



Reflections on Organising in a Pandemic

Masakhane

CaL
Coalition of African Lesbians



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Thank you to the entire team at CAL that has held this project from inception to now. To those that have offered their guidance, minds and held space for this work in various ways - you are all superstars!



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Background

2020 marks the 8th year of the existence of the partnership with LSVD and filia, it has had many transformations; from being known as the “More Than Campaign”, to “Autonomy Project” and officially settling in itself as the Masakhane project; with an embodiment of Autonomy as a guiding politic and messaging of how women of Southern Africa have come to articulate and understand their lived experiences. As we close off a difficult and taxing year, CAL saw it fitting to speak to the collectives and “check in” and find out how the collectives have been taking care of themselves and each other, as well as; how working under COVID-19 pressures has affected their work and creativity. In lieu of the annual Masakhane learning exchange space, we hope that this report will bring together lessons from each country and the progresses made-to its varied but appreciated degrees. We will have an opportunity to share this report with collectives in the new year.

Introduction

This report takes a different form from the usual format to acknowledge that a) conversations help us understand the extent of the work more meaningfully; b) it allows for CAL to hold space for collectives by offering support & ensure that these conversations helps them reflect on their work for their own reporting. Additionally, it is important to document more intentionally the stories of change that the Collectives have unearthed while organising within hostile contexts during a pandemic. It is worth noting that experiences of LBQ women and queer bodies in general are the least prioritised in times like these. It is quite easy for the movement itself to experience some challenges in balancing their being (well-being and safety) and still work towards effecting change. Documenting narrative that authentically represent the issues faced by women in their diversities is how CAL hopes to centre the Masakhane Legacy project.

COUNTRY CONTEXT & IMPLEMENTATION

In order for us to focus our check-in, CAL developed points of engagement for the calls with Collectives. These few guiding questions helped us to summarise these experiences.

(i) How has your body/mind/spirit been feeling lately? How is the Collective holding up?

Wellness and wellbeing have been part of many conversations within the feminist/activist spaces and one of the standing concerns is how under resources and little focus there is to ensure a sustainable, creative and non capitalist forms of care and ideas of community care. From what Collectives shared, community care was an integral part of some people's survival (both mentally and physically) and just talking to each other and holding space for one another was the support many needed.

"...tired but excited about next year. Work & some personal relationships didn't work out okay and that has affect my income-I live alone and I have bills to pay" ~ Mozambique

"Lately, public networks of support e.g. social security, health service are not efficient and that has affect my well-being, but the collective was there and held me. We kept in touch, exchanged things like soap and coconut oil. Even laughs!" ~ Mozambique

"I'm fine-been tired for most part of the year. This year has been a rollercoaster for me, I had to go back home to stay with my parents-which is something that hasn't

happened in 5 years. I was faced with some demons that I may have been avoiding. The interviews with the Collectives for the case studies kept me busy and being able to talk to someone was good for my soul. My soul, my heart felt recharged." ~Mozambique

"Beginning of the year was fun because I was learning new things. Right now I'm very tired and this I think I have fought if off, I am living/alive." ~ Mozambique

"This year has been emotionally draining for me, in the beginning I was quite calm, [I was told] in a time of chaos it is not a good thing. I

had to introspect on that. On top of that, there were family issues that needed to be confronted.” ~ Mozambique

“...I realised I was stronger than I thought I was. I am not only alive but doing things..”
~Mozambique

“I’m not looking forward to 2021 but moving at a comfortable pace for me and exploring with other people was comforting, and I felt grounded..” ~ Mozambique

“I’m doing quite alright, glad we have all made it through the year-individually and collectively.” ~ Lesotho

“It was stressful, I needed to find a job and finishing school. I tried to stay focused and be strong for others-my family. Collectively, I am worried about the work- I have been gone for a year and wonder if we still know what direction we want to take the project. It feels stagnant.” ~ Lesotho

“I feel tired, I have to do things and need to do them quickly because of deadlines- I need a LONG holiday.” ~ Lesotho

“I’m very tired, I feel like we are pressed with time and need to do what we have to and also need the rest.” ~ Lesotho

“Personally, I’m not sure about how I’m feeling. There has been a shift in the working from home , which is more hectic. I’m at peace but my mind is all over. It’s a lot” ~ Zambia

