each person in the organization during that workshop. We created a language and a space to talk about being stuck, whether each one was stuck, whether we were creating demons of our past? There was a significant shift by the whole group at different levels". (J Nov 2004).*

The next workshop, facilitated by a lecturer from the center for Adult Education, focused on governance. Staff were asked to map out where they locate access to knowledge and power. Is it close to the center or is it dispersed? Awareness was raised that knowledge and power are quite central – but people can have them in different places. Following the mapping and a discussion on governance structures, staff decided they did not want a board of management (a hierarchical structure) but rather a flat structure.

Following the governance workshop JAW held a three-day workshop of both staff and existing Board of Management members, facilitated by the Gender at Work facilitator. Some staff members met Board members for the first time at this workshop and together they looked at issues of power and at the links between principles, values, and practice. In the final workshop in the series, JAW developed a three-year programme and reformulated their vision so as to emphasize that people can be their own agents. The new mission states that JAW will “*empower women to be their own agents for change for socioeconomic development...*”

The following three chapters in the monograph present each organisation’s change story. Chapter two presents the perspective of the Coordinator of the CSVR Gender Programme, Lisa Vetten, and her own learning from the experience. Chapter three primarily presents the view of the Director of CALS and a key participant in their change process. Chapter 4, a jointly written piece by the Coordinator and Senior Manager in JAW, draws on written work from various staff members to present a rounded perspective on the JAW experience. Chapter 5, written by the two editors, discusses key learnings from the process.



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## LEAVING HOME: Gender at Work in the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation

*Lisa Vetten*

In this chapter, I attempt to highlight some of the buried and unspoken processes that affect work towards gender equality, both within organisational practice as well as within their external programmes of work.

Many of these reflections emerged in response to my participation in the year-long Gender at Work process but they do not stop with the final Gender at Work workshop. In fact, my most sustained and intense engagement with Gender at Work began once the workshops were over and we were required to write about our experience of the process. Writing, and the thinking that went with it, required a level of ongoing examination and scrutiny of the organization, my place in it, as well as the place of others and of how we all related to one another - something which to some extent, I had avoided during the workshops.

This interrogation of the personal is rarely the focus of analyses of efforts to mainstreaming gender equality – rather as if those tasked with conceptualising and implementing gender equality work were simply good little automatons mindlessly and mechanically executing gender policies. As a consequence, there is little recognition of what the personal facilitates and simultaneously constrains. At the same time the personal never exists in isolation from the particular environments, or contexts, within which individuals are located. As this chapter tries to show, the personal and institutional intersect, reinforce and conflict with one another, creating a dynamic web of influences in individuals and organisations. Subjective, partial and incomplete as this analysis is, I hope that it may contribute to better understanding why it is that organizations may struggle to ‘get their house in order.’

### **DEVELOPING THE GENDER PROGRAMME**

In 1998 I was employed in the position of gender co-ordinator by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV). I faced a number of challenges, not least of which was the lack of funding for my post, making fundraising, both for my position, as well as for gender projects, one of my first priorities. There was also no job description setting out my responsibilities and while this provided a good deal of freedom to choose my work focus (rather than having it decided for me) it did mean that the shape and direction of gender equality work was primarily vested in me, rather than the organisation as a whole. Further reinforcing this individualising tendency was the fact that there was no recent body or history of gender equality work within the CSV to work from and no like-minded colleagues to draw on or collaborate with. This state of affairs initially left me somewhat isolated from the body of the organisation until it was decided that I should be based in the Criminal Justice Policy Unit (CJPU). Between 1999 and 2000 another three people



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were hired, thus expanding gender work to the status of a unit, with myself as co-ordinator – although, unlike the heads of other units, I enjoyed no formal managerial authority or status within the organization and was therefore not part of the organisation’s management committee. The Gender Unit finally became a fully-fledged programme in its own right in 2002.

The Gender Unit initially focused on training members of the criminal justice system, as well as researching criminal justice system responses to violence against women. This emphasis came about both as a result of what donors chose to support, and the fact that a criminal justice system response was also the government’s primary means of dealing with the problem of violence against women. But as the Unit grew and our work and thinking evolved, it became increasingly clear that we needed to develop a response to the problem of violence against women that went beyond the criminal justice system alone. The inadequacies of such a mono-focus were evident from the fact that fairly extensive criminal justice system reforms seemed to be having little or no impact on the statistics for rape and domestic violence. With the ugly intersections between HIV/AIDS and violence becoming more apparent, the importance of treating violence as a health issue was also underscored. Work with healthworkers and members of the criminal justice system, as well as with women prisoners and homeless women, highlighted the need to also focus on women’s socio-economic rights.

Further, while women are not a homogenous category, many state and civil society responses seem predicated on the assumption that they are. Particular policies therefore implicitly advantage some women over others. This was made very clear through a project undertaken in central Johannesburg on women’s safety. The interviews and focus groups with sex workers and homeless women in particular led us to begin grappling with questions around how to emphasise and foreground in gender equality work the needs and rights of marginalized groups of women. The work with homeless women resulted in a research report entitled “*That Place is KwaMyamandawo*”: *Fear and Survival Strategies among Homeless Women Living in Inner City Johannesburg* and in our examining the relationship between housing and domestic violence. Women imprisoned for killing their abusive partners were another group we chose to prioritise. For a time we also partnered with the gender structure of Disabled People South Africa (DPSA) to design and implement a national training programme around access to justice for women with disabilities. This was followed by a small, exploratory research project on gender-based violence and disabled women, which aimed to make visible the nature and forms of violence against women with disabilities, their particular vulnerabilities to violence, and the barriers they confronted accessing assistance.

But while much of this work enjoyed a high public profile – even bringing about changes to law and policy – and was generally well-respected outside of the CSVR, the Gender Programme’s position within the organization felt a good deal more insecure. Indeed, primarily because



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questions around mainstreaming gender equality within the organization were so unresolved, the Gender Programme's existence and place within the organization often felt both precarious and uncertain.

### **ORGANISATIONAL RESTRUCTURING AND THE PLACE OF THE GENDER STRUCTURE**

The CSVR's initial forays into mainstreaming gender equality took different forms over the years. However, these various efforts were hampered from the start by the fact that there was no clear understanding of what needed to be done or how it was to be done. It was probably assumed that I would provide this understanding, as well as assist the other programmes in the Centre to integrate gender equality goals into their work. However, this gender equality mainstreaming function was not defined and there was no shared understanding of what it constituted, or what it entailed. Without clear institutional support, or a strategy to guide how gender equality was to be mainstreamed, I and others, muddled along as we thought best.

The CSVR was founded in 1989 as the Project for the Study of Violence (PSV). Initially based within the research division of the psychology department at the University of the Witwatersrand, it focused primarily on violence and industrial conflict; violence against children; and the involvement of youth in both political violence and political struggles. Work in these primary focus areas was carried out by an education and media component, a trauma clinic, and the youth project. In 1993 the organisation renamed itself the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) and began to focus on the transformation of state institutions such as the police and correctional services, leading to the establishment of a Criminal Justice Policy Unit (CJPU). The setting up of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) post-1994 prompted the establishment of the Transition and Reconciliation Unit (TRU). In 1998 I was employed in the position of gender coordinator and located in the criminal justice policy unit. And then in 2004 the Peace-building Programme emerged to engage with the conflicts on the continent.

My first attempt to get each of CSVR's programmes to consider gender equality goals within their work consisted of conceptualising specific projects that fitted within each of the CSVR's then-programmatic structures: the Criminal Justice Policy Unit (CJPU), the trauma clinic, the youth project and Transition and Reconciliation Unit (TRU). Other efforts included an audit of the various programmes' work in order to assess the extent to which these programmes were addressing gender equality; the nomination of gender guardians who would champion gender equality goals from each programme; an organisation-wide workshop on gender (attended by less than a third of the organisation since participation was voluntary); and the development of a funding proposal for a gender adviser within the organisation. Instances of sexual harassment within the organisation also prompted a workshop on the issue and a subsequent organisational policy.



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These early efforts were diluted by the fact that I enjoyed limited managerial authority within the organisation and that I was therefore not really in a position to influence or enforce changes to other programmes' projects. My uncertainty also got in the way, for while I had an academic understanding of the concept of gender mainstreaming and could appreciate its importance, the actual mechanics and application of the process were very unclear. As a consequence, I often lacked the confidence to drive a process of which I had no prior experience.

Much like 'empowerment', 'gender mainstreaming' had become one of those rag-bag, empty expressions that simultaneously meant both nothing and anything. While the goals of gender mainstreaming – equality, equity, justice and the redress of gender power imbalances which result in and perpetuate women's subordination – remained as valid and urgent as ever, the means by which organisations arrived at these outcomes was less clear. Certainly a whole class of (expensive) consultant-technocrats had emerged to lead organisations down the mainstreaming path, toolkits and manuals, checklists, indicators, means of verification and outputs firmly in hand. These efforts had not been without success, producing at least some changes in organisational practices. Yet widespread, sustained outbreaks of gender equality within organisations, agencies and government departments had not been an enduring feature of these interventions, raising questions as to how deep, central and profound these changes have been.

What I had read about the mechanics of gender mainstreaming was also thoroughly uninspiring. Planning, checking and monitoring other people's work for its gender correctness seemed a sad and administrative substitute for the 'real' work of gender activism. In a time and resource-constrained working environment, I asked myself which had the potential for greater impact: internal work focusing on the functioning of the organization and its programmes, or external work focusing on and challenging material instances of women's oppression? Ideally, although some sort of combination of both was needed in the CSV, I chose to prioritise the external over the internal, for reasons I will explore later.

Further, exactly what role the gender unit was to play in all of this mainstreaming activity was also never made explicit, with the question 'is gender a programme within the organization, or is the organisation gendered in all its programmes?' never satisfactorily addressed. The CSV also undertook (and still does) a conglomeration of things under its various programmes so it is questionable whether a coherent vision around mainstreaming was possible with so many projects and activities.

In an effort to address some of these questions around organizational structure generally, the first of the CSV's interminable discussions on this issue began in 2000. This included debate around whether the Gender Unit constituted a programme in its own right, or whether it should be re-structured as a series of mainstreaming projects crosscutting the other programmes. As the organizational language of the time phrased it, was gender a function or a programme of the CSV? Ultimately it was



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decided that gender did indeed warrant a specific programmatic focus and so the Gender Programme was born. But these debates about the CSVr's structure never went away and from 2001 onwards, a parade of consultants and processes was brought in to restructure the organization and alter its vision. Some of these discussions were personally difficult for me. I had invested a good deal in establishing the Gender Unit and elevating the status of gender equality work in the organization to a programme on par with the other programmes. This did not always give me the necessary distance with which to consider the question of how best the organization could be structured to favour work to mainstream gender equality.

### ***GENDER AT WORK: 2003 – 2005***

The Gender at Work process came at a time when I had run out of inspiration and ideas as to where next with the mainstreaming process. The expression 'gender at work' was immediately interesting because it seemed to suggest something different to whatever 'gender mainstreaming' was. There are obviously two ways to understand the expression, which plays around with 'work' as both noun and verb. At one level it refers to gender relations at workplaces but at another, it also refers to the active and daily ways in which gender relations and identities express themselves. It implied that this was always going to be ongoing and dynamic work that could not be neatly dispensed with through one workshop – so there was the promise of ongoing support with activities.

In addition to myself, one other member of the Gender Programme participated in the Gender at Work programme. While it would have made better strategic sense to have ensured that the other CSVr participants came from programmes outside Gender, at the time I did not trust anyone else sufficiently to be part of the process. The third participant was the human resources (HR) manager. Given her central role in the CSVr's racial transformation processes, including her seemed one possible means of ensuring that the race and gender work did not continue in isolation from one another.

Gender at Work also began at a time of great personal exhaustion, arising from my having taken on too much work, as well as bitter conflict with the previous Director who had recently returned from sabbatical to the organization and was attempting to reassert his position and influence within the organisation. One consequence of this struggle (as the Gender at Work facilitators pointed out) was that many of our experiences and perceptions of the organization were dominated and shaped by perceptions of the then-Director. Indeed, resentment towards him and the cataloguing of his faults often came to dominate subsequent Gender at Work sessions. This particular dynamic highlighted how the Gender Unit's external work of empowering women and getting their voices heard, was not being mirrored internally. Regardless of our external impact and successes, we Unit staff felt powerless within the organization and also devalued our work.



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Some three different strategies for applying the Gender at Work programme to the CSVR were identified in the Gender at Work process. These included: working with the whole organisation to influence a gender equality approach both in programmes and in the organisation; detaching from the broader organizational work in order to re-energise and replenish ourselves and learn to value our work; and finally, as a combination of the former two strategies, to continue working in our Gender Programme silo but also to work with 2-3 other projects in the CSVR. Given some of the context described earlier, it was decided to adopt the last of the strategies.

A relatively straight-forward process was chosen which was to have begun with developing a concept paper setting out the vision, work and strategic thrust of the Gender Programme and locating this within the broader strategic vision of the CSVR. Ideally this paper would set out a clearly articulated gender strategy to validate the work we did and motivate for the existence of the Gender Programme. Once this paper had been completed, we intended conducting a strategic review workshop both to look at how the Programme could provide a service to the rest of the organisation around gender equality work, as well as to examine our key strategic thrusts, functioning and projects. At the time, we were engaged in far too many projects for the number of staff employed.

Time never permitted the writing of the concept paper but we did hold the workshop reviewing our projects, resources and workload. This workshop too did not turn out exactly as initially planned. At about the same time as Gender at Work began, the previous director initiated a process intended to completely revise the CSVR's strategic priorities and foci. The organization became engaged in future scenario planning around violence and reconciliation, with Programmes expected to adjust their projects accordingly. Restructuring the organization and relocating projects and staff was again on the table. Still, the workshop assisted with the delegation of projects, the allocation of resources, and thinking through what projects and activities needed to be discontinued. It was also decided to obtain some research assistance to explore the nature and extent of funding to the gender-based violence sector. On an individual basis, I worked with the Gender at Work facilitator to strengthen my management of the Gender Programme, both in relation to the workload as well as the management of staff.

I also continued attempting to find ways to work in collaboration with other projects in the CSVR. One such opportunity arose when the CSVR was awarded a contract to work on a project in Kliptown commemorating struggles against colonialism and apartheid. Because it was a brand new project, it offered an opportunity to ensure from the outset that both women and men's contributions were acknowledged by the project. However, preparations for this project had lagged and with deadlines suddenly imminent, the then-Director decided there was now too little time to spend on planning and gender analysis.



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I also became a 'gender adviser' to a project looking at refugees' experiences of torture. This entailed helping the researchers think through their definitions of torture to ask whether these understandings inadvertently excluded women's experiences, as well as to develop questions that would adequately address both women and men's experiences of torture. This particular project provided one promising example of how mainstreaming gender equality might have worked at the CSV. I was involved from the outset in the conceptualization of the project, as well as the design of the research tools. The project manager also ensured that my time was budgeted for and the Gender Programme was reimbursed accordingly.

The Gender at Work plans were also complicated by a series of departures from the organization. The Director announced that he was leaving, raising concerns around how much additional change could be introduced to the organization at the same time as the organisation dealt with his departure. A key and long-time Gender Programme staff member, who had been part of the Gender at Work process, also left before this process was concluded. And then about a year later I too left the organization, some of the personal reflections provoked by Gender at Work having played a role in this decision.

And that is where the Gender at Work story could end, events having run their course and another phase in the CSV's efforts to promote gender equality brought to a close. But that would be only part of the story.

### ***WHAT LAY BENEATH: THE PERSONAL***

Interventions to promote gender equality are given life and impetus by people with histories, foibles and strengths, within organisations alive with conflicts, contradictions and multiple interests. It is the interaction between these various elements that determines largely what is possible at any given point in time, as I illustrate in the sections that follow.

I grew up in a household fraught by my father's verbal savagery, his good kick in the pants, clip across the earhole and the smack on the head that I always seemed to be asking for. Much of my adolescence was spent plotting his or my destruction and/or my escape from home. Within a month of matriculating from school, I found a waitressing job and moved away, thinking never again to be subject to my father or any other man's domination. Histories, however, are not so easily escaped and rewritten. They lie quiescent instead, waiting only for situations that bear traces or echoes of the original defeat to spring into insistent and overwhelming life. Workplaces, with their conflicts and authority structures, are ripe with opportunities for reliving just such struggles.

As a child, home had often been an anxious, ambivalent and fearful place where I was constantly being brought face to face with my smallness and all the numerous personal defects that necessitated the good hiding, which corrected them. How I dealt with this, was to create an alternative, accepting outside world where doing well brought a sense of worth and



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value that compensated for living in a household where I often felt helpless and wrong.

My father's moods were also highly unpredictable and inconsistent; what he ignored one day would enrage him the next. This made being in an environment in which I exercised some control and where predictability and order could be relied on, essential to my sense of well-being.

To be at the CSVR was often to feel devalued and unseen, while work outside of the organization provided considerably more rewarding and affirming experiences. The inside/outside split I had learned as a child once again became a way of being as I withdrew from the organization as a whole to retreat into what felt like the safety of the Gender Programme. The organisation's culture of 'corridor talk' also contributed to the sense of being in a whispering and hostile work environment where the superficial, pleasant reality was undercut with a sense of menace. Work also became literally unsafe after I was punched and kicked by four men who robbed me of my laptop, as I was leaving the building one night.

Additionally, the constant change and uncertainty in the organization, along with what I perceived as the Director's mercurial moods and decision-making, made it even more important to establish a separate and relatively predictable space. Our programmatic work around violence against women was frequently challenging and frustrating. After a day spent dealing with obstructive government officials, having to then enter the exhausting and conflictual arena of the CSVR was overwhelming. Busyness also became a strategy for keeping the organization out. But in trying to keep the organization out, I inevitably kept others out and so contributed to my sense of isolation.

This history of being ridiculed, humiliated and criticised had other consequences. It inculcated a sense of fundamental badness that made it impossible for me merely to be; I always had to do in order to justify my existence. Work became who I was and where I derived my sense of being a worthwhile human being. However an inability to separate one's self from one's work creates its own problems. For instance I was unable to say no to any work-related request, since each project or activity was yet another means of proving my worth. I also wanted to be liked by people so never refusing their requests was an obvious way to please others. Conversely, when work was taken away, or given to someone else, it seemed as if a bit of my self – and the good aspect of myself – was being taken away. I thus sometimes approached work-related situations from a position of emotional impoverishment or deprivation, feeling that whatever I had needed to be defended and guarded. This did create territorial tendencies - which complicated trying to work across programmes. Although aware of this tendency, I remained confused as to how to deal with it, sometimes letting go of matters that I needed to have been more assertive about, while at other times being unnecessarily guarded and suspicious towards others.



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Hatred, anxiety, ambivalence, despair at my powerlessness and a fear-filled rage had also constellated themselves around and towards authority, ensuring that both accepting, as well as exercising authority, was never a simple or straightforward matter for me. Rather, these became situations heavy with the ghosts of previous conflicts, losses and defeats that had to be exorcised through each encounter.

### **POWER AND AUTHORITY**

The support and involvement of the Director was crucial to the effectiveness of any strategies to mainstream gender equality in the CSV. However, for a range of reasons, he and I struggled to develop an effective working relationship. The shortcomings of our working relationship had been made even more apparent while he had been away on sabbatical. In his absence a female member of staff had been appointed the acting Director. She brought a very different style of leadership to the organization and as a result, for the first time since joining CSV, I began to feel like a valued member of the organization. I was not the only one to feel that a different kind of space and openness had become possible in the organization and so a period of fractious discontent arose within Management Committee Meetings (MCM) on the former Director's return. (This also more or less coincided with the start of the Gender at Work programme.)