“Health wise, I’m not ok. A lot of calls-everybody wants to have meetings. In relation to Masakhane, we are not moving at a pace that we should. We need a jump start of some kind...state of the collective is worrying.”
~Zambia

“Generally, I’m in an alright state. I have been feeling detached from the collective because we were not really involved. I hope we get past things.” ~ Zambia

“Its rough, I honestly feel burnt out and not performing to my full potential. I’m struggling with anxiety and the work load is a lot and taking a toll on me and I feel I am not giving [Masakhane project]

my all.” ~ Botswana

“As a collective we have not been working well, there has been breakdown in communication. I feel we’ve been disorganised in planning. I do not know if its a distance or communication thing.” ~Botswana

“I can’t say I’m ok - with the lockdowns, COVID, the economy- I feel I’m lucky to be alive and have food on the table. The Collective is great, we see it as a safe space - a family you can talk and find comfort in being able to talk about their issues.” ~ Zimbabwe

“Lately, I’ve been feeling exhausted. End of the year there has been a lot of work. Collectively, our communication is not the best.” ~ Botswana

“Even though there is COVID, my mind is at ease. I am happier and ready for whatever comes my way. It has made me understand that you are much bigger than yourself-a healthy spirit requires love, I am receiving love.” ~ Eswatini

“My body is ok - in a good palace.” My mind is tired mainly because of COVID. I miss hanging out with people without the restrictions. We met recently as a Collective and that was a good thing. For the collective, there is a strain on mental health and I think we are all holding onto the hope amongst ourselves.”

“I’m spiritually ok but my mind is a bit tired and I feel as the collective, we have lost momentum, we are not where we hoped to be.” ~ Eswatini



We explored successes as a range of initiatives taken by Collectives to ensure implementation, understanding of the Masakhane project, coordination and thinking work that may not always be linked to planned activities. Any form breakthrough in the Masakhane project is a success and should be counted as such. It is impressive to see how a myriad of issues such as socio-economic, wellbeing, movement building and capacity enhancement work went into the efforts of the collectives' implementation despite some being brought in play by COVID-19.

(ii) Please share with me some of the successes you have had in 2020 with regards to the Masakhane project

“... we have been able to discuss issues that we have never talked about before, like Mental health (depression, anxiety, suicide) and GBV. We go through the days without even talking about our issues because we are so used to their burden.” ~ Zimbabwe

“On mental health-we spoke about the triggers and most members articulated the disenfranchisement of LBQ women as one. Due to fact that a lot of us have to take care of ourselves financially- our right to family has been taken away [by being disowned for who we are].” ~ Zimbabwe

“Some of the members are in sole trading for survival [vendors] and the lockdown affected our work and the inability to provide ourselves took a toll on us.” ~ Zimbabwe

“We were able to assist sex workers and LBQ women who were in need of food and the project supported them through that.” ~ Zimbabwe.

“We provided space to just talk our issues -on WhatsApp. Issues around cyberbullying (cases of outing on social media & to their families- some attempts of suicide were reported via our WhatsApp group -“We saved a life.” ~ Zimbabwe

“We held a GBV dialogue. It was amazing-talked about GBV within the LBQ community (not knowing that



you are being abused, IPV, not being able to report such issues.” ~ Zimbabwe

“The food parcels initiative opened our eyes to women in rural areas’ experiences in and how COVID affected them (it cemented why one day we want to see the collective being an organisation). The food parcel initiative wasn’t just about the food, when the person sees you, they see hope. They want to talk to you.” ~ Eswatini

registration case. We were able to raise awareness about the case and what impact it has on their lives with the women in the rural areas as well as with other partners; especially with the case being a stepping stone to opening doors for other patriarchal laws to be challenged.” ~ Eswatini

“Being able to work with communities outside Gaborone and collaborating with other organisation in those initiatives like the breast cancer drive we were a part of.” ~ Botswana

“We have been able to get a therapist who is available to all LBQ women beneficiaries.” ~ Eswatini

“We increased our visibility with production of t-shirts & masks.” ~ Eswatini

“We have formed allies with Phumelela - an organisation that offers psychosocial services as well as Eswatini Sexual & Gender Minorities- in the form of advocacy with the on- going

“Our response to COVID-19, people lost jobs and were not able to meet their basic needs. We helped with food, sanitary wear. Lately we have been able to offer safer sex commodities like dental dams & finger cots have arrived- this is because LBQ women have been left behind many times with regards to such service.