The Director's founding role in the organization meant it was often difficult for him to separate his personal identity from that of the organization, which was emphatically his organization. Disagreement with him over how the organization was run, its direction and its projects, was liable to be interpreted as a personal attack. He is also a clever, articulate and charismatic individual, which often enabled him to dominate discussion in the organisation. Many resented this and felt silenced by him. For a time I too felt silenced and then began disagreeing with him. When I did not feel that he was listening to me, I would withdraw and become hostile and uncooperative. While this allowed me to feel like the injured party with a legitimate sense of grievance, it did not contribute to a constructive way of working.

A personal turning point came about following a confrontation during one of our MCM meetings and I caught myself reacting to the then-Director in a manner that was identical to how I responded to my father. This was how I wrote about this moment in a subsequent Gender at Work session:

*Staring at wall, white expanse - finding a speck, something, on which to focus, concentrate, bring my whole attention to bear in order to block about, erase, efface. Concentrating on all aspects of the speck, memorising it in detail so as not to hear, be touched by the words - shutting out. Trying to focus the breath, put everything into focus on the speck - almost to concentrate, refine, purify my hatred/rage - to make it a clean sharp weapon to remind myself that I cannot be destroyed, to take myself elsewhere, to show that I am impervious, to*



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*study the wall - to put up a wall, to allow nothing in. To gather everything in.*

Reflecting on this incident, I began to understand that responding in this way was a choice and not a pre-ordained given. I was no longer a child powerless in the face of a parent's rage, but an adult; I no longer depended on others for food and shelter but could fend for myself. In other words, I no longer lived in my father's house and therefore no longer had to obey his rules. While raging, impotent and silent hatred may have been a necessary survival strategy then, it was not a useful or helpful response to adult circumstances. But if I continued to approach encounters with others as battles featuring only winners and losers, aggressors or victims, I would never learn to behave differently and thus allow for a different outcome. Further, when I retreated into passivity and silence, I was also ceding what power and agency I did have. Indeed, my father's lessons in defeat had been so effective that his presence was no longer necessary to ensure my silence and immobilisation; I had learnt to do this to myself.

Some of these themes emerged again in my experience of managing the Gender Programme. Here however, the situation was reversed because instead of being subject to others' authority, I was now required to exercise it over others.

From the outset my management of the Gender Programme was infused with a great deal of ambivalence. To begin with, I can remember reading only a handful of feminist pieces that problematised the celebration in feminist thought of flat, non-hierarchical structures. These couple of articles aside, the literature overwhelmingly rejected hierarchies as undemocratic, masculinist and unfeminist. Had I therefore sold out, as it were, by becoming a manager? This question sat uneasily alongside a prior experience in a women's organisation which had embraced a flat non-hierarchical structure – but where the result had not been a democratic, collective and co-operative way of working. Conflicts around power were still present but in some ways more difficult to deal with as, in theory, we all had equal power. My earliest experiences of power and authority hardly offered useful alternatives, being either my father's authoritarian intolerance which brooked no challenge and my mother's failed and defeated efforts at assertion.

Added to this uncertainty around how best to exercise my managerial authority, was the desire to be liked and thought of as 'nice', along with the pervasive doubt about the accuracy and legitimacy of my perceptions of situations and people, fear of making mistakes and the desire to prove the worth of the Gender Unit/Programme. This conflicted mix of aspirations was then further complicated by the fact that the CSVR provided my first experience of managing others - and therefore the opportunity to make the kind of mistakes that come with just such inexperience.



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Conflict with staff emerged around the completion of work to agreed-upon deadlines and to the desired standard. When work was late or sub-standard I was initially overly accommodating, then when the problem persisted, resentful and unsure as to what to do next and finally, highly irritated. What made me unusual in relation to other CSVR managers was that I took disciplinary action when staff members did not do their work. As a result I was labelled a perfectionist and unsympathetic workaholic who drove those who worked with me into the ground, as well as being out of step with NGO culture (disciplinary action being the province of the callous private sector, rather than the caring NGO world).

At the time I was deeply hurt by these judgements, having tried so hard (as I saw it) to be the 'good' manager. To some extent I was also the last to find out that I was perceived in this way, these matters having been the subject of corridor gossip for quite some time. I had also wanted to be liked and to discover that I was not prompted something of a crisis, as well as an extended period of soul-searching. Once again reading feminist literature around leadership and management did not prove helpful. If these authors were to be believed, women apparently brought different, co-operative and nurturing styles to the workplace, which enhanced productivity, workplace relations and family life. Since I was clearly not a co-operative nurturer, being more focused on getting the job done, this obviously made me a pseudo-man. Finding no answers in this essentialism, I went out and found a management consultant who began trying to assist me to be both clear and consistent in my dealings with people and to address problems at the outset, rather than leaving them to simmer. The consultant however was in the process of returning to her home country so I was only able to draw on her experience for a short time.

I continued to accept far too much work – sometimes because I was incapable of saying 'no' but also because I did not always correctly estimate how long, some jobs actually take. Most of this work I attempted to complete on my own, thinking that since I had agreed to it, I was obliged to complete it. Also, given some of the previous conflicts around work and deadlines, I now tried to avoid them by taking on what should have been other staff's responsibilities. This approach did nothing to solve the underlying problem – the fair and equitable division of work – and only exacerbated a sense of deep resentment and grievance within me. However, there was simply no space within the organization to discuss these difficulties; raising them only prompted judgements about my perfectionism and workaholism, rather than any constructive suggestions around delegating work and responsibilities to people who were not always willing to take them on. My only consolation lay in finding out as I spoke to other women entering management positions that they too were grappling with many of the same questions. None of us however, had the experience to know how to behave any differently.

The one-on-one meetings with the Gender at Work facilitator working with CSVR were extremely helpful in assisting me to manage and reduce our project load. From a personal perspective, this was the most valuable



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aspect of the Gender at Work process, helping me to make and sustain important decisions around the allocation of work in the Programme, as well as the delegation of responsibilities. The facilitator also helped me to depersonalise management and understand that being a 'nice', liked person was not a key performance indicator - but getting work done was. This provided much-needed support and affirmation for me – although, once again, as with the previous consultant, I was relying on someone external to the organisation to provide me with a sense of value.

### **THE INTERNAL: CHANGE WITHIN THE CSVR**

It is also important to locate these reflections within the broader context of the organization as a whole. My sense of exclusion and not belonging was hardly unique, but appeared to be a feature of working at the CSVR more generally. While the grounds for feeling included or excluded were varied and many, these perceptions emerged most frequently in the organisation around race and power.

From 1999 onwards, the CSVR began engaging in a series of processes grappling with organisational change. The impetus came from two interrelated sources: the need to grapple with diversity and racial representivity within the organisation; and the restructuring of the organization, both to reflect greater representivity, as well as to increase the effectiveness of the organisation. By the time I left in early 2006, these issues had still not been satisfactorily resolved and the organisation continued holding workshops and meetings to explore these challenges. The themes remained fairly constant: how to break down the programme silos and encourage more cross-cutting work; how to transform the racial representivity of senior management in the organization; and finally, how to develop an organisational culture which embraced all. These questions were made all the more challenging by the size of the CSVR staff, which fluctuated between 60 to 70 people.

In 2000 the first set of external consultants was brought in to run a diversity workshop. The workshop exacerbated conflict within the organization and contributed to the departure of a few staff from the organization some months later. A Transformation Team was established the following year to look at change and transformation within the organization. In October 2001 Penny Plowman began researching gender equity and organizational change for her PhD<sup>9</sup>, using the CSVR as her case study. The Transformation Team subsequently asked her to assist them with two participatory action projects intended to deepen understanding of organizational culture and change. These took the form of a twelve-week diary project, followed by a two-week photography project. Because these two processes were well documented, they provide a useful insight into the perceptions staff members had of the CSVR.

<sup>9</sup> This thesis was only completed two years after the Gender at Work process had ended. See Penelope Plowman, 2006: Gender, Change and Organisation: A South African Case Study, Phd Thesis submitted to the School of Development Studies, University of East Anglia.



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The diary project ran between January – July 2002. Its objectives were for individuals to self-reflect on their experiences as agents of change in the organization; and to explore, both as individuals, as well as through a structured group process, what facilitated or hindered change within the organization. The twenty-one members of staff who participated in the project made weekly entries into their diaries for six weeks before the diaries were collected and analysed by the researcher. Plowman then presented the emerging themes to the diarists, added a few more questions for them to consider and they then continued writing for another six weeks. This next set of entries was again analysed and followed with a series of individual interviews with diarists.

The Siyashuta photography project was instituted between November 2002 – February 2003. Using disposable cameras, twenty-two people took photographs that they felt captured organizational culture within the CSVR. Individuals then shared the meaning of their various pictures with each other. These sessions were taped and transcribed before being analysed for themes. Both processes, which did not necessarily involve the same participants, produced remarkably similar themes and gave insight into the politics of grievance and resentment that so frequently animated the CSVR.

The organization was experienced in contradictory and multiple ways by staff. One such paradox was the sense of belonging and exclusion. Some described the organization as “a good place to work” where a strong work ethic and high levels of commitment, creativity and passion predominated. Still others felt isolated and excluded from this “supportive ‘family’ environment”. The various change processes in the organization had resulted in staff asking themselves whether or not there was a role for them in the CSVR as well as where they fitted into the organization. Once again this created feelings of inclusion and exclusion from the organization. Conflict between people was also very real - but typically avoided and swept under the carpet in the hope this would lead to its disappearance. Instances of sexual harassment in the organization were also not dealt with openly and decisively. Stealing of food, money and other items was also rife at the time.

Power – who had it, who didn’t and how it was exercised – was another major theme to emerge. Decision-making was said to be lacking in transparency and reflective of the interests of those who were represented and included on decision-making bodies. Management skills and support to staff were said to vary across the organization, with the resulting inconsistent application of policies and rules causing conflict and tension. There was a lack of trust between management and staff. Informal ‘corridor talk’ was also seen as more influential than formal ‘meeting talk.’ Indeed, both the diary and Siyashuta projects were valued because they were seen as safe, non-hierarchical spaces in which to express opinions and feelings.



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Those who worked on these two projects concluded that race overwhelmingly framed how individuals understood and analysed events in the organization, as well as how people related to one another. The organization was challenged to begin thinking more consciously about the links between gender and race, as well as the other instances of discriminatory behaviours - homophobia, xenophobia and sexual harassment - present in the organization.

Because race was such a primary and defining aspect of individual South Africans' identity and had been used to justify massive inequality, dispossession and violence, it is unsurprising that post-1994, it was the dominant lens through which CSVR staff viewed people and their actions. It is however, a form of categorising that represses the multiple and complex totality of people by reducing them to mono or singular identities only. Within this framework individuals can be only thing or another – never a confusing mix of both, or one sort of person under some conditions and another in different conditions. Thus, as sometimes happened during the more intense conflicts at the CSVR, one could only be black or white; there was no possibility of being many other things in addition to one's race. The situation could become even more complicated for those staff classified as either "Asian (Indian)" or "coloured" under apartheid. Sometimes they were seen as "black", at other times as "white", or even erased from the discussion altogether.

Another complication arose in relation to managers in the CSVR who were predominantly female and white, while both the past and present Executive Directors were male. The assumptions made about racial privilege and disadvantage denied and ignored whatever difficulties white female managers may have experienced both within the organization, as well as with the former and current Directors, on the grounds of gender. It may even be speculated that many of the dissatisfactions staff felt with the two male directors were displaced onto us as the less authoritative sex.

The CSVR experience underscores how incomplete our efforts to integrate race and gender equality work remain. I also wonder how much of a liability white women are to struggles to advance gender equality. Indeed, had the person tasked with mainstreaming gender equality at the CSVR been black, perhaps a very different set of outcomes may then have arisen.

These racialised experiences of power and dispossession produced yet another set of paralyzing and irreconcilable tensions in me. Expressed in its crudest forms, being white (which I am) was synonymous in the CSVR with being oppressive, undemocratic, secretive and unwilling to give up privilege while being black was equated with being held back, denied opportunities and treated unfairly; who qualified as victim and who as oppressor was made very clear.

My earlier experiences with my father had instilled the idea in me that I was powerless and weak – even a fundamentally bad person who



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deserved ill-treatment. Yet because I am white, at the CSVR it seemed I was all-powerful, selfish and crushing of others. While both are extreme, opposed perceptions, what underlies both is badness and very polarised/skewed perceptions of power. So in some ways it didn't matter whether I thought of myself as persecuted or persecutor – the outcome was always to ensure the sense that there was something very fundamentally wrong with me.

### **THE EXTERNAL: CSVR PROGRAMMES**

In the meantime, other programmes in the CSVR had also been seeking funding for gender-related work. One such project based in CJPU examined rape in men's prisons, while another in TRU was intended to look at the transmission of memories between mothers and daughters around the liberation struggle. The third project, already mentioned earlier and also based in TRU, looked at refugees' experience of torture. This prompted a number of questions that remained unanswered: if each CSVR programme ran a project with an overt gender equality focus, did this constitute the mainstreaming of gender equality? How did these projects relate to the Gender Programme and vice versa? Who 'owned' gender as a concept and a tool in the CSVR? This was a particularly pressing question given how extremely loose and infinitely elastic the term 'gender' was at the CSVR. For example, if a project was instituted that focused specifically either on men or women, such as providing counselling services to women refugees, or researching male rape in men's prisons, then it was a 'gender' project. In both these instances gender was treated as synonymous with target group. The torture research, by comparison, tended to treat gender as an interesting research variable to some extent.

The term gender was used in an ill-defined way at CSVR, including by me because I simply assumed that we all understood the word in the same way. Indeed, initially it did not occur to me that when people used 'gender' they might be using it to refer to very many different and even opposed ideas. It was only while reading for a course around feminist theory that I was exposed to some of the critical debates in feminist thought around 'gender.' Working with government officials as well as other organisations also brought home the problematic and varied ways in which gender could be understood. For example, a telephonic counselling service that advertised itself as dealing with violence against women changed its name to the gender-based violence hotline. According to a representative of the organisation, the shift from 'women' to 'gender' was intended to indicate that the agency took a 'non-discriminatory' approach to domestic violence and rape, recognising that men too could be victims of these crimes and could therefore call the hotline for help.

When 'gender' is used in ways that are both unspecific and simplified, the problem of gender equality is reduced to a problem of description, inclusion or representation - ensuring that both women and men are included, or their situations described, or their experiences represented. Equality is understood as mere inclusive equivalence: if a service is set



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up for women, then an identical one must be set up for men, whose experiences are assumed to be the same. This sort of understanding stops short, therefore of thinking about transformative outcomes, or changing the nature of women and men's relations to one another. Thus, in terms of the CSVr's efforts, rather than simply leaving the word 'gender' to float in isolation, perhaps we should have used it as a kind of prefix, as in 'gender (in)equality', 'gender issue' or 'gender relations.' Not only might this have begun to make us more specific about what we were doing at the CSVr, but it may also have ensured that the political dimensions of gender equality work were never lost sight of, because gender equality outcomes were entirely absent from these projects outside the Gender Programme.

To some extent developing a more critical understanding of gender and gender equality across the CSVr could have been achieved through training. But the problem perhaps ran deeper than a mere lack of familiarity with thinking in this area. Raising my concerns around how 'gender' was conceptualized with both the previous Director as well as the MCM often prompted the response that gender could be understood in many ways and that I did not have the monopoly in the organization around its conceptualization – an oddly-marginalising and undermining response to give someone specifically employed to manage a programme of gender-related work.

In another instance, one of the other programmes had conducted research looking at experiences of sexual violence amongst girl learners. The first time I became aware of this project was when the invitation to the seminar discussing the research findings was distributed. I met with the Director almost immediately, concerned that this work had taken place without any involvement or input from the Gender Programme, had not followed ethical guidelines around interviewing women about violence and also peddled some rather reactionary ideas about drugs, alcohol and rape. He responded by telling me not to be territorial but instead to be grateful that young black male researchers were investigating the subject of rape. His setting up of race against gender was very effective in silencing further discussion. What made his comment particularly ironic was the fact that prior to the establishment of the Gender Programme, with one notable exception, all writing at the CSVr on sexual violence had been by men – both black and white; having women writing about sexual violence was actually a novelty.

Concern with discrimination against women could also be used to promote conservative ideas around sexuality. Soon after his appointment, the current Director also instructed the employee responsible for internet and e-mail use at the CSVr to restrict access to sites with sexual content. E-mails or websites that contained the words 'sexual', 'rape' and 'pleasure' (amongst others) were then blocked to us, making it impossible to conduct internet literature searches and receive correspondence and literature – a highly frustrating state of affairs for those of us working on issues of sexual violence. This was justified as protecting female employees at the CSVr from possible sexual harassment. The ensuing



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debate resulted in some words being removed from the list but often meant we still had to approach the internet administrator to provide access to these restricted sites.

Overall these various experiences with mainstreaming gender equality as it was deployed in the CSVr produced in me an increasingly ambivalent attitude to the usefulness of mainstreaming as a strategy. To begin with, there is its overtly technicist language and set of tools, which seem oblivious to people, their histories and relationships; it takes little account of organizational cultures and appears to presume a nice, neat, linear process that unfolds according to the blueprint for change. It also seems to assume an end-point.

Both 'gender' and 'gender mainstreaming' may also be used in ways that camouflage, if not do away with, women and their oppression. To mainstream something can refer to its movement away from the margins and into the centre. At the same time it can also point to the diluting – if not dumbing down – of the more challenging, provocative and controversial aspects of gender theory in order to make it more palatable and acceptable to the mainstream. This seems most evident in the disappearance of the word 'feminism' from much mainstreaming writing. ('Feminism' was also very rarely heard in the corridors of the CSVr either.) Difficult and controversial though feminism (or feminisms) may be, nonetheless it is where the politics and language of women's oppression resides. Gender mainstreaming, with its unthreatening focus on both men and women can hide these provocations and challenges and reduce mainstreaming to a problem of numbers and representation.

### CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has tried to illustrate, from one person's perspective, in one organization, the many complexities attached to mainstreaming gender. Based on this experience, it concludes with some thoughts on how I would tackle the process now, given what I have learned.

An obvious starting point would be to develop, from the outset, a shared understanding of the term gender, as well as the goals of gender equality work. Some of the gender mainstreaming frameworks developed for this purpose could well be useful in this regard. Their approaches and underlying conceptualisations would however, need to be interrogated regularly, as I suggested earlier.

Also important to take into account from the beginning are questions around how individual organisations' structure and functioning enhance or limit gender equality work. At the CSVr for example, the question of whose responsibility it was to drive the mainstreaming process within the organisation was never adequately addressed. Indeed, as one of the Gender at Work facilitators asked, why was the Gender Programme, in addition to its external programmatic work, also considered responsible for mainstreaming gender equality within the organisation? As she pointed out, the TRU - which focused its programmatic work on



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reconciliation - was not responsible for the CSVr's internal racial transformation agenda.

The lack of centralized planning, as well as the silo structure dominant within the CSVr, also militated against a more integrated way of working. Thus whoever is responsible for gender equality work would probably also need to have a good understanding of organisational development and functioning if they are to effect organisational change. Further, those who carry out gender equality work should not do so alone or in isolation. Were I to undertake this work again I would certainly ensure that I had regular access to those with more experience in this area, who could offer insight and encouragement.

These sorts of interventions that address the conceptual and structural challenges to mainstreaming gender equality may resolve some of the challenges I've outlined. They are very unlikely to have helped with some of the personal and organisational context I've described. Experiences of power and subordination, force and powerlessness, and the identities they produce, seem central to understanding the more destructive aspects of this context.

Being at the CSVr often left me feeling the fiction of other people's imaginations – as if my identity was chiefly determined by others rather than by me. I seemed to act from a squeezed and pinched part of my identity, with this tiny little space being the only identity permitted me at the Centre. This sensation was most pronounced in relation to the victim – aggressor/oppressor dynamic at work in the CSVr. Although the source may have differed, I would guess that many of us at the CSVr probably had first-hand experiences of mistreatment at the hand of more powerful individuals and were also working with violence and victimisation on a routine basis.

Experiences of victimisation or injustice, especially if repeated, imprint themselves deeply to become a powerful filter through which the world is viewed. In its most extreme form, this framing can reduce the world into a place comprising only victims and aggressors, where the only choice is to be victimised or attack first. Once caught in the limiting grip of this logic, it becomes almost impossible to treat encounters as anything other than exercises in possible revictimisation and/or loss. Power, although most desired, is often most feared with the result that personal power is projected onto others instead, transforming them into all-powerful aggressors and the person occupying the victim position helpless and immobilised. This is not to suggest that all experiences of disempowerment are a figment of imagination but rather that such experiences are doomed to repeat themselves in various forms, in a variety of situations, with a diversity of individuals, until one learns to step outside this polarised universe. In my case it happened when I began to think beyond the logic of victim-aggressor and so was able to begin exercising different choices around my responses.



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The notion that we may sometimes play a role in bringing about our own unhappiness is challenging. Certainly if understood and applied simplistically, it may be used to suggest that people's ill-treatment is exaggerated or imagined, while taking a more critical approach to 'the victim' can seem insensitive, callous and blaming (which in certain circumstances it certainly is.) Victimisation however, is a complex experience that leaves a troubled and confused legacy. The fact that it is often dealt with in simple moral terms – 'good' victim, 'bad' oppressor/aggressor – does not help matters either. Understandably, very few people willingly choose to be labelled 'bad' or to consider themselves bad. As a consequence it is difficult to honestly examine one's own behaviour because in doing so, one is implicitly accepting 'badness.' If we did away with such simplifying, moralistic evaluations of people and circumstances, it may become easier for people to accept that they are sometimes both victims and aggressors. And in being able to think through situations, rather than lapsing into habitual ways of responding, it becomes possible to make different choices that do not confine one to behaving either passively or aggressively. The agency that comes with the capacity to choose differently – to exercise agency instead of feeling pushed into some pre-determined way of being - is where real freedom begins.



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## THE CENTRE FOR APPLIED LEGAL STUDIES

*Catherine Albertyn*

### 1 - INTRODUCTION

Over nearly three decades, four directors and in the context of fundamental political and legal changes in South Africa, the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) has remained committed to working to advance human rights and social justice. However, the nature of its work and the form of its organisation has shifted during this time, in response to both external and internal changes. The most 'radical' organisational changes occurred in the early 1990s as CALS responded to the changes in South Africa following the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the commencement of political negotiations for democracy. More than ten years later, in 2003 and 2004, some of the organisation's leadership began to consider whether the form, approach and culture that it had developed in the early 1990s remained viable in a changing political and legal context.

In 2002, in my capacity as a director of CALS I was invited to participate in a 'Gender at Work' programme, to explore issues about gender within the organisation and in its external work. Together with Likhapha Mbatha head of CALS Gender Research Project I participated in the Gender at Work Change Catalysts Programme. This report captures that process, which took place during 2003 and 2004, as well as subsequent developments in the organisation in 2005, locating this within an understanding of the history of CALS.

### 2 - WHAT ARE WE CHANGING?

Gender at Work came at a strategic and a difficult time for me as CALS Director.. Firstly, the process would offer an opportunity to think through and address some of the more intractable issues of directing CALS. At the same time, facing tenure confirmation at the University of Witwatersrand within three years meant that I was extremely busy trying to publish at the same time as I was managing CALS. After attending a preliminary meeting with Gender at Work in 2003, and trusting the individuals involved, I believed that this would be a valuable experience both for myself and for CALS. From the beginning I wanted to use the change process offered by Gender at Work to address the core issues of change at CALS which did not necessarily present themselves as gender issues. However, as the process unfolded, the gender dimensions of the organisation's development became clearer.

Although CALS had started out as an organisation founded and led by white left wing male lawyers, from the late 1990s, women began to dominate in numbers at academic levels and white women came to represent the single most 'senior' group in CALS. In May 2001, I was appointed as CALS fourth director after having been the unsuccessful organisational choice in 1998.



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A feminist lawyer and mother of two small children (then 4 and 6), I had spent nine years in the CALS Gender Research Project. I believed that CALS needed a 'hands-on' director that sought to build a coherent organisation, but I also inherited a relatively fragmented organisation, with six projects and about 30 staff (nearly half of whom were in the one project, the Aids Law Project ALP). Projects were characterised by different internal policies and practices, by different approaches to the academic/activist continuum and by differing external relationships. However, the common values and commitment to democracy and the use of law to pursue justice and human rights remained. CALS was also beginning to shift from a focus on policy formulation and law reform (although this remained a key area of work) to a greater concern with the implementation and enforcement of human rights. This involved a new emphasis on economic issues, including poverty and socio-economic rights, and an increasingly complicated relationship with the state as both partner and opponent.

My experience of collective work from the GRP and in the women's movement was to stand me in good stead in the initial negotiation of my movement from project head and peer to director.

The issues for change initially identified in the first consultative meetings with Gender at Work were:

- Building the centre so as to achieve greater organisational coherence
- Building a better listening organisation
- Integrating race, class, gender in CALS work

### **2.1 - BUILDING THE CENTRE** *(CALS projects tend to work autonomously)*

Given its history, (see box 1) CALS tended to operate within silos not only amongst, but also sometimes within, programmes. This had a number of formal and informal consequences. At the formal level, programmes planned separately, with no input from other programmes; there was little formal collaboration or experience sharing on strategy; there was no common set of indicators for choosing work, no common development of research quality and research methodology. In addition, there was no core set of indicators for research e.g. projects did not have to consider gender, class, race in their work in any coherent way. Some projects had developed these, but others had not.

At an 'informal' level, the 'silo' mentality has both created, and then been exacerbated by, distinct project identities. This resulted in an uneven relationship of projects within CALS, an issue highlighted by the relationship with the Aids Law Project (ALP). As the largest CALS project the ALP was almost an organization within CALS, and its developing separate identity and method of working began to create an uncomfortable relationship between the ALP and CALS. For those in smaller projects, there was insufficient 'resonance' with other parts of the



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organisation, some felt a stronger project identity than an identity with CALS as an organisation. Some individuals felt isolated from the whole.

### Box 1

#### CALS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT: USING THE LAW TO FIGHT APARTHEID – 1978 – 1990

CALS was founded as a Research Centre at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1978 by prominent human rights academic, Professor John Dugard. At the time the idea of public interest law was in its infancy<sup>10</sup> with the dominant legal idea being ‘legality’ and obedience to the law, however repressive. Against the tide of formal legalism, Dugard believed that law, even under a repressive regime, was capable of delivering justice and that it could be used to secure space for political struggles. Dugard argued that, in the wake of the repression of the 1970s, including the death in detention of Steve Biko, the reputation of the South African legal system had ‘sunk to its lowest level and there was a manifest need for the creation of institutions ... to work for justice and equality through law’.<sup>11</sup> In the absence of a Bill of Rights/constitutional democracy, which would have allowed radical change through law CALS’ ‘would conduct research into socially relevant areas and reform of the law, and thus knit together a group of lawyers who would use the law to contribute to a more just legal order’.<sup>12</sup>

Dugard was joined, amongst others, by Halton Cheadle, (in 1978) and Fink Haysom (in 1981), both young lawyers whose left wing politics had been forged in student and union struggles in the 1970s. Together with labour lawyer Clive Thompson, Cheadle and Haysom founded a law firm to enable them to pursue public interest litigation and the firm, Cheadle, Thompson and Haysom, became a parallel unit to CALS.

This combination of academic institution and law firm meant that, from its inception, CALS’s ‘niche’ was to combine the idea of academic legal research, teaching and publishing, with the practical use of law as a tool for advancing justice.. Over the next 10 to 12 years, CALS became a significant source of legal opposition to apartheid rule taking up landmark legal challenges to torture in detention, separate development, emergency regulations, labour matters and political trials.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Although individual lawyers were pursuing forms of public interest law, the Legal Resources Centre was only founded in 1979.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in P Rosenfeld, C Sprague and H McKay ‘Ethical Dimensions of International Grantmaking: Drawing the Line in a Borderless World’ (2004) 11 *The Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* 48, 58.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 58-59.

<sup>13</sup> This work is captured in Centre for Applied Legal Studies *Fighting for Justice*



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The ALP/ CALS relationship can be best understood in the context of the organisational challenges facing CALS from around 1998. CALS was by this stage searching for a new *organisational* direction and a common identity that fitted with its commitment to human rights and democratic government in the post 1994 era. One of the key issues was CALS relationship to government. Many projects worked with government to promote human rights through policy development and law reform, relying often on relationships that predated 1994. So soon after independence, government was seen as an ally. For example, the Gender Project and Labour Project both worked closely with government (in different ways) to develop new laws.

However, the political context for the AIDS Law Project was more complex as government headed into a series of policy and budgetary blunders with Sarafina<sup>14</sup> and Virodine.<sup>15</sup> This meant that the ALP began to develop a more confrontational relationship with government, while also working closely with it on other issues. However, the growing tensions with government contributed to the continuing development of an autonomous ALP identity, separate from CALS.

A second tension that characterised the work at CALS was the academic/activist tension. CALS' base at a University meant that its staff were members of the academic staff expected to perform academically through teaching and publications. At the same time, CALS attracted legal activists whose dominant concern was to use their skills to promote human rights and social justice. The academic/activist relationship was both a strength and a tension that individual staff members and projects manifested and managed in different ways. The changing political context for projects and the differing relationships to the state influenced a continuing trend of 'fragmentation'. In particular, the ALP began to develop a separate identity, building the project as an 'NGO', and consciously adopting a more 'activist' stance than other CALS projects. Over time, this also created tension within CALS as real and imagined differences in work and style influenced divisions within the organisation as a whole. This was exacerbated by the ALP's regular, but infrequent, indications of 'leaving CALS' over the years.

### ***Challenges in the context of creating a new democracy: 1990 – 1996***

The practice of working in silos can also be understood within a broader understanding of CALS responses to the challenges of the 1990s. In 1990, the major liberation movement, the African National Congress, and other prohibited political organisations were declared lawful and the stage was set for a negotiated handover of power. A slow start to these negotiations in 1992, gathered momentum in 1993 as the focus of

<sup>14</sup> The Sarafina issue concerned the government funding a play to encourage preventive measures against HIV infection. The funding occurred outside of normal government procurement procedures and the play was widely considered to be problematic in its messages.

<sup>15</sup> The Virodene scandal emerged when it appeared that Cabinet had funded the production of a harmful industrial solvent to treat persons living with AIDS.





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progressive legal work became the drafting of a new interim and democratic constitution, including a Bill of Rights, and the first democratic elections. As the 1990s unfolded, CALS found itself in a very different opportunity structure for its work in promoting human rights and justice. This shaped important changes in the nature of its work (from opposition to engagement), its organisational form (from individuals to projects) and its internal culture (reflecting growing diversity and change). A new director, Professor Dennis Davis, took over the reins of CALS in 1991 to preside over the period of democratic engagement and significant shifts in the form of the organisation.

As space opened for constitutional change, so CALS staff were drawn into the processes of political negotiation and constitution writing. Because of the nature of its work and the position of its staff (several of whom had been members of, or affiliated to the prohibited ANC and trade union), CALS became closely allied to the organisations in the tripartite alliance: the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU). As a legal and human rights organisation, CALS was well positioned to become a critical resource to the process of political, constitutional and legal change, and its place in the University continued to lend legitimacy to its work. During the early 1990s, the dominant theme of CALS work shifted from using the law as a tool to fight oppression to building a legal and constitutional state founded on human rights, and to laying the groundwork for rights based policies of the new government.

In this changing context – old areas expanded and changed in focus, e.g. in land the work shifted from fighting removals to researching policies for restitution, and in the media from fighting censorship to giving content to the right to freedom of expression. In addition, new areas of work opened up.

### *From individuals to projects*

These new projects were not apparently driven by any process of strategic planning, but developed more organically out of the interests of the director, existing staff and new staff who sought out CALS as a home for their work. Importantly, in the new context of the 1990s, the focus on a national liberation struggle based on race dissolved to accommodate a much broader range of issues.

- The formation of a Land Rights Project in 1990 (building on work about forced removals etc.) provided a base for long term land activist, Aninka Claasens, to shape the political and legal processes concerning land rights.
- The Freedom of Expression Project (1992) arose out of staff member, Gilbert Marcus' long term interest in this area of law and the need to influence constitutional change and future policy and law reform.
- The Gender Research Project (1992) arose out of feminist librarian Lydia Levin's commitment to gender equality (see below).



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- The formation of the Aids Consortium and then the Aids Law Project was the result of staff member Edwin Cameron's personal and political commitment to addressing AIDS based discrimination in a new South Africa.<sup>16</sup>
- The Community Dispute Resolution Trust, committed to informal dispute resolution, also found a home at CALS.

### *The roots of autonomous projects*

The emergence of a range of projects dedicated to specific issues, the differing context of these issues, the rapid increase in staff, the informal and charismatic management style, and the emergence of a divergent organisational culture meant that projects began to operate increasingly in isolation from each other and to develop their own autonomy. Both the external and internal environment influenced project staff to build project identities based on their area of work and their sense of what the organisational norms should be. This differed across projects, contributing to the divergent CALS culture. Newer projects were more likely to develop more autonomous identities. This process set up a cycle in which the larger and less comfortable organisational environment turned people inwards to their smaller peer group, which in its turn impeded the development of a stronger organisational culture. Although a deep commitment to democracy, and to CALS role in the constitutional making phase, held everyone together on the 'big' issues, projects inevitably took their own paths and developed autonomous identities with varying levels of closeness to CALS. They also operated with different 'project cultures', reinforcing the diversity of (competing) organisational cultures at CALS.

This was not necessarily a negative development, and over time probably contributed to organisational change. For the Gender Project, it was easier to build a more collective and co-operative culture within their project rather than in the organisation as a whole. The AIDS Law Project did so for internal and external reasons – including the development of a more self-consciously activist approach and the identified need to have a visible AIDS Law Project (ALP) to promote human rights for people living with HIV and AIDS. Over time the ALP came to signify the more 'extreme' example of project identity and even developed its own mission statements, logo, letterhead and annual report.

### *Seeking cross-cutting synergies*

Davis, and the organisation as a whole, were aware of the problems created by this growth of projects. A major concern of staff and management meetings by the mid 1990s was to find cross-cutting synergies that bound staff together across their projects. Part of this was a process to develop a new mission statement that reflected its role in the creation and consolidation of democracy through research, advocacy, litigation and education. Overall, Davis promoted CALS as a resource to the constitutional negotiations and building the new democracy. He

<sup>16</sup> This story is now told in Edwin Cameron's book *Witness to Aids* (2005).



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sought to create a media profile for CALS around issues of human rights in the new democracy. The development of a highly successful television show about human rights, *Future Imperfect*, was not only a flagship public awareness programme on human rights it was also a strategy to build synergies within CALS. Organisational meetings and social events were seen as further tools. These were all mechanisms that were director-driven – giving staff a visible organisational ‘anchor’. Davis’ strong personality meant that this worked.

### **Internal and external CALS**

As a result, during this time CALS maintained a strong public profile as ‘CALS’, driven by its charismatic director and high profile media. Project identities were strong, but with the exception of the ALP, were always linked to CALS. For example, the Gender Project’s reputation was as the CALS Gender Project.

#### **Box 2**

#### **THE GENDER RESEARCH PROJECT IN THE EARLY 1990S**

Feminist CALS librarian, Lydia Levin, raised funds for a Gender Project at CALS in the early 1990s to focus on the external environment and influence the law to include women. In 1992, two staff members were employed: ANC returning exile, Mavivi Manzini, and myself, a public interest lawyer. Both of us were immediately drawn into the growing movement of women mobilising around inclusion in the new democracy. Mavivi continued her work as an ANC feminist activist, drawing CALS and me into the feminist struggles of the ANC, the Women’s National Coalition and the constitutional negotiations. The Gender Project at CALS soon achieved high profile as a source of legal and constitutional expertise for women. It became a major resource for ANC women in the negotiations, and for the Women’s National Coalition, a broad-based alliance of organisations that lobbied for the inclusion of gender equality goals in the new Constitution, largely through the development of a *Women’s Charter for Effective Equality*.

The sphere of women’s work created a separate identity for the Gender Project. The early 1990s were exciting and taxing times, with little personal space. Work consumed all CALS staff, and everything came second to the task of creating a new democracy. Initially, little attention was paid to the internal organisation of the Gender Project, and less to the role (if any) of the Gender Project in affecting the internal organisation of CALS. Mavivi and I developed a positive relationship, working in a symbiotic partnership within a wider alliance of women. Here the ‘brand’ of CALS was a positive one, marking its staff as progressive, ‘experts’ with a history of struggle, thus offering important entry-points to the tripartite alliance and the negotiations.

For my part, trained as an academic and lawyer, these were significant ‘learning years’. While my legal training and the up front



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adversarial style of public interest lawyers suited the needs of the struggle for inclusion in the new democracy, I also had to learn the more strategic and collective political style that Mavivi, , was deeply familiar with.

The closeness of the women's struggles during the negotiations, partly reflected a growing internal identity. In addition, the political sense of 'women fighting for inclusion' in the wider negotiations was mirrored within CALS, as many colleague were involved in negotiations for the tripartite alliance or as experts and some were – rightly or wrongly - perceived to be 'on the other side'. Within the organisation, this meant that the Gender project too, turned inwards to forge an identity. Indeed, with CALS so large, and the culture so divergent, it was easier to align first with the project and then with the organisation. Like other projects, the Gender Project became self reliant in terms of fund raising and planning - sharing these products at organisational meetings but not subjecting them to effective organisational scrutiny. .

In addition, the 'turning away' and the sense of being on another side reflected the dominance within CALS of the more individualist and competitive culture that was not felt to be receptive to gender issues. The Gender Project did not seek to project a 'victim' identity as a result of this, but it did turn inwards.

#### *Building a collective identity for the Gender Project*

After 1994, the GRP staff (with Mavivi now in Parliament and CALS intern Thuli ..... now employed as a researcher) continued to pursue a hectic work schedule. Continuing the established culture, Cathi and Thuli worked on their individual projects, and had formal lines of accountability and meetings. Nevertheless, the informal culture of the GRP remained individualist, with little sense of group accountability.

In the mid 1990s, the GRP was joined by Likhapha Mbatha. Likhapha had spent several years in the Women and Law in Southern Africa research network and she brought a different organisational ethic to CALS. Finding a group of individuals with little collective work ethic or sense of accountability to the project, Likhapha nudged Cathi and the Gender Project to develop a more collective style of planning, research, evaluation. It was this experience that Cathi was later to take to the leadership of CALS.

Internally, CALS worked as an organisation because of a strong director, and strong projects, but it also exhibited divergent organisational cultures. The new was allowed to emerge, however much of the old remained in place. The projects provided space to change, but also came to represent a danger of organisational fragmentation. Davis was part of both the old and the new, and thus provided an important bridge to overall organisational change. He addressed the possibilities of fragmentation by introducing overarching mechanisms that sought to link projects, however



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these were highly dependent upon his own capacity to make them work. It is difficult to assess what change meant to Davis – it clearly meant greater diversity of race and gender, better organisational structuring and communication (the formal indicators of change). Change at a deeper cultural level remained elusive however.

When I took on the position of Director the extent of the task was apparent in early meetings to discuss the organisation where it seemed that the current structure ‘worked’ for many at CALS and that there was no common idea of what a different CALS should look like and what the lines of accountability should be. It was clear that, to some extent, the idea of CALS would have to be (re)built, as well as my particular authority as Director in the organisation. When I took over, the most recent experience of directors was of ‘absent’ and ‘laissez-faire’ leadership where projects were able to run autonomously if they wished. This meant that the role of a more hands-on director was potentially contested.