Its a small number
but it's better
than nothing." ~
Botswana

to determine our progress.
How we can determine and
archive our goals, targets
and deliverable and what we
want to do with the project." ~
Botswana

"We have been able to sell
the Masakhane project in
other spaces- we had an
introductory meeting with
Women Against Rape and
made a partnership about the
project and how we can work
towards enhancing it next
year." ~ Botswana

"I will call it progress and not
success, being able to get
updates about the progress of
work through other collective
members so it was good to be
kept in the loop." ~ Zambia

" Our progress: getting to the
point of
discussing
the project
in a critical
manner,
it's a few
people
that are
still putting
in some
interest,
compared
to last
year." ~ Zambia

"One of our
initiatives
was the
Muscle Up
self- defence
class that
taught LBQ
women
to protect
themselves.
There has
been an
increase



in GBV cases and these
also affect LBQ women." ~
Botswana

"We have managed to get
some resources (materials
from AWID) that could help
us develop our own learning
and build onto our movement
building for work. ~Botswana

"Our fiscal host [LEGABIBO]
has offered us their M&E officer
to work with the collective

"Restructuring of the work plan
which has seen the wellbeing
aspect coming to the fore,
even though COVID-19 is what
has forced us to focus on well-
being." ~ Zambia

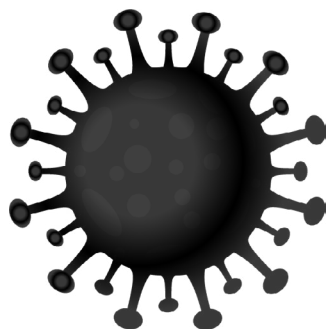
"We have people who
started their feminist journeys
with Masakhane moving
into different spaces (not
coordinated by Masakhane)
and we have seen our politics

being reflected and carried through.” ~ Zambia

“We’ve seen a shift in terms of how we have been able to engage different collective members who have fallen off and we see the willingness to be part of the collective.” ~ Zambia

“One of our successes is that we are alive! We have done meetings and 5 episodes of podcasts recording (not published yet because of lack of technical know-how with editing)” ~ Mozambique

“Angola partnership: conversations are going on, how we can collaborate and learn more about their movement, some hindrances of course have been because of COVID-19.” ~ Mozambique



“We established a partnership with MoveFem during the UPR report preparation. This was a special one because we know

that there is competitiveness in movements and makes it hard to reach out and form partnerships.” ~ Mozambique

“Psychological support in the collective.” ~ Mozambique

“It feels like we have some control and ownership of the project with the direction the project is going. Framing of research that has morphed into the book series -which is really answering some questions based on lived experiences of LBQ women in the country.” ~ Mozambique

“...getting people from different organisations (partners: Lesotho Federation of the disabled-their women’s wing) within the collective we have representative/affiliations to (Matrix-LGBTI organisation, Rainbow Alliance, Ca re for Basotho: Sex workers, SHE HIVE- feminist & SRHR organisation, Golden Dykes-LBQ women led and focus, Masters of Healing)...and our decision to focus on mental health issues.” ~Lesotho

“Another success has been bouncing back from where we were in terms of mobilisation and how things were able to move, we have really come a long way. Partners still wanting to come and be part

of it despite the long silence we had last year and so it showed some willingness to work with us.” ~ Lesotho

being peer therapy sessions - [through them] I also found that I neglected myself even.” ~Lesotho

“The food parcel baskets helped us understanding the economic effects of COVID-19 these outreaches ended up

(iii) Please share some of the challenges you have experienced in 2020 with regards to the Masakhane project.

“The collective always talks to each other and are on the same page but we have lost momentum despite the Facebook page running. We are behind on tasks.