My initial focus was internal – seeking to develop common organisational and human resource policies and practices. Although theoretically subject to the same policies and rules, practices differed across projects and individuals. I also began to build the management team and address the task of developing a common identity and sense of accountability to CALS. I continued to hold annual organisational meetings, which confirmed several integrating mechanisms (that had previously been used), including regular staff meetings and research seminars. In addition, I worked individually with all project heads to assist in project management issues. As the biggest project at CALS, I paid particular attention to the ALP – expending time and energy to assist in resolving issues within the project.

The main source of the authority that I sought to build was through good internal management of the existing structures, rather than changing these. However, the structure of CALS had been developed in a different context and I soon recognised the limitations of this. CALS’ structure needed change, especially in the fact there was no ‘centre’, rather CALS appeared to consist of a series of projects, some of which only saw the ‘centre’ as servicing the administrative and financial needs of the projects. While some projects might have supported a more ‘intellectual’ centre, it was difficult to see how this would fit in the existing structure. The ‘integrating mechanisms’ identified at various CALS meetings were no different to those whose impact had been limited in the past. In this context, the Gender at Work process was to offer an opportunity to look at the structure and functioning of the organisation in the new context with fresh eyes. I hoped that attention to gender would assist in rethinking CALS as a whole.

## **2.2 - WE CAN BE A BETTER ‘LISTENING’ ORGANISATION**

The ‘silo’ mentality and the consequences of distinct projects sometimes translated into people feeling ‘psychologically’ isolated/boxed in or not able to move forward in their work. For people working in the



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administrative section, this was exacerbated by the experience of the University as a 'big' bureaucracy

CALS assumes that it is 'fine' on issues of race and gender internally, however this needed to be interrogated. While it was a diverse organisation, there was also a glass ceiling for black staff at the level of researcher. Box 3 provides historical background to CALS organizational culture and racial composition during the early years when white male left wing lawyers founded the organisation.

As CALS grew through the development of new projects, so the staff extended and diversified. The demographics Of CALS academics and litigators shifted from to 50% white men all at senior levels in 1989<sup>17</sup> to 33% in 1995. In 1989 there was one woman researcher. By 1995, white women constituted one third of researchers with the balance of one third split equally between black women and men. The gender balance in 1995 was thus 50:50.

These demographic changes, the more open political environment and the enabling leadership of CALS Director Dennis Davis began to shift the culture of the organisation. Davis provided space for internal discussions through meetings and retreats. Important internal challenges to the dominant 'male' culture by CALS librarian, Lydia Levin, were increasingly given space and support. A feminist, Levin had been a founder member of the People Opposing Women Abuse (a services organisation for survivors of rape and domestic violence founded in the early 1970s). She had a strong sense of the need for processes and accountability within organisations and was a forceful protagonist of this within CALS, arguing for change even before she found support in greater numbers of women at CALS.

The greater diversity of staff meant that issues of race, gender and organisational culture were debated regularly within the organisation. Issues of representivity of leadership, participation in meetings, affirmative action as an appointment strategy, and a more collaborative leadership structure were tabled and discussed. Project heads were appointed, a weekly staff meeting instituted and a management policy committee was put in place. During Davis' tenure, there were two women deputy directors who were responsible for internal administrative and management issues, and two male deputy directors who had 'external' portfolios – a practice which (again) reinforced the gendered 'public/private divide' in the organisation.

Older staff members retained much of the 'old culture' at CALS and Davis often had to tread a tightrope between the earlier and still strong culture of the 'boys with the golden balls' and the new more inclusive and accountable organisational culture that was emerging. At the same time, he was also confronted with forceful new staff with strong ideas about what they wanted of CALS. He was able to manage this though his

<sup>17</sup> Six white men at senior researcher level and above, plus two black male and one white female researcher and two black interns.



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charismatic leadership style. His intellect and personality meant that he remained a popular director, able to manage the opposing/divergent tendencies within the organisation. While Davis's tenure saw important changes to CALS, the organisation was still dominated by the strong personalities and culture of the past, even while in some projects and at times as an organisation, it could be a different place – more consultative and co-operative, less competitive and judgemental. In the diversity of organisational cultures at CALS, the aggressive, competitive, individualist and forceful culture of the past – rooted in a combination of law, academia and masculinity – remained powerful. This power derived from the culture itself, as well as its relationship to 'the past' of successful public interest lawyering and the individuals who remained.

### 2.3 - INTEGRATING RACE, CLASS AND GENDER INTO OUR WORK

Many assume that as a progressive organisation, working for the human rights of 'the poor' and 'the disadvantaged', CALS automatically includes race, class and gender in its work. However, it is also true that:

- Gender means 'women' in CALS, and only some researchers did 'gender'.
- Gender was not seen as a lens that we place on all of our work – consciously or unconsciously.
- Race was largely unarticulated.
- It was assumed that by working for 'the poor', CALS incorporated 'class' into its work.

To achieve this integration and to build better research and advocacy skills, it was felt to be important to reduce silos within and across projects, increase intra and cross project intellectual input, increase CALS' ability to plan and work across issues (e.g. gender, HIV/Aids, poverty) in all programmes, and enhance the quality of its work, and its ability to address the concerns of race, class and gender. Overall, attention needed to be paid to lines of communication and accountability.

#### Box 3

##### CALS CULTURE: RACE AND GENDER 1978-1990

The environment of human rights law and public interest meant that one was locked in battle with the state. It demanded courage, strength, passion and commitment. Overlaid with legal professional culture, it was also competitive, individualist and adversarial, not easily amenable to management control. Perhaps not surprisingly at a time when women and black people were still in a minority in law schools and the legal profession, most CALS staff were white men, self described as 'left wing jocks who burnt the candle at both ends'<sup>18</sup> and who enjoyed a degree of protection from the repression of the state due to the apartheid regime's contradictory respect for the law and lawyers within the 'white state'.

<sup>18</sup> In the words of Fink Haysom, *Sunday Times* March 2005.



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The organisational culture was competitive, intellectual and individualist, where a shared commitment to human rights and social justice cemented relationships but also subsumed the private sphere of family and relationships. The dominant work ethic was of long working hours, busy weekends, high expectations of support staff, and a social life that seamlessly flowed from the work environment.

Although many saw CALS as a “boys’ club”, where these norms were set by a group immortalised as “the men with the golden balls”, it was also creative and a fun place to be. CALS worked because of these talented and committed individuals

However, to work in this environment meant that one had to fit – and it was easier to do so if one came from a similar background to the dominant players – white, educated, middle class, male, left wing. The few women and black people at CALS either ‘fitted’ as forceful and strong people able to hold their own in this environment and (in the case of administrative staff) willing to work the long hours demanded of them, or were more ‘invisible’ in the organisational culture. In other words, a particular culture dominated. Those who were ‘different’ were accommodated within this culture, but were not visible. In its own version of the public/private divide, CALS was sustained by the work of its administrative staff (50% of the staff in 1983 and 66% in 1989) - all women - and was reasonably diverse at the lower professional and administrative level, however the public perception and culture of CALS remained that of the successful, high profile (white) men.

### **3 - HOW DID WE THINK WE COULD CHANGE THIS?**

The overall aim of the Gender at Work process was to build a more coherent and united organization, confirmed by a common vision and by common strategic planning, organisational criteria and processes. Within this would be the institutionalization of structures and processes to integrate race, class and gender into our work. As Director, I wanted to see a more fluid and integrated organization with good formal and informal communication flows, and with accountability and loyalty to CALS before projects. I felt that the integration of gender into all of CALS work would only be successful if there were good communications and accountability structures. To build better conceptual research skills and enhance feminist advocacy skills CALS needed common commitment, integrated working methods and accountability to common procedures and standards.

In general, through engagement in initial processes with Gender at Work, Likhapa, CALS head of Gender Research Group, and I identified the task as embarking on a process that would reshape some of the organizational structures of the past and build on the positive work of the organization. We both felt that greater integration would be achieved by staff from different projects working together on issues, and by pooling



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functions such as litigation and training across projects. However, we also felt that CALS projects with strong identities, might resist this. We were all too aware that the current structure and mode of working had been entrenched over a decade, and that changing these would not be easy. In addition, building new lines of work and accountability might be resisted by project heads as this would affect their existing roles. The CALS Gender at Work team was not confident that everyone would support a strategic restructuring of CALS at that stage. We felt that that this might interfere with differing project interests and thus might require a more direct and possibly confrontational approach than Cathi as Director felt comfortable with at that time.

This combination of uncertainty about the organisational response and the extent to which the status quo appeared to be entrenched, meant that the CALS team suggested mechanisms that sought to deepen and expand existing positive structures and processes in the organization, rather than restructuring the organisation. These were to:

1. Attract wider discussion over strategic planning and projects through:
  - Director and cross programme input into strategic planning at programme level;
  - Cross programme input into research planning
2. Develop some common indicators/criteria that would include gender in the:
  - choice of work/planning; and
  - quality of work.
3. Use existing meetings to do this:
  - Invite others to Project strategic planning.
  - Present plans for work at research meetings and staff meetings
  - Share advocacy experiences.

At the Gender at Work meeting in May 2004, this was concretised in a number of formal steps with time lines [See Annexure A]. These were to:

1. **Develop** a concept paper to share the idea on why and how CALS is doing this.
2. **Set** up a reference group as “drivers” of the process<sup>19</sup>.
3. **Communicate** the idea to staff.
4. **Hold meetings** to conceptualize research<sup>20</sup> for projects
5. **Generate debates** on an effective developmental management style that draws from diversity.
6. **Promote** a management style that is inclusive and accountable using opportune moments.
7. **Document** recent examples of management style that had an impact on diversity (positive and negative).
8. **Consult staff** on the best way to create space to talk.

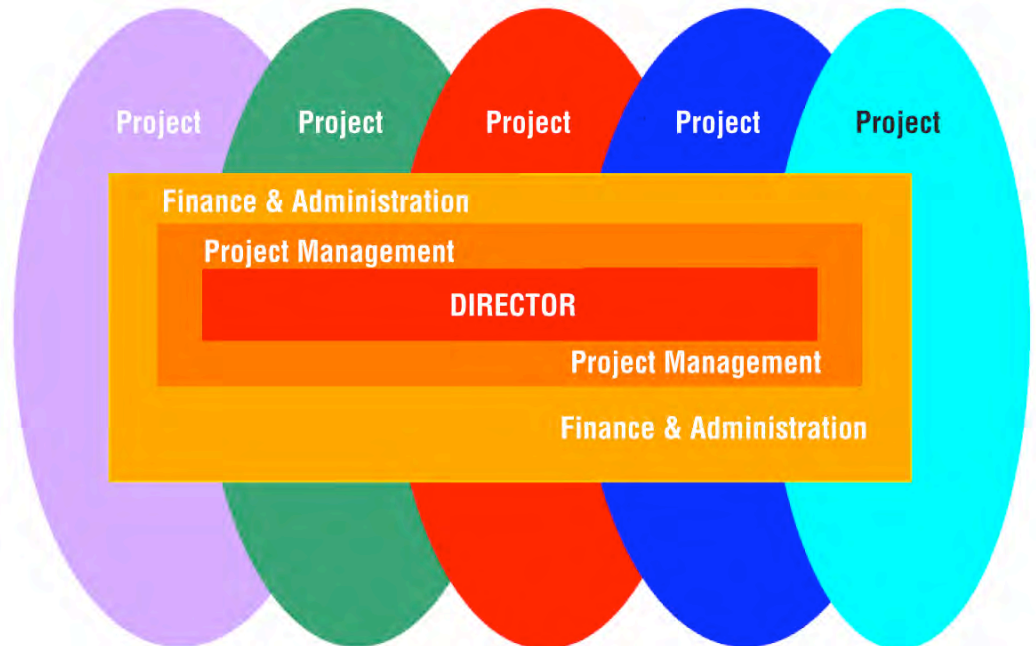
<sup>19</sup> This group was to act as a resource for developing research and capacity as well as preparing for research meetings.

<sup>20</sup> CALS overall was planning to conceptualise research for year 2005.



**9. Write** an analytical report on WIP, This was a report for Gender at Work that described and analysed what had happened in the organization.

***CALS as it ought to be***



***4 - WHAT HAPPENED?***

Initially, a number of formal steps were agreed. These involved obtaining organisational agreement on a conceptual paper at an early stage. In the end, a series of less formal, and more open ended, strategies were pursued. These are set out below:

***The Concept paper***

A formal concept paper was not prepared, rather Cathi presented a set of objectives and strategies to CALS Management Committee (Mancom). The following issues were discussed and agreed by Mancom in October 2004.





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| THE ISSUE  | WHAT TO DO?  | HOW TO DO?   |
|--|--|--|
| Fragmentation, silo style of working, not benefiting from the experience and expertise of all at CALS      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open up planning and review processes</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set dates/calendar; director and other CALS staff to attend</li> <li>• Link to general planning/review</li> </ul>   |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open up research processes</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present research plans/methods to research staff at regular meetings</li> </ul>   |
| Fragmentation – standards, information, policies etc.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single forum of staff communication and discussion; create ways for staff to speak out openly to whole organization and not to group</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff meeting to be become more staff driven and owned.</li> <li>• Develop single staff manual accessible to all.</li> </ul>  |
| Improve quality of research, especially in relation to diversity issues (gender, race, culture, class etc) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open up research process to CALS staff and, possibly, identified outside experts.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present research plans/methods to research staff (plus others?) at regular meetings. Focus on conscious integration of race, class, gender etc at all stages of research process (conceptualization, planning, implementation, review)</li> </ul> |
| Build cohesive, inclusive and responsive management  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop management styles that are inclusive of race, gender, class etc. Build on strengths.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal and informal methods.</li> </ul>   |



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Although this seemed a formal plan, and although there was agreement at Mancom, the strategies were not detailed in any way. There was an overall general consensus on issues and objectives, some of which did not seem to be new and which were seen to be questions that CALS had consistently identified. At this stage, there was not sufficient interrogation by Mancom about the relationship between the objectives and the strategies and whether the objectives could be met by the listed strategies. The document was also discussed briefly at a staff meeting and their implementation proceeded on the basis that no organisational restructuring was necessary.

### *Impact?*

This process meant that ideas about more collective and integrated work, as well as more conscious race/class/gender integration, began to be discussed in the organisation. Looking back, it is clear that this started a series of formal and informal discussions across CALS about what a new CALS might look like. However, these discussions were also generated by the increasing awareness of many staff of the limitations of, and the problems and tensions caused by, the current project/organisational structure. Newer staff, not vested in the existing structures, became particularly aware of this.

### *Open up planning and review process*

There was general agreement to this idea. However, it was largely implemented through projects inviting me as Director to attend some project planning and review processes. In practice, only the Aids Law Project extended this invitation formally. It became clear that in the project based culture of CALS, autonomous planning was deeply entrenched across the organisation.

Some attempt was made to ask projects to present their ongoing plans to the staff meeting for review. This had uneven results, and only a small section of the staff engaged with these plans. However, this tended to be seen as an information strategy, rather than one that subjected those plans to organisational interrogation.

I was more successful at an informal level and was able to engage informally with individuals and groups across the organisation about the nature of their work. However, this was not a sustainable approach.

As a result of this experience, at the beginning of 2005, I obtained Mancom agreement for an organisational planning session to which project plans would be open to formal scrutiny by the organisation, rather than merely being tabled for informational purposes. The problems of segmented planning were openly discussed and a more united organisational approach confirmed. This was a positive development emerging from a more conscious approach to planning. However, other events intervened as discussed below.



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In reviewing the Impact it would seem that this generated a growing sense of shared research and planning by some projects and researchers. This was evident in staff meetings and in their work generally. Given Likhapha's presence in the Gender Project, the nature of work on gender, as well as the Project's own history of collective work, this project seemed particularly open to a more consultative and integrated approach. As a result, in planning its work in 2005, the Gender Project embarked on a project driven consultative process in CALS.

### *Open up research processes*

There was some development with opening up the research process during 2004. Some staff presented their research plans at research and staff meetings. However, this did not allow for detailed discussion or meaningful engagement by the rest of the organisation. I worked at an informal level to engage research across the organisation in my position as director. However, these approaches were not built into research cycles and thus were not sustainable as organisational strategies that sought change, but merely introduced the idea of more inclusive and consultative research processes at CALS.

In terms of impact, these actions resulted in ideas about open research processes being tabled in the organisation. Many staff welcomed the Gender Research Project's initiative to draw them into planning their research, and subsequently welcomed the idea of cross-cutting research projects in 2005. Again important groundwork was laid.

### *Staff meeting*

The Staff meeting became an important forum for staff during the period of Gender at Work and was regularly attended by a majority of staff. An informal agenda and revolving chair was instituted in the second half of 2004. The staff manual was not developed during this phase.

In terms of impact this resulted in better involvement of staff in staff meetings and better communication among staff. However this was still identified as an ongoing issue in CALS.

### *Develop inclusive management styles*

More inclusive management styles were developed at an informal level as I worked as director with CALS managers on a variety of issues as these came up.

In terms of impact working together to address issues created better understandings and relationships at senior management level.



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## Analysis

Overall, CALS did not follow a formal process of change, and even deviated from some of the processes initially identified in the Gender at Work process as set out above. In the end, the strategies of change were more tentative and informal than overt, inserted at several points within the organisation, rather than a full engagement with the issues and staff. If this strategy was to be described, it would be involved engagement on a small scale (in meetings of single projects, management, individuals) around agreed objectives, using available fora and spaces such as staff meetings and planning meetings. Ideas about change were inserted into this process – but there was no overt engagement with the need for fundamental change.

This approach to change was gradual and difficult to measure. However, at the beginning of 2005 it was arguable that it had achieved clear (if sometimes rhetorical) acceptance of the need for inclusive approaches to race, class and gender by Mancom and various projects; and that important groundwork was laid for a later acceptance of more fundamental change. In general, there was an opening up of debate about how better to plan, research, evaluate and communicate at CALS. They also generated a series of formal and informal discussions about how CALS should change.

Progress and impact can also be understood along two axes:

- The relationship of the plans to the change objectives,
- The relationship between the plans and what actually happened.

In considering the relationship of the plans to the change objectives in retrospect, there was some dissonance between the plans and the change objectives. It was difficult to reconcile an incremental approach with the identified need for quite fundamental change to the way in which CALS operated. This is perhaps why it was difficult to develop a conceptual paper that might inevitably have pointed to different conclusions. Thus while there was agreement on a set of strategies, it was without a detailed interrogation of what these might mean if fully implemented, and with no discussion about how and why the existing processes and structures might have mitigated against change and maintained the *status quo*. This did not mean that the strategies would not have some impact. However, it did mean that the impact was informal and became part of a longer process.

In considering the relationship between plans and what happened it is evident that there was a gap between intention and impact in relation to the agreed plans. Thus the insertion of new strategies into existing structures and fora (without changing these) limited their impact. For example, taking research planning to staff meetings or voluntary research meetings meant that it was valuable in getting staff to start thinking about the issues, but this did not make it a formal requirement of planning or research etc.



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The question that emerges is why not address the need for organizational change sooner and 'head-on'? There were a number of individual and structural reasons why this did not occur.

Firstly, I did not feel ready to do this for at least two reasons. One, I was overcommitted to academic and research work (partly due to tenure pressures, partly due to an inability to say 'no'). I did not have the time that it would take to engage the process. However, I also did not feel confident enough in the support of key people in the organisation and was not yet willing to enter a process that may force individuals and projects to confront differences in structure, accountability and identity – and perhaps lead to divisions within the organization, or deepen existing project divisions. I therefore felt more comfortable with a process of building debate and consensus more slowly. Thirdly, my leadership instinct was to negotiate, include and assist, rather than exclude or confront. For example, although the ALP had several times expressed thoughts about 'leaving CALS' over the years and during my tenure as Director, my response had always been to seek to draw the ALP into CALS through assisting it in addressing the issues it raised and through stressing the commonalities between the ALP and other projects.

Organizationally, CALS was so entrenched in a 'way of doing things' that it seemed easier to stay the same than to change. In addition, the status quo was one that partly 'worked' for projects that wanted their own discrete identity. Also, the everyday routine of 'being busy' meant that thoughts tended to be focussed on immediate issues, rather than long term change.

## 5 - THE VALUE OF THE GENDER AT WORK PROCESS

The Gender at Work process ended in the first quarter of 2005. On its own, it seemed to achieve 'little' – yet writing this report at the end of 2005, the value of the process in pushing CALS along a road of organisational change becomes significant. To understand this, we must include a brief synopsis of events in 2005.

### *Events in 2005*

As set out above, the 'next step' in 2005 in the Gender at Work process was to institutionalise an organisational planning cycle. A planning meeting to do this was set for June 2005. However as the Gender at Work process formally ended in 2005, the ALP approached Cathi to announce its intention to leave CALS. In doing so, the ALP cited both problems with the university bureaucracy and a sense of 'difference' with CALS in that the ALP was more 'political' and more 'activist'. Cathi accepted this decision in her meeting with the ALP. However at a subsequent meeting with the ALP head, it was agreed to engage in a strategic organisational process that would address issues of concern head-on, including the key problems affecting CALS: the organisational form, project identities and the history and tensions that this symbolised.



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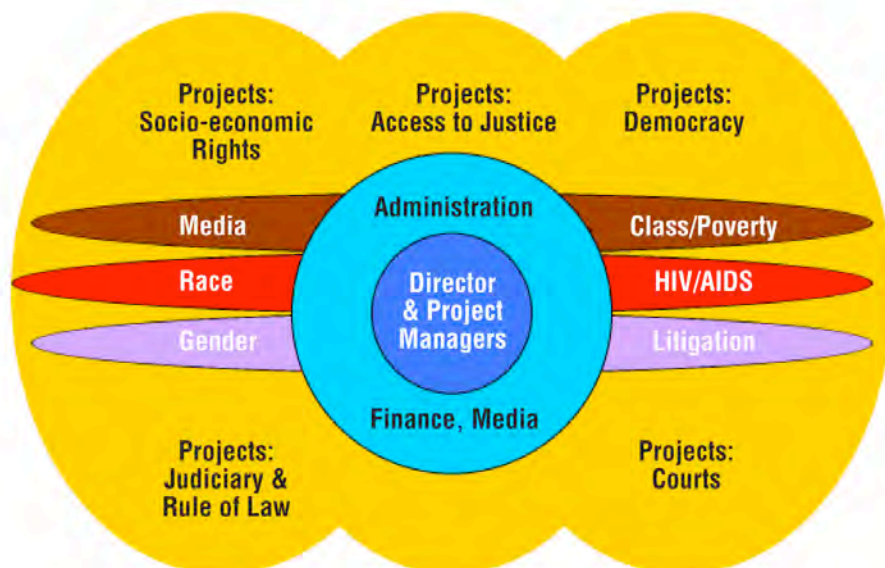
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Cathi insisted that this process would be one in which all sides were willing to change.

Considerable progress was made at a CALS meeting in August 2005, with agreement of key themes of common work around public engagement and public profile issues. However, the ALP (itself undergoing an evaluation) was still to meet to decide on its future direction. Cathi felt that it was important that CALS communicate to the ALP, for consideration at this meeting, what a future CALS might look like. These were developed by the management committee and included criteria around a single organisational identity, organisational lines of accountability etc

At its review in September 2005, the ALP decided to leave CALS. Most significant in this decision was the sense that its organisational identity was too strong and needed to be retained. It felt unable to meet the criteria for full inclusion into a new CALS.

At a CALS planning meeting in early October 2005, the remaining projects moved quickly to agree on important changes to the structure of CALS, including the restructuring of projects, the idea of gender, poverty (class) etc. being cross-cutting issues and the idea of cross-cutting functions such as litigation and media/publicity. Although some fears were expressed at the meeting, there was also a sense of excitement and relief at being able to move forward. There remains much work to be done, but it is on the basis of a fundamental change to the structure and operation of CALS. The diagram set out below tries to capture this idea of the new CALS :



### *Reflections on Gender at Work*

Clearly there were many factors impacting on change at CALS, including the external environment (the need to reflect work that was more integrated and inter-sectoral, the need to meet the pressing human rights issues and questions in 2005, changing donor requirements), changing internal factors (projects ending their funding cycle) the trajectory of projects such as the ALP (itself fairly well developed into a 'separate' entity within CALS) and the GRP (looking to integrate more into the work of CALS), and the needs of staff (wanting to work in different ways, break down some of the project barriers, improve collaboration with other researchers). The impact of the Gender at Work process was to enable Cathi, as director, and Likhapha, as head of the Gender Research Project, to manage this change.

Perhaps most importantly, the Gender at Work process provided space to reflect on CALS, on the idea of effective leadership, how to use power in a positive way and what it meant to be a feminist leader. Gender at Work strengthened my ability to understand and appreciate the human, group and organisational connections that underpinned organisational issues, as well as to set the necessary boundaries and direction to the organisation both on individual issues, but also when CALS was faced with difficult and potentially fractious issues in 2005. For me as Director, much of this was about the exercise of power in a 'stronger' way than I had been used to in the past, and thus to take full control of my own power when managing the internal dynamics and beginning a process of restructuring for the future.

Power and leadership are gendered issues in many ways. The CALS experience suggests that we feel more comfortable with some kinds of power than others. This means that it can take time to feel comfortable with the full exercise of power, but that to do so, is essential for good leadership.



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## JUSTICE AND WOMEN (JAW)

*Jenny Bell and Fazila Gany*

### ***Gender at Work, Cape Town, November 2003.***

*Having being urged by our landlady to forgo all other expenses and 'to eat peanut butter sandwiches if you have to' we obeyed her command to pay the cable car fare and go up Table Mountain in order to commune with the universe whose lay lines were energetically centred on that point, that day. The concepts that she introduced us to were strange, but the command was urgent and we felt the need for interventions that could magically change our lives. We used the experience to confront an organizational burden that we had been carrying and enacted a ritual where we threw it off the mountain and visualized it bouncing down the sides and vanishing into the depths of the sea below. We felt momentarily freed, but as we couldn't reduce the experience to rational thought, we couldn't truly own it. In retrospect, this was JAW's introduction to Gender at Work. After all, the reason we were in Cape Town was to attend the first formal meeting that Gender at Work had organised and to decide about how we would participate in the Change Catalyst Programme. And it was our participation in this programme that enabled us to understand and explain the changes that we underwent.*

This is a story about our organisation's struggle with another side of power – victimhood. We describe:

- How our enmeshment in victimhood helped unleash an organizational dynamic which further entrapped us
- How by mobilizing as a group and using the covert power inherent in victimhood we challenged this organizational dynamic
- How this alone did not bring change – for it was only when we confronted our own attachment to victimhood and gave ourselves time to reflect on – power- that we were able to facilitate a change both within ourselves and within our organization.
- How by being more conscious of our own power we were to see connections between issues to which we had previously been oblivious.
- How this process has impacted on the way we work together and our organizational culture as well as how we work with our constituency

*Power and powerlessness were concepts we explored at great lengths. We needed to understand the significance that these concepts played in our lives, our organization and the influence it had on our attitudes.*

### **THE CRISIS OF SHADOW**



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The 1994 elections which heralded in democracy in South Africa brought two important pieces of legislation related to women's domestic / private lives. The first was an amendment to the Maintenance Act no. 98 of 1999 which sought to increase the effectiveness of the collection by the State of money from partners reluctant to contribute to the support of their children. The second the Domestic Violence Act no 116 of 1998 which sought to provide statutory protection to women in abusive relationships. In 1997 the Department of Justice faced with the challenge of transforming the court and facilitating people's access to Justice – launched nationwide initiative's where Courts were opened to women, and where women were encouraged to seek justice.

JAW was formed out of an initiative started by the local Magistrates Court in PMB and which involved a number of Ngos in Pietermaritzburg – where the court was opened to women for the Day, and where women were encouraged to speak out about their experiences of trying to access Justice. The NGO's long upset by their inability to impact upon the Justice system seized the opportunity to participate in the event and encouraged their constituents to attend. The event was structured as an open forum and women were asked to tell their stories and direct their questions to the Department of Justice officials present. No-one was prepared for the numbers of women who wanted an opportunity to speak nor for the accounts of pain and anguish which they related. Having opened this Pandora's box the organizers of the event felt that they could not simply close it all down and walk away. They decided to start a project to help women more effectively access Justice. As the majority of the concerns raised at the "Open day" were related to Domestic Violence and maintenance these became the focus of the project .

The project, now called Justice and Women (JAW) was from the outset run by a consortium of 5 organisations,<sup>21</sup> all keen to have some extension to their existing programmes. This was a time in which non-profit organizations were under pressure to transform to meet the needs of the new democracy and there was a scramble for projects, which could more appropriately position organizations. Domestic Violence and Gender issues were politically popular issues and within the consortium there was an uneasy jockeying for control of the project. With time Family and Marriage Society and Black Sash emerged as victors and they entered into an uneasy partnership in the management of JAW where their respective roles were never clearly defined. Why? This lack of clarity suited both organizations as it gave them room in which to manoeuvre without ever having to disclose their intentions. This becomes clearer when one looks at Famsa's position. At the time Famsa was being placed under increasing pressure by its' sole funder the State to transform its services, which were viewed as irrelevant and elitist and Famsa desperately needed a partner with a politically credible track record to help it attract additional donor funding. Black Sash was such a partner.

<sup>21</sup> Black Sash, Famsa, Pacsa, Nicro and Police Services – family support unit. Initially governance worked loosely in the form of a consortium, with funding going through Famsa, and Famsa accountable to the consortium.



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Black Sash too had its reasons for entering this partnership – reasons which were never stated but which were tacitly recognized and accepted.

To less murky waters: From the outset the partners had agreed to staff the project with women who had personal experience of applying for Maintenance or Domestic Violence protection orders. The Open Day at court had visibly demonstrated how intimidated women felt by the legal system and the partners felt that women needed a visible presence at court of people, who represented their class, race and educational background and who through their increasing familiarity with the court and its processes, could facilitate women's access into the legal system. The JAW service was established in 1998 and operated on a part time basis – 3 mornings per week - for a period of 4 years. The magistrates court supported the idea of the project and from the outset agreed to accommodate it at Court.

In this time the partnership continued its hold on the project keeping it dependant and tied to both organizations. Why? At one level the answer lies in resources – neither partner had sufficient staff to invest greater time in the project and to properly plan for its future. At another level neither partner really wanted the project to be autonomous as it continued to serve their organizations needs. But the partners were also faced with Donors questioning about the continued viability of the project and whether its role should not essentially be played by the State. A plethora of mixed messages, which given the lack of honesty that bedeviled this partnership, were addressed by creating a myth: that JAW was only a temporary service and that staff were to use the opportunity to gain as many skills as possible in order to move on to more lucrative employment. The fact that some staff members were able to do this added credence to the myth and those who remained were increasingly viewed as being dependent, lacking in initiative and drive. The insular circularity of the paradigm served to create a noose for all.

How did the JAW staff respond to this situation? Did they mobilize, organise and confront it or did they passively acquiesce in the face of this tyranny? In fact they responded by drawing on what they knew best. They retreated to their victimhood and as time passed, an intricate dance developed which moved JAW staff and the partners between unwilling compliance and aggressive dominance. Each blamed the other. JAW staff drawing from their reservoir of personal experience knew the steps of this dance and as their combined frustration increased, they mobilised their joint understanding of this dance and named it – abuse, perpetrators of abuse – and through this action learned that they could temporarily right the balance of power. For being named, the partners took fright and would retreat. But unmasking and naming did not resolve this dynamic – it just dampened it down until yet another situation unleashed yet another crisis and the dance continued with the addition of more complicated steps.

Why did the JAW staff tolerate the situation for so long – why did they not leave? For most staff, JAW was the first experience of formal employment



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and as single parents they needed employment for their economic survival. Work at JAW also offered benefits. It offered staff affirmation and status as they came to be recognised by other women as experts in maintenance and court procedures. JAW was also a haven, for work provided staff with a respite from family crises, it was a time where they could meet, discuss and find support with others who'd had similar experiences. These factors kept staff at JAW. The crises that the staff experienced with the partners strengthened their bond.

*We had by this time perfected an organisational culture of victimhood – it permeated everything. Shaped by our continued dependence on the partner organisations, by our illegitimate status in the world – we found ways of replicating ourselves through the services which we offered women at court. We talked for, mediated on behalf of and fought for women against the Justice system heralding each success rather like a David against a Goliath. We revelled in our smallness, in the battle, in our lack of formal status, our lack of qualification and used it to unseat and challenge, each battle yet another victory against the perpetrators of abuse in our own lives. Each time we offered support to others we were at a deeper level unconsciously supporting ourselves. We never truly questioned whether we were making any difference beyond the immediate, whether this was leading to long term change for women or to the system that we were working within. We were insulated by the comfort and by the integrity of our lived experience which we wore like a T shirt - been there, know what it's like- but the 'done that, move on' did not follow for quite a time.*

In 2002 one of the project partners (ie. Famsa director) announced her intention to resign and this heralded a period in which JAW's long term future was considered. The partners recognised that they could not continue to "micromanage JAW" (as if it was one of their organisation's mini-projects) and that there was a need to build JAW's internal management structure. To justify this expansion JAW services needed to be broadened and a proposal was developed to extend JAW services into rural areas. Prior to her departure the project partner indicated that she would be interested in applying for the post. The newly appointed Director however questioned the viability of the project and questioned the nature of the partnership between the 2 project partners. This unleashed a period of uncertainty in which further conflict prevailed. The JAW staff, now mistresses of the art of "naming and blaming" used the opportunity to divide the project partners. The mistrust between project partners grew. It was only after the intervention of the governance structures of both organizations, which established an interim Board of Management for JAW (with representation from both organizations) and to whom both project partners would account, that a period of relative calm was re-established. The project partners then advertised the post of project manager at JAW but the person appointed to the post left within 6 weeks of her appointment. The partners by this time, desperate to account to the funder for project progress, asked the previous Famsa Director to



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consider the position- which she accepted.

### **CROSSING THE FLOOR**

*Our unresolved issues float around our heads like bubbles awaiting the slightest pressure in order to burst. Often our shadow side dictates our responses, our behavior and emotions. Like a blanket on a wintry night, we whip them out and allow them to embrace our vulnerable bodies forming an invisible shield hoping to keep the gray cold at bay.*

I, Jenny, the ex-Famsa director, came into JAW with an agenda. I no longer wanted to be part of the type of organisational structure that I had come from. I wanted a new organisational experience – I wanted equality, a sense of internal coherence, a connectedness with others which I felt that JAW might offer. I brought with me my own bruising encounters in the exercise and management of power within an organisation and I felt that a remedy lay in the creation of a different type of organisational structure, a co-operative of equals. I did not at this point understand that I was trying to create a solution for my own sense of powerlessness.

My employment at JAW catalysed the project partners to act as a unified force and the dance between the partners and myself as the representative of the JAW staff, of unwilling compliance and aggressive dominance, continued. With time I recognised the steps and drew some masochistic comfort from the divine justice of the process: I too have caused pain so I too must suffer and for a while, I was prepared to be sacrificed.

A number of events woke me from my stupor in May/June 2003. The first was the ending of a contract with a funder which I used as the opportunity to break the hold of one of the project partners over JAW. I secured the support of the JAW staff, Board of management and the funder to shift accountability for JAW to only one partner. The terms of reference for the new partnership committed JAW to developing its own governance structure and to securing its autonomy.

The second event was a colleague's trip to Mecca (June 2004). Her time of spiritual renewal and consolidation became my time of reflection and I started questioning why I had facilitated the creation of a system where others were benefiting from leadership without taking up the discomforts involved. I questioned why I had become an agent in my own exploitation and my anger at both myself and at others was intense. I however did something different with this anger. I took ownership and confronted it in a different way. I gestated it and gave it birth in a letter, which I wrote to my colleague outlining my concerns. I acknowledged my complicity and asked her to reflect and join me in finding a new way to work through the situation. Writing the letter created more distance for respect to come in and gave her time to respond and reflect on what was written. This approach is more spacious and mature and not as heated as my previous



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style which would have been to talk about it immediately. My colleague took up the challenge.

*My dilemma with leadership and management juxtaposed to the staff arose out of my own issues of my past. Trapped in an abusive marriage for almost 10 years and then abandoning it without much support from my family and the community, breaking the shackles of stereotype, I found myself in a lonely place. No empathy from most of the people I knew, I struggled to keep afloat. When challenged with the issue of my position in management at JAW and my 'sitting on the fence', I began to dig deep within myself. My clinging on to the issue of empathy for the staff and 'feeling' for them came from the lack of support I received when I left my marriage. It was easier to identify with them, than with management.*

*It slowly dawned upon me that change was like a slow dance; you had to learn the steps, connect with the rhythm within you before you can hear the music, then dance with your soul and then sway with the sound. Aristotle said -We are what we repeatedly do-. Unlearning old behaviour is linked to our perceptions of change. Even allowing our past experiences and memories to influence our present actions can become a cycle that one perpetuates. You have to allow the learning's and the good to pass through the sieve and handpick all that would result in you stagnating. My experience has been difficult and every now and again I sense that I am standing at the edge of a precipice. I realized that I need headspace to reflect and this helps me handpick the issues.*

### **ENTER SYNCHRONICITY**

In mid-2003 Michel Friedman approached JAW to establish whether we would be interested in participating in an action research project to be run by Gender at Work. The objectives of the project seemed to fit JAW's need to work towards autonomy and to develop a governance structure and we realised that we needed support in the process. In April 2004 the work began. It started with a two day process of reflection through which the JAW story was documented. The questioning was gentle but firm and through mapping out the events of our past we were graphically faced by the repeated themes emerging – the recurrent power battles, the themes of perpetrator – victim, legitimacy – illegitimacy. We were asked to try and understand what purpose these recurrent issues served, to decipher what these issues prevented us from seeing /doing / being? The questions created uneasy spaces on which to reflect and the continuing work with Gender at Work helped to focus this reflection.

### **SURFACING THE INTENTION**

Having the intent to address the issue of power and power relations that existed within our organization and effecting the transformation required was – with hindsight - facilitated by the following factors;



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- A strong sense of identity and trust amongst the JAW staff members which was made stronger by the experiences faced with the project partners over the years. This enabled staff to be vulnerable with one another, to admit their mistakes.
- The leadership by the JAW project co-ordinator which was built on a conscious understanding and respect for the degree of difference between the individuals in the organization and an acceptance that for some, more time was needed to accommodate change.

*S, slow but solid gives a firm head shake that says no- her voice like lead confirms her resistance. Force change on her and all she becomes is slower and more disgruntled. P, quiet when asked, pursues it further and she agrees that it's a good idea. I sense that she is not entirely happy with the decision but for some reason she is not prepared to go into battle, so she takes on the task. She moves around mechanically almost like a wound up doll. Her passion buried with resistance. Her responses merge with her shadow side and her pile begins to increase.*

*Some responses [amongst staff] may be more overt and some like P's more covert. For me the challenge lies in engaging with this but allowing people to dance to their own rhythm so that slowly your rhythm and theirs are one and yet we dance differently. For me the integral part to change is respect.*

- Through the Gender at Work process we were assisted to develop a plan with tasks to be completed, which we felt, would set the conditions for a change in our understanding of power and the power relations within the organization.
- We soon came to realize however that when one surfaces the intent to address an issue such as power within an organization this unleashes processes which belie rationality and planning. We had to develop the ability to be as open to the unplanned as to the planned and we had to learn to use the opportunities thereby created to enrich our learning.
- This all created a process which at times felt intensely confusing and we were not always sure whether we had moved in any tangible direction. The interventions of Gender at Work played an invaluable role in helping clear this "fog" and their insistence on us taking responsibility for writing up the process helped transform our tacit understanding into knowledge of the dynamics involved.