“The issues with finance also threw us off. We are a team though so we try to juggle and move. We have a feminist workshop coming up this December if everything goes well.” ~ Eswatini

“ In some instances, using resources that are personal for aiding some of the beneficiaries because of how bad the situation was.” ~ Eswatini

“The lack of office space makes coordination

and assisting beneficiaries difficult as we have to meet the in places that are not always private or safe.” ~ Eswatini

“ It has been difficult organising within COVID regulations and fear to come together physically.” ~ Zambia

“...falling out of members, they wouldn't want to be back in the Collective because of past experiences that were not well coordinated. Others not willing or able to work without funding because they cannot afford to be part of the space

due to financial constraints
and being able to get to
where they are needed.” ~
Zambia

“..coordination in Zambia
was not strong, certain
things; the mistakes/gaps we
saw in the beginning came
up during COVID. Financial
sustainability which took a lot
to dig into our own pockets
during a time like this.” ~
Zambia

“With a growing feminist/
women’s movement, we were
missing in action so we were
unable to be visible and take
up space. Couldn’t capitalise
on the different spaces and
conversations happening.” ~
Zambia

“...communication breakdown,
we had to do a project
and think our roles would
be communicated more
effectively.” ~ Botswana

“Well-being..a lot of work
and no debriefs; we do not
recognise mental well-being
and that a person needs time
out of work. I am on autopilot,
not creative with the work and
the end of year madness has
halted implementation...” ~
Botswana

“It has been hard getting
feedback from the managers

within the fiscal host to report
and plan activities and there
are some bottlenecks in
that process and this delays
implementation. Even with
stipends: everyone we report
to is within the fiscal host.”
~Botswana

“There has been a loss of
economic independence
by many of the LBQ women
within the collective.”
~Zimbabwe

“...bringing
people together.
As much as we
are 1 community
it is hard to have
people from
different spaces
(economically,
socially, ideas,
communities
etc.) people will
always have
disagreements
and differences
that cannot be
resolved easily.”
~ Zimbabwe

“As member [not part of the

coordinating team] I cannot say I've experienced any-the leadership certainly had many challenges." ~ Zimbabwe

"Not being able to do physical meetings, we are at a point where we need to start running and not walking. Physical meetings make it easy to make decisions." ~ Lesotho

"Delay of disbursements of funds is very difficult especially with COVID- everything is slow. But reliance on the funding has also shifted because of the "autonomous" webinar we were in with CAL shifted things for us." ~ Lesotho

"Lesotho does not allow for an online working environment, infrastructures aren't suitable for that." ~ Lesotho

"..the panic and chaos about work and relating that into the project and how I would honour the work and maintain well-being ~Mozambique

"The brunches are essential for me-connection is so strong and it is different because it allows me to be me. It creates space for that- it is space for support and learning." ~ Mozambique

"..hesitation in asking for support- feeling like we didn't want to burden other people because people were already dealing with a lot. Not doing too many activities as a result." ~ Mozambique

(iv) What are some of the changes (minor/major) that the Collective has seen in your country on LBQ/sexual rights and women's rights issues? What role or opportunities are there for the Masakhane project?

"We have seen a change in LBQ/sexual rights- clinics opening by GALZ (MSM & LBQ women) which curbs the weird questions or being stared at because you are dressed differently. Opportunity for the Masakhane project to work with these organisations to ensure we are included. As much as they are catering for LBQ women, we are not mainly included- programming resources. There are mostly services like checking for cervical cancers, we know people who are not comfortable with those processes and understand where you are coming from and talk them through it. One other clinic open this morning (14th Dec 2020)." ~ Zimbabwe

entrepreneurship to try and encompass it with the many issues LBQ women face." ~ Zimbabwe

"We saw a reversal of the Land policy-ownership of land by women and the review of the constitution is an opportunity to engage to ensure that we visible." ~ Botswana

"There is active conversations on gender based violence and so this could be an entry point for us. We can do random visits to these policy makers because they do not respond to invitations to meet and have conversation about representation and share recommendations on how they can be more inclusive." ~ Botswana

"A lot of people were not able to provide for themselves because of COVID-19 and the project has been able to assist people in need and people appreciate what it has been able to do. We have seen an increase in members this year [+90 people]. Aspiration of training about financial literacy skills/

"GBV increased during lockdown has forced us to work with our women's movement and we need their support to increase our voice and collaborate and participate in their activities- this is how we explore intersectionality and how we can uphold varying identities of women." ~ Botswana