### **THE CHANGE PROCESS**

In retrospect the change process could be summarised across five thematic areas



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## 1. Integrating an understanding of concepts

Integrating an understanding of concepts that underlie the governance of an organisation – concepts such as power, accountability, authority, management, leadership. To do this we undertook a process of reflection which took various forms.

- Armed with disposable cameras we documented how we perceived and defined these concepts in different spheres of our lives - our community, our work, our family relationships . The task forced us to match our internal intuitive understanding with external physical objects /images, a struggle which on reflection was an essential part of the learning. It was a struggle to identify the images, to negotiate with the people involved in the images, a struggle to work out what one was trying to convey

*“I remember we were given a task to take out photographs that showed accountability, authority, leadership and management. We were like fish that were trying to catch the bait because we had to choose those people and ask their permission, even though it was scary, I did it and felt powerful. For me I was a fish who had to change colours to get the kind of food that I needed and also had to be aware that sometimes the food may not taste good.”*

*“We were given cameras to take pictures where people were using power. I took a picture of taxi drivers and what they do at the taxi rank. They totally block the way in the rank as if they own the space. They forget that they need the passenger’s and that they cannot work without them. They forget who they are accountable to.”*

*“I have always struggled to understand what management meant and found it extremely difficult to find an image which would convey a sense of management – I eventually took a photograph of my mother in law’s grocery cupboard. Everything in that cupboard is neatly stacked, you get a sense of its inherent order, of what is needed, of what is finished, of marshalling and protecting resources. I came to realise that this shapes part of my understanding of the term”*

- We physically mapped out and sculpted and thereby objectified power relations within JAW, between JAW and its stakeholders and in our own personal relationships. Through these exercises we started to connect with a more tangible, visible sense of our own power.



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We sit and toy with play dough  
Moulding, kneading powerlessness  
Shaping destinies that was.

***Different forms and figures emerge***

Each one of significance.

Exploring different heights of understanding,

Some less painful than others, yet the power that emanates from  
this powerlessness is almost immortal.

The thread that runs through all unites and magnifies what we are.  
It weaves untold tales into magic carpets.

*“I thought about the power line workshop and I how I had measured myself at the lowest point of the power line .I felt powerless when it comes to making decisions at work. I felt voiceless and helpless, As if I am sinking into the river. After this workshop I started to stand up for myself and was able to raise my concerns. Although I was angry at that time but I dealt with it and let it go”*

*“When we spoke about accountability it made me see who the important people are who are accountable to us .We do not realize that there are people who are very close to us and we communicate with them in our jobs. These are the court officials”*

*“I recall when we used play dough to shape our goddesses of powerlessness. We shared painful memories and through our veil of tears, looked around and suddenly realized our resounding resilience through our violent relationships with our partners, the death of our loved ones, rejection from our families and on the whole our struggle through crisis. I realized then that power was pliable and not often palpable and that powerlessness was transitional. Power expands, contracts and is never fixed.”*

*“The play dough exercise made me realize that I was moulding power, I felt emotional when I moulded my Goddess. I realised what I have achieved-I now own my own home . I am proud and motivated and for me this goddess is a symbol of my strength.”*

- With a better sense of our own individual power, we were more able to re-examine our past and to gain insight into other’s positions.

*“I recollect one of the issues that came up when we unpacked power and authority. It was an issue that took place a few years ago but still remained fresh in J’s mind. It was a disciplinary hearing that took place while Jb who is our present manager and who at that time was a project partner also participated in that hearing. At the session J expressed how powerless she felt through that disciplinary procedure and that it had tainted her so much that she experienced great difficulty in letting go. Jb startled her as well as all those who were familiar with the issue, when she*



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*expressed how powerless she had also felt at that time. We always perceive that people in authority are always powerful. This revelation allowed J to reflect, understand, to detach and move on. She finally had closure.”*

## **2. Breaking down insularity and creating the condition to receive new ideas, new definitions**

The Gender at Work process forced us to move from an existing level of comfort into situations where we started facing all the assumptions that we had about ourselves both at an individual and at an organisational level.

Just the process of engagement with other organisations in the Gender at Work Action research project was challenging. We saw ourselves organisationally as not sufficiently educated, not sufficiently professional and perceived the other organisations to be everything that we were not. We dreaded the initial encounter and doubted the value of our contribution.

*“I remember Jb telling all of us about the Gender at Work workshops and she emphasized that anyone who attended these workshops had to talk, that we couldn’t just sit and listen. I agreed to go to the first workshop but I was terrified. I just sat there and forced myself to speak “*

*“ I was so proud of S + F at that first workshop. There was a very difficult moment at the end where one of the participants was very critical and aggressive about the process. People were stunned and initially said nothing but both S + F did not leave it , they confronted her and they did it with such skill that she was able to leave tabling her issues more constructively “*

Through these and other interactions we came to be more aware of our strength as an organisation which we realised was centred in the very things that we did not value about ourselves - our smallness, our connection to our emotions, our ability to work from our feelings.

During the same period as the Gender at Work process was unfolding, JAW secured funding to send the majority of the staff to university where they completed a 2 year part time course in Adult Education and Participatory Development. Through this staff were challenged to start framing their actions at work in theory and encouraged to critically reflect on their practise. Staff started feeling more comfortable in the use of theory and through their interactions at university, came to realise that they were capable of participating in academic processes. This started a process where staff started revisiting the assumptions that they had made about themselves and their lives.



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### **Staff input on the value of the Adult Education Course**

**F:** Initially I was overcome by mixed emotions one of absolute anxiety coupled by excitement. Studying further has always been a dream that I held onto. I remember walking in to the lecturer room every Tuesday morning with a defined sense of confidence. Every Tuesday I had a spring to my step. My colleagues and I would chatter on like teenagers. My sense of confidence was enhanced by the fact I felt grounded by my organizational experience and every time I contributed in class I spoke from an authentic experience that no one could judge because it was my experience. As an Adult learner that was what was different for me. It opened me up to how people were different according to the context from which they came. I was doing my capacitor training concurrently with my studies and this gave me an infused feeling of groundedness coupled with a sort of mysteriousness. It was almost an ethereal experience. My graduation was also similar; I felt emotional more especially because I had my 18 year old daughter with me who had attempted to study through UNISA but gave it up. I felt sad that she had not continued but that day gave me a sense of perseverance to encourage her and my self to go on. I knew that no matter what I would encourage her to study. I also felt sadness and bitterness towards my impoverished childhood that did not allow me to study once I had matriculated. I felt similar to what S described that I had wings and I controlled how high I flew.

**S:** I felt very anxious because my last experience of studying was at school and this felt like going back to school. This was made worse for me because I had not completed matric and I was not sure that I would make it. However I felt that I had been given an opportunity to study further and this was my dream. The greatest challenge was how I managed time. I kept two jobs and was a single mum. I had also come out of grieving for my late husband and did not feel emotionally very stable. Studying helped me keep focused. I found myself in a mixed group of people with different qualifications and I kept asking myself if I would make it. I began to feel that my children and family members respected me more. My children also began to help me with putting my work together. My community members were surprised that at my age I could study. All of this gave me more independence. The lecturer's guidance allowed me the space to grow at a pace that kept my independence but did not keep me dependent. For me that is what learning and leadership is about. My leadership style has changed in every way. My graduation was like a dream come through, I never expected to complete it and do well at the same time. It was the greatest moment for me but at the same time I felt sad that my children three of whom had completed matric but could not study further because of finances. I was grateful that my organization had given me the opportunity. I felt that I had been given wings to fly.



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*J: Firstly I had not matriculated and had a mere standard five education did not know what to expect going to university. I was very scared, nervous and anxious. I struggled with these feelings and did not know how to overcome this until the first semester. What helped was that the lecturer was helpful in making me understand after confronting him about my difficulties. Everything was smooth sailing after that .In my first year I had a 75% aggregate. I want to thank my organization for giving me this opportunity. I am proud that I worked on my own through all the two years. Four of my children are matriculated but only one had not .After I had graduated he decided to complete his matric through Intec. I wanted to study further after this because I was motivated but unfortunately took ill. I was so proud of my self when I graduated, I was reduced to tears .I now have a better sense of how to unpack and look at things in a critical way. Reading has always been an issue for me but now I have got into reading as well. My families look up to me and have confidence in me. I feel confident and proud of myself.*

Through Gender at Work we were introduced to *Capacitar* – a popular educational practise which draws on a range of mind -body- spirit integration practises to give people skills which they can use to help them deal with situations which they find overwhelming. Two staff members participated in a *Capacitar* training programme and brought the practises back to JAW using them with staff on a regular basis. These practises were essential in helping us redefine how we worked with one another and with our constituency. For we started to learn the art of restraint where rather than rushing in and rescuing as we had done before, we started to value and respect people's ability to deal with their own issues. This restraint meant that we started to become more aware of our own projections, our own anxieties or fears and consequently became less inclined to place them on others. This did not adversely affect the quality of support given for we walked more respectfully alongside, helping people to get to a safe emotional space, from where they could reconnect with their inner resources and draw from this to deal with what they faced. The practise also helped us more quickly identify those who wanted to be rescued, those who wanted to remain stuck in a position of helplessness.

*N was late for a staff meeting and I was angry but when I saw how upset she was, I let go of my feeling – “What’s wrong N ?” we asked – she took time to reply and when she did it came in stilted gut wrenching gasps from deep in her being. It was the kind of sound that instantly reduced others to tears.*

*When calm enough N described how her daughter of 14 – who had recently returned home after running away with a baby in tow- had spent the night ignoring the cries of her baby and when finally responding had acted in such rage that the baby needed to be taken to hospital for treatment.*

*We sat and listened.*



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*N we knew, had been through agony trying to find her daughter and she had with time come to accept that the daughter was living with a much older man and that there was nothing that she could do about it.*

*What she was now struggling to accept was her daughter's return home and the added responsibility that she faced of rearing another child, at a time when she felt ready to start focusing on her own life . "I do not want this baby" she said and "I do not even want to know its name"*

*We let her speak and when calm enough we used a capacitar practise -an emotional freedom technique,-where we acknowledged and centred the difficulties of the account deep within our physical being and we also acknowledged that although there were no easy answers we trusted N's ability to find a way through.*

*N sighed a deep, deep sigh and then said – "let's go on with the meeting."*

*It took N 4 months to find the emotional space to acknowledge the baby but she did and she now speaks of her with pride and great love.*

### **3. Building up knowledge to face the Board**

From the outset of the Gender at Work process, JAW staff were adamant that given their experience of the past governance structure, that they did not want a Board to govern them, they wanted to govern themselves. Having learnt however about the need for accountability, particularly in terms of funding received, the staff struggled to identify an organisational legal structure which could secure this plus allow them to govern themselves.

The need for continued funding consequently opened the way for staff to start considering which legal structure would most appropriately meet the need. Workshops were organised where the advantages of each legal structure were debated and with this knowledge, staff agreed to meet with the existing Board to present their decision.

The workshop was facilitated by Gender at Work and took a surprising turn. For far from facing one another as adversaries a space was created where staff and board members started to listen to one another.

This was done through helping staff present the rationale for their programmes and helping the staff articulate the values which underpinned the work which they did.

"It's all in the way that you describe it " the facilitator said – "and if you can describe it in the right language your value will be heard" The right language in this instance was coherence . It was the linkage between the value, the principle and the practise – and once this was made, the



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programmes became clearer.

Time was also spent detailing all the responsibilities within the organisation and engaging staff and board in mapping out which JAW staff member had authority to act in a particular area. The tension between the staff and board members visibly receded – helped by substantial dollops of *Capacitar* practise. In retrospect the JAW staff acknowledged that the issue about the type of legal structure to be adopted was merely a reflection of their fear and powerlessness.

*“I feel less uptight about the legal entity that we need to adapt – if we get the prior work done in place”*

*“The principles, values, practices ( exercise ) made it clear how the hard work which we do looks small but has bigger contents. They help me to see what I am committed to do.”*

*“I realised who I am accountable to and who is accountable to me”*

*“The last workshop we had at Salt Rock with the Board of Management was excellent. We both shared our fears and our hopes. What I realized was that the facilitator made sure that we had a chance to speak. Before the workshop we had some ground rules that helped. The facilitator also realized that we had anger and gave open space to allow conflict. People spoke and we moved on. It was a three-day workshop where I gained knowledge and also acknowledged the BOM (Board of management) for being dedicated. My learning was that I must take responsibility for my work and my actions. I can now swim in the river of JAW, sometimes it's not easy but I won't give up”*

*“The Salt Rock workshop gave me a broader picture about the organization and what values, principles and practices are and how it can be applied to my work situation.”*

#### **4. Being given responsibility and exercising it**

One of the decisions that flowed from the joint Staff / Board workshop was that the group would work together in deciding the type of legal structure to be adopted for managing JAW once JAW secured autonomy. The group met several times and agreed ultimately that JAW be managed as a Charitable Trust. Staff were involved in developing the guidelines for the recruitment of Trustees as well as involved in identifying and interviewing potential trustees. The terms of reference for the Trust were also drafted through negotiation with both groups.

The Board also involved the staff in reviewing and making recommendation for JAW salary and service conditions. The experience of being given responsibility and of exercising it did much to restore a sense of trust between the staff and the Board of JAW. But restoring trust in itself was not the key ingredient, - that lay in the different perspective of their ability and their potential that staff had built up through the Gender at Work process.



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*“A task team was nominated for negotiating salaries for all staff including the manager. I felt in a powerful place as I could agree or disagree. It helped me make decisions together with a Board member.”*

*“We were able to choose a task team which included one member of our Board of management. This task team dealt with the issue of increase in salaries. For me that showed that we were all at the same level of understanding of each other’s needs.”*

### **5. “Well, what has changed?”**

It was only in retrospect that we realised that our battle with the project partners mirrored that which many of the women in our constituency face, when trying to access maintenance from fathers who are reluctant to support their children.

Like them **we too** were dependent on the whims of project partners who refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of our claims. Like them **we too** felt emboldened to make demands which the partners initially agreed to but did not always honour. Like them the frustration kept us angry, like them our sense of powerlessness kept us trapped. We reflected them in everyway and that kept us feeling valued.

**Question: “Well, what has changed?”**

**Answer: “We have. As staff we view ourselves differently”.**

*“I realise that every person has the capacity to be both powerful and powerless. It’s OK to be both – But it becomes a problem when you get stuck in one mode”*

*“When I recognise that I have power within me – I do not have to fear other people’s perceived power “*

*“I can say yes or no and I am starting to recognise my limits and my capacities “*

*“I have stopped focusing on blame and I try and accept responsibility for my actions in my own relationships”*

*“When we did the river of JAW exercise, the river was going down at first with no flowers on the banks of the river and it reminded me of JAW at the beginning. We were working but we were always reminded that we might not get funding. We have to remember that JAW is a stepping-stone. We had no manager then and in 2002 we got a manager and I looked at my river again and this time there were flowers growing. The rocks that stood in the way blocking my JAW river started moving slowly, when we began the power and other workshops. These were the equipment that helped move the rocks. Some of the rocks have not gone.”*



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This change has spilled over into other areas of our lives.

- S has summoned up the courage to leave an abusive marriage and has endured a period in which she and her children were constantly on the move in search of safe accommodation. She drew comfort from the fact that it had “ taken the Israelites many years of wandering in the desert until they reached the promised land” and hers is the pragmatic voice in the quote above who recognises that “Some rocks have not gone”
- F as a result of her achievements in her university certificate course, has been offered a place in a University Honours course and at the age of 40 is feeling more confident to explore and show the other areas of her creativity. Hers is the poetry in this article.
- N who struggled to speak English in public, came to realize that she was “reserving herself and hiding all the potential I have – not trying to practice in order to be perfect”. She recently hosted, in English, the official opening of a JAW project in front of an audience of over 100 people.

We have come to value our past and through the reflection involved in the Gender at Work process have realized that we need to harness its lessons to empower others. We are presently in the process of moving from the “rescuer – service delivery/ welfarist programmes” to one’s which help women to act as their own advocates in maintenance matters, where women are mobilised to act on the Justice system for needed resources and reform. This is bringing us to a different level where we are now able to more easily face the structural forces which underpin inequality and oppression and are in the process of “ integrating an understanding of the concepts ” for this next leg of our journey .

At a more prosaic level, JAW is now operating as an autonomous organisation and the JAW Trust was formally registered in May 2005 and we no longer feel the need to resort to magical solutions and ritual enactments in order to deal with our organisational issues. We have developed the ability to manage without feeling so personally involved.

It is now about 14 months since the formal end of the Gender at Work process. With hindsight it is easier to see how many foundations were laid during that process for what we are able to manage today. For instance, members of staff feel more empowered to take initiative, to lead their various projects and programmes and to interact with Trust members without so much trepidation and fear. The programme has been formalised, it has clearer objectives and a linked methodology for empowering women constituents to become effective advocates. Conceptually, we in JAW have shifted from focusing on changing the condition of the women we work with, to changing their position. We work more now with groups with the specific intention of breaking individual isolation. In relation to the Department as an organ of the State, we no longer do their work for them. We have streamlined our services, and are



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now more firmly located as an NGO that has a clear monitoring role as opposed to a 'hand-holding' role. Part of this change was precipitated by our decision to set up an information desk outside the JAW offices and hence outside the courtroom building. As a result both JAW and the Department have had to refocus. The whole process enabled us to confront and thus liberate ourselves from the perpetrator-victim dynamics that had previously existed within the organisation.

In reflection, we realise that a change process can only begin with a willingness to change and a willingness to embrace different/new concepts and processes that one doesn't understand to begin with. By the end of writing this paper, we were able to give words to the unconscious feelings and conceptual shifts that had taken place during the change process. One of our most important lessons is that change happens at multiple levels – and is facilitated with some degree of objectivity. We achieved a certain distancing from our own situation and from our identification with our constituency, through the process we used, the statues or goddesses of powerlessness we made, the outside facilitator and being part of the Action Learning Peer group. The Adult Education course also helped us move what was 'inside', 'outside' – which challenged us to examine how we were relating to our constituency. Through these processes and the writing of the paper we were able to rearrange our 'unconscious' experience and make meaning of it. This consolidation has meant that the changes have not only been felt throughout the organisation and the way we do our work, but have also been sustained.

### **SEEDS DISPERSE**

*Words solemnly planted on the boards,  
Intimidating yet invigorating,  
'Power' the ever changing  
'Leadership' the flexible,  
'Accountability' the silver thread,  
'Empowerment' the ultimate,  
'Authority' almost threatening.  
These we toyed with for days, each questioning,  
Some drawing painfully from past experiences.  
These concepts transformed into a language dictated by our  
perceptions.  
Each one brings into it their own measurement, some almost  
weightless and others too much.  
We struggle to slowly unearth, to stir,  
<sup>22</sup>At last with brilliant reflection there is an awakening,  
It arouses our soul,  
We magically connect  
The seeds disperse*

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## CONCLUSIONS AND KEY LEARNINGS

*Michel Friedman and Shamim Meer*

In this chapter we reflect on some of the key lessons to emerge from the Gender at Work Action Learning Programme (ALP) from our vantage point as programme manager/ facilitator and documentalist.

We highlight that deeply transformative change can be supported and assisted by processes that facilitate reflection, that hold, accompany and consider the need to heal. Such a process needs to embrace the personal and the emotional. All three authors talk about grappling with power at a very deep level– especially their experience of power wielded over them and their own power. Allowing such personal space enables a leap into territory often avoided because it is either too painful or difficult to honestly look at and untangle – it allows the exploration of organizational authority in ways that enable personal transformation which helps individuals function more effectively in their organisations. We also found that the link between personal and organisational change works in both directions -- organisational change can catalyse personal change.

A significant learning around emotions and organisations is that unless the negative charge of difficult emotional realities are recognised and transformed, they can bedevil the best intentions for change, prohibit forward movement and perhaps make it impossible to transform informal rules/norms<sup>23</sup>. Similarly unearthing hidden experience and making visible the shadow can help to align the organisation inside and outside.

### **KEY LEARNING 1**

**The value of a process, which facilitates deep reflection, holds, accompanies, and considers the need to heal**

Bringing the assumptions and experience we noted in the introductory chapter, we attempted to create a space in each interaction that would facilitate deep reflection in ways that challenged held ideas and that brought our emotions, bodies and the personal realm to understandings of ourselves within our organisations. Our first key learning is that this approach works to unleash energy for change and helps in greater creativity. Drawing mainly on comments from participants we outline the ways in which this approach facilitated the change processes in these three organisations.

On further reflection a related learning on our part is that this approach cannot be boiled down to a simple use of tools in the sense that we can now offer a tool than can work in any hands to achieve the same end results. This is because a central feature of the approach we are advancing is the relationships between and among the actors in a change

<sup>23</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of informal rules or 'deep structure' see Chapter 1 – Roots of Gender Inequality in Organisations, in Aruna Rao, Rieky Stuart and David Kelleher, 1999.



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process – the ability of facilitators (i.e. users of the tools) to listen, to hear, to respond, to be part of the process in body and emotion.

What we are advancing as an approach to change is often dismissed as too time consuming or too touchy feely, particularly in the present context when efficiency considerations overshadow and marginalize what we see as more sustainable approaches and outcomes. We want results, we want to be efficient but we worry that boiling down the search for gender equality and equity to checklists and monitoring tools takes us away from our main objectives.

We are searching for a more deeply authentic way of working where our process is more in harmony with our vision. In this search we are drawing on the learnings from decades of work on organisational development, from more recent experiments with action learning approaches as more powerful for long term change in organisational culture, than the more traditional organisational development approaches. We also fuse the history of peer and action learning with personal change in ways that link personal and political as well as personal and structural.

### **Reflection and peer learning space**

The sentiments expressed in the following quotes, from the two peer-learning events, demonstrate how reflection brings issues to consciousness, and how this greater consciousness is in itself an impetus for change.

*“I’m more conscious of the way I think. I’ve been forced to look at things differently. I can look at things more critically” (F May 2004).*

*“It has been very inspiring - a real privilege to be here - enriching and at times exhausting. Thanks for sharing your wisdom with us. Particularly to the facilitators for making us think outside the box” (C May 2004).*

*“It’s been very inspirational applying theoretical concepts in a fresh way” (S, May 2004).*

*“I don’t often get space for reflection. The three Gender at Work meetings and the meetings with our facilitator were invaluable. The shared reflective space, collective ideas, provided the basis for learning” ( C Nov 2004).*

*“This process unleashed a different kind of reflection. It exposed our vulnerabilities and linked these with other processes. It is difficult to risk this level of exposure in organizations, as people will diagnose you as lacking” (J, Nov 2004).*

*“This environment was unbelievably rich. We learnt from other organizations, from their issues. It was important that organizations were at different stages – that there was a mix and that we could reflect on this mix” (J, Nov, 2004).*



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*“In a strange way the process helped me measure my actions at work, to look at things more deeply, more critically” (F, Nov 2004)*

*“I’m becoming aware of the power of reflection in the process of change. As an HR manager I’m continually looking for techniques to create a sense of reflection I’m using this more in my meetings now. People participate more, listen more and value their own contribution” (S, Nov 2004).*

*“The reflection space, the time out to think of things in a different way was very useful. The interaction with people here, sharing with other organisations --was most valuable. Having an external facilitator was very useful – there was someone to test ideas with. This acted to re-invigorate us” (L, Nov 2004).*

Participants consistently repeated that what they valued most in the process was the reflective space that Gender at Work facilitators held, the opportunity to learn from other organisations, and being challenged to think differently. Reflection on self and on organisational practice was affirmed as a key tool for learning. However, unfortunately in most social justice oriented Ngo’s, opportunities for deep reflection of this kind, are far too rare.

Stopping to take stock, to look deeply at those things, which we normally take for granted, to help ourselves, and each other take blindfolds off and hold value of what is valuable, is potentially the most powerful tool for deep change. Yet ironically this is seen as privileged space, as a luxury we cannot afford. If we are too focused all the time on goals and efficiency, we forget that “without reflective time our worldview becomes fragmented and chaotic” (Briskin, 1996:139).

Deep reflection also plays a role in helping one to change focus. Sometimes it is hard to change something directly, but it is easier to change our focus. If we stop watering the negative seeds, we can find the energy for change that comes from what is positive. For instance, in the first peer-learning event, the CSVr team had a revelation “Defining the gender unit as a gender based violence programme was a turning point for us. This frees up energy to look at where we can locate organizational change in the organisation. This helps us reflect on where we are in the organization and how much power we have. (S May 2004).

### ***Accompanying***

Gender at Work facilitators played various roles in the overall process. Besides facilitating the peer learning events, we were also called upon to provide resources such as relevant literature, to assist in designing learning events or workshop processes, to facilitate internal organizational processes or act as mentor and sounding board.

*“The programme came at a point when it matched our needs at lots of different levels. The neutrality and breath of vision were what we needed. We felt watched, helpfully mentored. I can’t*



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*stress enough how important it was to have a person from outside the organization. This helped us move the goal posts, to shift complacency. It prodded us to see the different perspectives. It was no accident that we have been able to work through processes fundamental to our organization. The intuitive, unstructured process was helpful. The edges were fuzzy and there was a constant struggle to make meaning. It meant we had to engage and think issues through to make sense of the programme. Change is not finite – it is fuzzy. An important part of facilitating change processes, is to recognize that lack of clarity and struggles are an important part of the process” (J, Nov 2004).*

### **Healing Opportunities**

The Ngo’s we worked with are all engaged in confronting social and economic issues marked by a history of conflict, violence and social divisions. Often it is not only the constituencies that organizations serve, who experience the trauma and pain of this history, but the organisational staff themselves can embody these realities. Staff members bring their life experiences into the organization and they also confront many painful realities through the course of their daily work. One of the most deeply embedded consequences of living within the norms of a racist, patriarchal culture is that many women feel devalued. This devaluing that so many women have internalised is one of the hardest aspects of patriarchal cultures to change. The peer learning environments were thus created to give participants a physical and emotional experience of being deeply valued, to recover a sense of their own voices, worth and affirmation. The qualities of such a learning space include deep connection, trust, emotional support, active listening, respect, challenge, non-judgementalism, compassion and tolerance of diverse views. In such a context, authentic and honest sharing of the painful and often silenced aspects of personal and organisational stories can emerge.

*“This process has allowed self reflection at personal and work levels. I’m always in a shell, not brave enough to question and reflect deep inside me. I did not want to open up wounds – but here, I could reflect in a positive way. I’m taking back lots of positive energy. We can now voice our feelings, this takes courage and I am ready”. (S, May 2004).*

In many healing contexts, it is the quality of listening that creates the space for change. The root of the word to heal comes from the Greek word, ‘holos’ – to make whole. Sometimes what is most required for us to feel whole is that we are deeply listened to, and thus have our deepest experiences valued and heard without judgement.

*“The materials we got – the readings that our facilitator sent us helped us through the process in a synchronistic way. It was like someone was listening to us at a deeper level. It was very helpful (J, Nov 2004).*



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Besides emotional distress, exhaustion, burn-out and fatigue are other common consequences for participants working long hours in socially difficult contexts. As Goleman, (1996:22) points out – “low levels of energy appear to increase one’s vulnerability to tension, anxiety and fearfulness”. “When your calmness and motivation is low, molehills loom as mountains and you’re likely to waste precious emotional energy wrestling with magnified doubts and imaginary obstacles”.

Organisational change interventions can themselves induce their own stresses, and require enthusiasm, energy and inspiration to pursue. In order to renew and revitalise participants’ energy and capacity for clarity, the Gender at Work learning spaces thus deliberately utilised various tools and exercises that help to release embodied stress and relieve emotional distress and physical fatigue. One of the organisations was so inspired by the exercises in the workshops, that they attended further training in order to share the benefits of these practices and embed them more deeply into their own organisational culture.

*“The Capacitar exercises—the need for congruence between mind, body, and soul especially with people who are traumatized is great. For example, the levels of stress and anxiety, experienced by the women we work with, including vomiting, diarrhea, and the ongoing dialogue in their heads is huge. I’ve never before understood the level of this trauma. Women are not coping. The Capacitar exercises help women create space for ways of dealing with all this” (J, Nov 2004)*

*“Capacitar was very useful. We are using this with magistrates at our stakeholders workshop on Friday”(J, Nov 2004)*

### **Value of Writing in aiding reflection and communication**

From this first phase of the action-learning process, Gender at Work has confirmed that participants value the opportunity to reflect upon and write about their experiences and that it enables a certain kind of consolidation to occur.

On its own, it (the Gender at Work process) seemed to achieve ‘little’ – yet writing this report at the end of 2005, the value of the process in pushing CALS along a road of organisational change becomes significant. (CALS paper)

Gender at Work’s... insistence on us taking responsibility for writing up the process helped transform our tacit understanding into knowledge of the dynamics involved (Jaw paper)

In fact, my most sustained and intense engagement with Gender at Work began once the workshops were over and we were required to write about our experience of the process. Writing, and the thinking that went with it, required a level of ongoing examination and scrutiny of the organization, my place in it, as well as the place of others and of how we



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all related to one another - something which, to some extent, I had avoided during the workshops (CSV paper)

However, it took far longer for the papers to be completed than we had imagined. All authors struggled to prioritise the time required for the task. We still believe that communication is a necessary part of our process. In some instances the writing was not seen as a 'legitimate' part of participants' job descriptions. Nor did we as the Gender at Work Team consider the question of time and money for writing when we designed the process – an omission we take as a lesson learnt. This meant that participants had to either work on their writing at nights and on weekends or take unpaid leave to do so. In this sense we could be accused of colluding in and further perpetuating the unpaid labour syndrome that so many women find themselves in.

Gender at Work was reluctant to take on the role of writing because we believed that writing is fundamentally a political act in which the writer through writing is allowed to participate in shaping the knowledge agenda and how the world is understood and acted upon.

We also believe that reflection is a complement to action and that writing entails rigorous reflection, as well as allows the writer to consolidate experience. Encouraging this kind of rigorous reflection therefore supports an improved practice.

In many organisations only a few people write – those with greater education, skills and experience, and this tends to overlap with the race class and gender hierarchies in society – and this exclusionary practice can be changed by empowering other members of the organization to write.

We realise that in addition to skill, practice, education, experience and time there are emotional and energy blockages that create very real obstacles to writing and that ways need to be found to unleash blocked energy and settle blocked emotions. In part our overall approach in the Gender at Work process – i.e. drawing from Capacitar and The Resonance Repatterning system helped us deal with some of these obstacles. In addition, both of us had to spend many hours talking through ideas, encouraging, supporting and at times cajoling some of the authors.

We have realised that in future, if we want participants to write themselves, we need to support organizations to overcome the obstacles that currently prevent them from owning the authorship of their own stories and thus hopefully challenge an underlying 'deep structure' cultural practice.



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## KEY LEARNING 2

### Organisations and change

We are profoundly aware that changes are constantly occurring within organizations all the time. At times change can be positive at times it can be negative. At times change can happen unintentionally and at times we contribute to change in ways we are not conscious of. The changes we refer to here are brought about by conscious interventions that seek specific positive outcomes - deep change so as to achieve transformative shifts in the realms of ideas, cultures and structure.

A framework<sup>24</sup> we used in our initial workshops to assess where change is occurring in an organization brought awareness to four levels of action: access to resources, women's and men's consciousness, exclusionary practices and formal institutional rules and internal organizational culture and leadership.

The three organisations offer good illustrations of change at all of the levels above. However in actual experience these themes interlink and overlap with each other and because of this overlap, we have organized the key themes in this section as follows:

- How much of organizational change is personal change?
- Emotions and organisations
- Organisational change catalyses personal change
- the shadow
- organizational culture change
- role of leaders
- organizational change is multi-directional
- mainstreaming as a management concern vs separate gender units.

#### *How much of organizational change is personal change?*

*“Common to all the organizations is that organizational change is about personal change” (C, nov 2004).*

Perhaps not surprisingly, a key theme to emerge in this change project given its focus on gender equality and organizational change was the complex ways in which individuals are socialized into specific women and men. In some cases participants brought awareness to the connection between childhood experiences (one's personal history) and present-day behaviours, and this unlocked enormous potential and strengthened capacities to bring change to the present. What helped these personal transformations to unfold and the impact these transformations had in helping participants to function more effectively within their organisations is perhaps one of the greatest learnings this process has to offer others.

<sup>24</sup> The framework was developed by David Kelleher and Aruna Rao Gender at Work Directors. See Aruna Rao and David Kelleher, *Is there Life After Mainstreaming?* Gender and Development: Mainstreaming A Critical Review, Volume 13, Number 2, Oxfam UKI, July 2005. Also see Annex 1.



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How people's raced, classed and gendered socializations affect their living and being within organizational space is key to understanding crucial aspects of power, voice, initiative, change, leadership, authority and management. Vital indicators of 'gender equality' are more women speaking their minds, taking responsibility and initiative and gaining access to decision-making resources by entering positions of structural authority and leadership.

However the implications of this vision can be complex and raise serious challenges. In this regard, striking features of the Gender at Work Programme included the personal changes unleashed during this process: the awareness of how adult relationships within organizations can mimic parent-child dynamics and the reclaiming by some participants of personal power through achieving greater awareness.

In taking a leap into territory often avoided because it is too painful, participants explored issues of gender and authority making the links between early experiences of authoritarian fathers with present authority figures in organisations. While participants touched on race in relation to authority, the most deeply felt experiences were perceived through the lenses of gender and authority.

In the Jaw case for instance, the change project aimed to change its formal structure by developing a new legal governance structure for the organization. However, governance requires authority, leadership, management and accountability. Staff members' historical experiences with abusive authority figures – men at home – women within the organizational hierarchy – led them to question – “Do we want power given our experience of its abuse?” (March 2004, Hearing the Stories workshop).

Eight months later, the Jaw Coordinator reflects on her journey of shifting consciousness and behaviour and describes how she reclaimed her own authorship:

*“I felt powerless, like a child in relation to the board. I realised we behave in ways designed to please unpredictable people. Once awareness of this dawned I was able to say what I thought without worrying about whether it would cause displeasure. This in turn resulted in a less charged relationship with the board...” (J, Nov 2004).*

*“The journey triggered feelings that made me feel vulnerable as a woman. I struggled being a manager and going through this struggle enabled me to deal more comfortably with my role. I was able to see the need to see the structure in a way that makes me ..... my life as a woman, take authority from the board more happily. There was also a difference with the staff. There was a change in F's management style to being more assertive. We tended to vacillate – between being staff and being managers. (J, Nov 2004)*



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The second most senior person in Jaw reflects on her perceptions of her own personal power and her reluctance to join 'management' and thus access decision-making structures:

*"The modeling out of clay exercise helped me realize that the model was of a powerful person even though I felt powerless. I realized I had done things in my life that showed me I was not a powerless person but a powerful one" (F Nov 2004).*

*"My dilemma with leadership and management juxtaposed to the staff arose out of my own issues of my past. Trapped in an abusive marriage for almost 10 years and then abandoning it without much support from my family and the community, breaking the shackles of stereotype, I found myself in a lonely place. No empathy from most of the people I knew, I struggled to keep afloat. When challenged with the issue of my position in management at Jaw and my 'sitting on the fence', I began to dig deep within myself. My clinging on to the issue of empathy for the staff and 'feeling' for them came from the lack of support I received when I left my marriage. It was easier to identify with them, than with management". (Jaw Paper)*

And at the final peer-learning event after having undergone a significant consciousness and practical shift, she is able to conclude:

*"There is no doubt for me that our personal lives impact on how we see things in the organisation. Individual change is also needed. If you haven't dealt with issues in your own life, you bring those issues to the organization" (F, Nov 2004).*

One of the most fraught issues in the change project at CSVR was the apparent intransigence of the white male director. Intriguingly, a key turning point in their change process was when the Gender Unit's white woman coordinator had a change in consciousness to realise that there were similarities between how she used to relate to her father and how she was currently relating to the director.

*"I grew up in a household made fraught by my father's verbal savagery, the good kick in the pants, the clip across the earhole, the smack on the head that I was asking for.... Hatred, anxiety, ambivalence, despair at my powerlessness and a fear-filled rage had also constellated themselves around and towards authority...*

*A personal turning point came about following a confrontation during one of our MCM meetings and I caught myself reacting to the then-Director in a manner that was identical to how I responded to my father...*

*I began to understand that responding in this way was a choice and not a pre-ordained given. I was no longer a child powerless in the face of a parent's rage, but an adult; I no longer depended on others for food and shelter but could fend for myself. In other*



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*words, I no longer lived in my father's house and therefore no longer had to obey his rules. While raging, impotent and silent hatred may have been a necessary survival strategy then, it was not a useful or helpful response to adult circumstances." (CSV Paper)*

In CALS, the white woman feminist director struggled to fully own and utilize her access to positional power and authority. In her conclusion to the case study, the director writes:

*"Perhaps most importantly, the Gender at Work process provided space to reflect on CALS, on the idea of effective leadership, how to use power in a positive way and what it meant to be a feminist leader. Gender at Work strengthened my ability to understand and appreciate the human, group and organisational connections that underpinned organisational issues, as well as to set the necessary boundaries and direction to the organisation both on individual issues, but also when CALS was faced with difficult and potentially fractious issues in 2005. For me, much of this was about the exercise of power in a 'stronger' way than I had been used to in the past, and thus to take full control of my own power when managing the internal dynamics and beginning a process of restructuring for the future. Power and leadership are gendered issues in many ways. The CALS experience suggests that we feel more comfortable with some kinds of power than others. This means that it can take time to feel comfortable with the full exercise of power, but that to do so, is essential for good leadership." (CALS Paper)*

### **Emotions and change. Emotions and organizations**

Some of the above examples also demonstrate the potent way in which emotions are tied up both with consciousness and with transformational processes, particularly emotions of powerlessness and anxiety. There was however no consensus on how much responsibility an organization needs to take for staff's emotional well-being or even how much space the organization needs to create for processing feelings, whether as a by-product of organisational change or of simply complex lived realities. Perhaps the most significant lesson is that unless the negative charge of difficult emotional realities are recognised and transformed, they can bedevil the best intentions, prohibit forward movement and perhaps make it impossible to transform informal rules/norms.