“There is room for collaboration of movements [sex workers & mainstream feminist movements]. And the fact that we are in and HIV spaces [problematic as they are], we see this as an opportunity to speak to our politics.” ~ Zambia

lady taken effort
to speak against
these violations.”
~Lesotho

“Conversation about Injustices happening on women and children, more public conversations on specific cases. A lot of online, cannot gauge whether there is a change in behaviour or just the the visibility was high due to COVID.” ~Mozambique

“WAFE and Lotus Identity being LBQ focused and conversations on learning more about feminist ways of working, women’s rights are a shift we have seen and also an opportunity for Masakhane has to engage more movements.” ~ Zambia

“Child and gender Protection Unit has been active on GBV-assist them in learning more of how LBQ women are side lined in the protection of women. There is an increase of conversation on women’s issues-GBV specifically with the First

“..exasperated by the pandemic as in the global community 2 different conflicts have in some regions (internal conflict of political parties and northern region (terrorism) and this means not having access to basic things such as health and education-which affects women mostly.”
~Mozambique



We can find opportunities in the northern for Masakhane project to find (story telling about the displaced LBQ persons in the camps, how they are being exploited and how we can zone on the effects of these conflicts.” ~ Mozambique

opportunity to teach about the use of pronouns being [hard in Portuguese because of gendered pronouns that have no flexibility], but maybe there are other local language opportunities that we can use.” ~ Mozambique

“..segmented women’s rights movement: no space for questioning gender and other fundamentalist ideas. The

transwomen’s movement is booming and still have to fight for space in the women/ feminist spaces. We do have an



(v) How has COVID-19 affected the work and the Collective generally?

Like many movements, collectives have experienced a myriad of issues due to COVID-19, it has been reflected in how Collectives shared about their challenges and successes as well as how their well-being has been affected. The needs assessment that CAL conducted in June presented and opportunity for Collective to tailor make their work to the immediate responses for the communities.

Additionally, COVID-19 has afford both CAL and the Collective growth in terms of how we see the important and meaningful work that our contexts require of us. We have been able to plan for 2021 with a need for more interconnectedness, in our struggles, in our creativities, in our capacities and in documenting and archiving our work. The idea of the Masakhane Legacy project was born out if this realisation and how much resources and reference we share from the work of Collectives and documenting Masakhane as a model for feminist movement building and ownership of priorities that speak to the needs of LBQ women and WHRDs.

CONCLUSION & REFLECTIONS FROM CAL

The Masakhane project has shown overtime how movement building requires consistent shifts to align with the geopolitical contexts, structures of the movements or collectives and emerging needs at a given time. Organising in a pandemic has offered CAL an opportunity to zoom in more into issues around wellbeing and socio-economic gaps; as issues that remain a huge part of the realisation of autonomy and how the intersecting experiences cannot be set in a hierarchal manner thereby a more horizontal and or interlinked approach needs to be consciously implemented. It is imperative for CAL to take heed of the direction of Collectives and waves of their advocacy to maintain confidence in the belief that our interests in movement building are informed by what is happening on the ground and not perceived realities that could be inaccurate and hinder the support to solution the issues.

This conscious treading and acknowledgement has festered more engaging processes with collectives, with the different needs assessment processes, the ability to network beyond CAL and to actively participate in high-level advocacy initiatives and question the processes in these space as well as interrogate their role in systems of accountability.

CAL looks forward to another fruitful and meaningful year with Masakhane Collectives and building a feminist future that upholds our shared and unique visions in the demand for our freedoms. And as Audre Lorde says “without community, there is no liberations...but community must not mean a shedding our differences, nor the pathetic pretence that these differences do not exist.”

HOPES FOR 2021

- A focus on media production by Collectives with the support of the CAL media team: Media training set for February 2021.
- Realisation of the Masakhane Legacy Project
- Active participation in Human Rights Mechanism spaces (HRC & ACHPR) based on the developed Advocacy plan shared with LSVD for the extension application. A calendar of the training schedule will be developed and aligned with the Advocacy manual guide by CAL.

- Foregrounding well-being and collective care.

- M&E for purposes of reflecting on the milestones the Collectives have had and meaningfully gauge their impacts in their organising contexts.