The following quotes reflect some of the debate:

*I'm feeling very exhausted. The silences in the organisation filter through me. I pick it up because I interact with staff. I realised this morning that I cannot carry everyone's silent messages and how to feed back to the coordinator. Today I will be responsible for my own thoughts (F, May 2004).*





*Emotions are a big deal in change processes—how they are dealt with, ignored, worked with. You won't have a change process without emotions so you need a strategy for dealing with them (Daily reflection Nov 2004 process.)*

*Can organizations be therapists? Should we be involved in these questions? Where are the boundaries? Is this a question of size? (L, Nov 2004).. "There is a point when things have to be done and people need to put feelings aside. When does it become self indulgent and narcissistic to go on about our feelings? We need a balance".*

*There is a lot of anger in the ALP given their work with AIDS. How do you deal with this situation, these emotions? What do you do as a feminist leader in an organization? (C, Nov 2004).*

*At JAW work and home are integrated; it hasn't been a problem. We do have a boundary though, we don't counsel each other. We're supportive though—we give people space to talk. How much do we lose when we adhere to boxed in rules about expressing feeling? (J, Nov 2004)*

Being able to honour and express one's feelings is in most cultures a stereotypically feminine trait and given patriarchal values, is not often valorized. Many organizational cultures also tend to place higher value on rational, scientific, and conceptual qualities than on feeling responses to the world. Denying the importance of emotional realities is a norm that can in practice act to minimize and thus exclude people from being fully present with all of who they are in organizational life. Individual emotional histories as well as organizational styles for valuing emotions will likely impact both individuals' and teams' capacities to work 'well', to function efficiently, to feel heard and valued etc. Finding the right balance between taking emotions seriously, and not letting them rule the organization is no doubt tricky, and certainly a concern for achieving gender equality. From these three experiences, we can see how crucial emotional work is, to transforming gender inequalities and to some extent exclusionary practices/informal rules. It is hard and often painful work and unless something drives us to do it, we are likely to resist it.

### ***Organisational change catalyses personal change***

Deliberate or conscious changes initiated within organizational processes combined with organizational support can also play an instrumental role in facilitating changes within people's personal lives in general. Such personal change in turn feeds back into the organization and can facilitate people's capacity to participate in more empowered ways in all aspects of organizational life. The following quotes from the Jaw team members reflect this:

*I felt I had a tea cup to empty the ocean. This morning I thought how can I throw the tea cup to colleagues, and family like the ball we imagined in our playful throwing to each other in Tai Chi yesterday. I felt my energy come back in a positive way. The*



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*teacup is yours. I have done my share and want to move on. I also thought what stops me using a bucket? Why could I not have asked for a bucket? I am going back very positive – thinking if put in a situation like that again to say I need a bucket, not a tea cup. I feel very positive (S, reflection on process during May peer learning workshop 2004).*

*A lot has happened since May. People are aware of power and powerlessness in relation to their personal and work lives, and in relation to our constituency” (F Nov 2004).*

*The personal shifts among staff are clear. For example a staff member from a rural area who could only relate to me (the coordinator) through a third party – was able to take up a problem with a bank teller – she was able to stand up for herself, say that she did not get the full amount and that she would write a letter to take this up. She was able to assert herself, so that she would not be a victim of the system. (J Nov 2004).*

*Most staff at JAW are building or buying houses... This is significant - we are moving into building an organization and people are also building personally (J and F, Nov 2004).*

### **Shadow examples**

The concept of ‘the shadow’ emerged as a useful tool for many of the participants. The term is used in at least two ways. Just like we can’t see our own physical shadow’s following us around, we have individual and organizational shadows at a more psychological level. Usually it is others who can see our shadows before us and these tend to be those parts of ourselves, and others, that we dislike, “ignore, fear, deem unnecessary or simply lack the imagination to perceive (Briskin, 1996:34). The point being, that there are issues, which lurk beneath the surface, which are hidden from consciousness and which can hold us back. We have to see them first before they can change. “The shadow is most virulent in individuals and organizations when unresolved aspects of our own personality are channeled toward blame and the repressed negative qualities within ourselves are projected onto others” (Briskin, 1996:49).

Shadow was also used in this process in a second sense to describe the ways in which the inner workings of organisations’ were not always able to reflect the values or practices that were dearly held in their work outside in the world. In different ways, internal issues in each organization mirrored some aspect of precisely that which they were most determined to change in the world. Recognising shadow “gives leaders and organizational members an opportunity to acknowledge and assess responsibility for unaddressed facets of their own personalities and their organisations’ direction” (Briskin, 1996:36). All three cases demonstrate how shadow dynamics can manifest “at different levels and in different ways, reminding us that what we don’t see in the upper world of rational behaviour also has consequence” (p38). Unearthing these shadows is probably akin to surfacing deep structure issues at both an individual



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consciousness level as well as at the level of informal culture or exclusionary practices.

CSVR and CALS for instance, noted that while their work outside was about making visible and challenging practices and processes of social exclusion there were serious shortfalls in addressing these within the organisations.

*We cannot be a human rights organisation and not be a human rights organisation inside. We must ensure human rights inside also. (CALS)*

In one organization, despite having existing skills and research methodologies for surfacing social practices of exclusion, there was little space internally for discussion on race. In the other, diversity workshops focused on race were compulsory for all staff while gender workshops were not compulsory.

*It is important for organizations to use these strategies because it is too dangerous to be human. Words are barriers to pain and humanity. A way of refusing to engage. Put things into constructs and ideas, to take them out of relational feelings, so that it can obscure (CSVR Nov 2004).*

JAW on the other hand works with people, is not remote and its very existence is based on the desire to challenge the exclusionary and demeaning practices of the justice system. It seeks to humanise the justice system so that people can be seen as people and not numbers. While Jaw aims to create a human space in an inhuman environment and tries to humanise court officials, at the beginning of this process staff felt strongly that they did not have such a relationship with their board. Their change project involved attempts at bringing greater alignment between existing JAW values and their internal governance relationships/practices.

Somewhat surprisingly, during the change processes activities, various shadow issues present within Jaw's own informal culture surfaced as an emerging consciousness. For example, their very humanizing focus also had its own shadow aspects. They saw, how the value of going the extra mile, of caring for others more than yourself, can lead to difficulties in planning ahead because one is always responding to others; to burnout, no boundaries, getting sick/tired; to lots of overtime and burdens on family time. The shadow of identifying with the victim can lead to an inability to say no which in turn can lead to quite a bit of compromising.

*By the end of the process the coordinator at Jaw was able to say: We thought that we spend a lot of time dealing with the shit in JAW. We now have a concept for dealing with this. We realise that informal practices are more important than formal processes. I realize at some point that part of this is the value of the Gender At Work process of surfacing the shadow (the informal). You always have to be aware of the shadow and the formal part at the same*



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*time. That is one of the strategies that can grow organizations. It does require a lot of conflict. In JAW we have a lot of conflict. It takes time and energy and a willingness to deal with uncomfortable things ( J Nov 2004).*

The complexity and difficulty of aligning internal organizational practices with the values and visions of what organizations are helping create on the outside is reflected in the personal experience of the Gender Coordinator from CSVR. At the final peer-learning meeting, the Gender Coordinator who was reluctant to take responsibility for changing the whole organization asked:

*“Is the organization a means to an end or an end in itself? It is too tedious to do battle constantly. We need calm, neutral, supportive spaces. Where do we put our energy? My choice is to work on the outside. Gender relations affect the internal dynamics of an organization but we are relatively privileged in relation to people outside the organization and they need to be our priority.”*

And one year later, in her writing, she explains the roots of her position:

*“As a child, home had often been an anxious, ambivalent and fearful place where I was constantly being brought face to face with my smallness and all the numerous personal defects that necessitated the good hiding, which corrected them. How I dealt with this, was to create an alternative, accepting outside world where doing well brought a sense of, worth and value that compensated for living in a household where I often felt helpless and wrong.*

*My father’s moods were also highly unpredictable and inconsistent; what he ignored one day would enrage him the next. This made being in an environment in which I exercised some control and where predictability and order,, essential to my sense of well-being, could be relied on.*

*To be at the CSVR was often to feel devalued and unseen, while work outside of the organization provided considerably more rewarding and affirming experiences. The inside/outside split I had learned as a child once again became a way of being as I withdrew from the organization as a whole to retreat into what felt like the safety of the Gender Programme.” (CSV Paper)*

All the above examples testify that to “acknowledge and then resolve the contradictions implied by the shadow requires considerable reflection and moral effort” (Briskin, 1996:42). It is anyway perhaps not possible to get rid of the shadow, but more useful to ask “how does one live with the shadow without enduring a succession of disasters” (p54).



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### Organisational culture change

Clearly any deep changes or transformations in the cultures of the organizations participating in the Gender at Work process cannot only be attributed to this single intervention. Deep changes will inevitably be linked to other processes simultaneously occurring in the organization. As we have tried to illustrate in some of the examples above, deep cultural transformations in organizations are interwoven with changes in other areas such as consciousness, structure or access. Some of the key changes that we have observed in each organization are summarized below.

Although Jaw's initial emphasis was on changing its legal governance structure, the CCP process within Jaw catalysed changes at multiple levels. Congruent with its existing culture, the Jaw process engaged participants at the rational, emotional and energetic levels and developed its own rhythm. As Fazila described it:

*“change was like a slow dance; you had to learn the steps, connect with the rhythm within you before you can hear the music, then dance with your soul and then sway with the sound.” (JAW Paper)*

As a result of this in-depth, 'slow dance' process we can see formal changes in Jaw in that it is now a legal entity in its own right with a new board of trustees. More staff members gained access to decision making via positions of management and project leadership and to opportunities for personal educational growth. Individual consciousness in terms of knowledge, skill, self-confidence, self-value, awareness and assertiveness among staff has increased enormously. There is greater understanding of governance processes (formal rules), and individuals have an enhanced sense of authority. Staff members are also more able to take responsibility for transforming negative emotional states. In relation to informal culture and exclusionary practices there is now a staff representative who attends Board meetings. In addition, the relationship between the board and staff has changed considerably – no longer being so antagonistic or set within a victim-perpetrator type framework. Becoming aware of the organisational shadow has led to significant changes in staff conditions of employment and assumptions within Jaw about how to organise themselves. As a group, staff, are more able to address complex and traumatic emotional material and these skills are used not only individually but also within staff meetings and programme work. Jaw's whole stance in relation to the Dept. of Justice has changed from being a support system partially doing their work for them, to playing more of a monitoring role. The shift is creating tensions and changes causing a refocus in both organizations.

The Jaw programme has been formalized with clearer objectives and methodology. The focus is now more on empowering women constituents as opposed to 'doing' the work of the Dept. of Justice by helping individuals fill out forms! There has been a major shift from



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focusing on changing women's condition (by improving their access to maintenance payments) to changing women's position (by working more with groups to break individual isolation and to facilitate constituent capacity towards holding the Justice system accountable). JAW staff see themselves and the people they work with less as victims and more as agents of change.

Jaw's process, taught them that different members of the organization (eg. staff and board) have different understandings, which need to be communicated and that a common understanding was necessary in order to move forward. While the Jaw team had a plan, they also learned to 'sniff the trail' and were flexible. While change can be conflictual, they learned that crisis helps change, it requires time, people must take responsibility, external support is important and listening to others is crucial. In the end, the process brought new energy and direction.

The CALS team intended to ensure that questions of gender equality were an integral part of all CALS research. To achieve this they planned to break down silos and create more of a listening organisation. The approach they chose to follow made this a management responsibility. The main changes in CALS manifested at the levels of individual consciousness – that is how people think and see – and in the culture of management. The process led to some fundamental changes in informal culture, in that the whole way in which different sections or silos relate to each other was restructured. Also staff meetings were run more democratically and this maximised a wider range of staff participation. Changes in the conceptualization of the terms of reference for research within CALS projects have the potential to change the way in which CALS research is done and can lead to practices that consider race, gender and class inequalities from the outset, so that addressing gender equality is no longer the concern of the gender project alone.

What helped the CALS process was that Gender at Work came along as they were already struggling with these issues. The objective of integrating race, class and gender equality was not described merely as an internal one, but linked to how CALS engages with the world. Having Gender at Work as an external entity, somehow gave the process more support – and perhaps legitimacy.

In the case of the CSV, more changes occurred at personal levels of individual consciousness than at the level of deep organizational changes. One of the CCP team members left the organization during the process. The coordinator of the Gender Unit had significant changes in her own awareness of her relationship to the organization and came away with new levels of insight. The Gender Unit managed to restructure its role and its workload. Although the organisation as a whole focuses on issues of social violence, the Gender Based Violence Programme continues to have the clearest focus on how violence is gendered. Only three programmes besides the GBVP address gender equality issues. The criminal justice programme has a programme on sexual violence in prisons. There is a sexual violence in schools project and a Gender and



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Memory programme. Perhaps the organization as a whole was not feeling enough pressure to change and at the organizational level, the CCP process was not a burning issue and had no champion. In terms of internal equity issues, the organization managed to reconstitute its Transformation Team.

### ***The role of organizational leaders in facilitating meaningful organizational change***

Our experience in this programme confirms, along with many traditional organizational development guidelines, that if you want changes to take root in the organizational culture, then leadership support and openness to learning is crucial.

In the CALS case the director, newly appointed, (a structural shift from coordinating the GPU) and consciously seeking to bring her feminism to managing the organization was part of the CALS team engaged in the Gender at Work Programme. The JAW Coordinator also recently appointed and motivated to make dramatic organizational shifts was part of the JAW team engaged in the Gender at Work Programme.

Having the Director from CALS and the JAW Coordinator in these organizational teams meant that the person at the highest level of responsibility for organizational matters was present and participant in the process, and was able to take learnings into the organisation.

The CSVR team was made up of the Gender Unit programme manager and the human resources manager over the entire process, with a Gender Unit researcher attending the first phase that is until she resigned from the organisation. The CSVR director did not participate in the programme. One of the two founders of the organisation, he was in his last year with the organization, and on sabbatical for much of the period over which the Gender at Work programme ran. Although both the GU and the HR managers sat on the CSVR Management Team, they perceived themselves as having limited influence. The GU programme manager was not inclined towards organizational development – her strength and bent being in programme work on Gender Based Violence and her contributions in this field as researcher, commentator and activist are widely recognized. In this context the absence of the Director limited the possible success of the change process and seemed to fuel a degree of negativity in the CSVR team. Although physically absent from the Gender at Work process, the Director's presence, power and influence in the organization was at all times quite palpable.

### ***Organisational change is “a kind of dance that happens in more than one direction”...***

Lessons emerging from all three teams suggest that change is slow and multi-directional:



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*Change is not linear, is unpredictable, impossible to anticipate every contingency (L, CSVR – Nov 2004)*

*To get greater integration across programmes internally and in order to integrate race, class and gender internally and in how we deal with the world: commitment from all staff is needed, meetings need to be carefully planned and prepared for, work through existing forums and recognize how important and key is the right moment of receptivity. (C, Cals – Nov 2004)*

The facilitator working with Cals reflects that:

*“Rational approaches to change can work. In the Cals case, staff want to be good professionals, so focusing the change process on planning research fits straight into what is very important to their sense of self identity. If they see a gap in their research, that changing research design and methodology can address, they can respond positively.”*

The CALS case also highlights the need for those of us working with conscious change, to interrogate our assumptions. For instance, the Director was surprised to discover that some staff believed working with women is enough.

*“Doing gender work is about making people conscious of how they see the world. People think it is simply about adding women and stir. Women are already in the mix. It is about getting women to think of themselves” (C, Nov 2004)*

She realizes she needs to understand what people are thinking.

The CALS story also shows how gender is used as an analytical category in research and how day-to-day organizational activities are influenced by assumptions about gender equality. Deep organisational change requires change in both respects. For example, the facilitator was surprised that the Director did not use basic, democratic methods of holding meetings. Not bringing awareness of gender equality to both the work and the process can mean that we don't get to more fundamental layers of change. The whole process was helped enormously by the Directors' desire to change, to be a different kind of (feminist) director and her willingness to be honest about her own limits. Besides the specific 'gender' changes, the organization now has more coherent organizational planning and more democratically run staff meetings.

### ***Mainstreaming as a management concern versus separate units for gender equality***

These three case studies in different ways all raise questions about the meaning and practice of 'mainstreaming gender equality' into the core culture of an organization.



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The culture and functioning of organizations in South Africa, like the society as a whole, are shaped and influenced by the intersection of unequal relations of power informed by class, race, gender and sexuality. Precisely how this web of relations, weave together in relation to any particular issue is complex and variable. In this sense 'gender' is already in the 'main stream' of organizational life, but not always perhaps in ways that we might want. The real challenge of so-called 'mainstreaming' then is not about adding in something new to a pre-existing pot, but rather about how to transform what is unfavourable about what is already there, so that we have a situation that is more equitable. These case studies demonstrate and reflect upon the conceptual and strategic choices that have been considered.

Two of the stories – those of CALS and CSVN -- reflect upon the conceptual and organizational split between 'gender work', and 'other programme work'. Gender work directly addresses the more obvious aspects of 'women's oppression and patriarchal conditions (for example, violence against women, women's legal minority status etc.) and is located in specific gender units. 'Other programme work' – touches on issues that affect both women's and men's lives, (such as reconciliation, Hiv/Aids, access to housing or water), but is somehow not perceived as linked to or needing to address instances of 'women's oppression' or by definition already impacts directly on the lives of women, so there is no need for mainstreaming. Both stories address the question of whose responsibility it is to ensure that general programme work is more professionally competent in addressing the differential gendered impacts of their foci. Is it the gender units' job? Is it the role of an individual programme manager or officer? Is it the role of the management team as a whole?

Both organisations explored the difference between holding an individual researcher responsible for their gender sensitivity versus resting responsibility within the management team/culture of the organization. The difficulty involved in transforming old ways of seeing and doing is illuminated in these explorations. In one case it required a restructuring of the whole organization. In the other case, a red flag of caution was raised against eradicating specific gender units in case the specialization of the work that they enable is diminished. Presumably in an ideal world, the issues that these units focus upon should be encouraged and fostered without having to have a separate space for them. For instance, why can't the specifically gendered impacts of any kind of violence as well as gender based violence in its own right be examined and challenged as an intrinsic part of a programme that focuses on societal violence? The million-dollar question is how to realize this ideal world? It is too soon to fully assess the impact of the changes wrought by the interventions described here.

At the same time we perhaps also need to consider objective material conditions. It appears as if in both CALS and CSVN it was somehow possible and easier to continue to work in silos during the more conceptual era of 'policy reform'. However, now in the era of



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'implementation' where so many issues interconnect and overlap on the ground, the gaps are more glaring and it is much harder to get away with working so independently. In other words, is the focus on implementation 'out there' somehow encouraging organisations to shift their focus 'in here' from an individual consciousness vis a vis gender, race, class to more of a change in organizational culture and planning and management processes? Changes in the CALS management structuring and style are striking in this regard.

The third story – JAW's – is a good illustration of what difference it makes to perform a regular organizational development/mainstream function in a way, which is cognizant of and challenges the consequences of patriarchal constructions. This case set out to develop a new and legitimate democratic governance structure for the organization. In the process, staff had to confront the consequences of a gendered and raced relationship to authority and management – and the roots of their own sense of victimhood and powerlessness. In developing a new governance structure, therefore, their change project shows how they simultaneously transformed their preconceived notions of what it means to be a woman, a leader, and a manager. Indirectly, the insights gained through their experience in developing a new governance structure, has in turn influenced both the conceptual and practical ways in which staff work with constituents. In particular, the organizational vision statement has changed from implying a strong welfarist orientation, to supporting women's empowerment with a developmental orientation.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the change processes described in this monograph illustrate the complex linkages between personal and organizational change and how 'home-life' impacts on organizational life and vice versa. How we understand the interconnectedness between individual socialization into raced, classed, gendered beings and the impacts of this on organisational cultures and models for organisational change can influence the extent to which change interventions are effective. Incorporating this thinking into our change models will have more of a chance of bringing about the deeper changes we require for true equality. We need to tackle consciousness as well as the deep structure of everyday taken for granted behaviours and practices. How new consciousness gets translated into new practices is the key ingredient which will lead to lasting changes or not.

We have seen how the moulding of present practices and the possibility of transforming them is deeply rooted in organisational histories as well as the identity of pioneers, their values, visions and influence on organizational cultures. Transformational work requires deep engagement not only with structures and how much people have invested in those structures but also in individuals' very own identities. To effect lasting changes requires challenge, whether the pressure comes from inside or outside of oneself and we have to have the courage to face what comes up and deal with it.



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## ANNEX 1

Figure 1: What are we trying to change?



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