The young women of Swaziland

Young Women's Voices

Issue 1. September 2010

Theme: …..taking control of your life…..

In this issue…

- **Moving beyond conflict and becoming a success in Makhosini** 3
- **The young women of Mhalangatane putting a shine on life** 5
- **The inspiring story of the young women of Nata** 7
- **The young women of Ghanzi taking the first steps** 8
- **The "young and brave ladies" of Okondjatu** 8
- **The accomplished young female professionals of Windhoek** 10
- **Basic entrepreneurial Tips** 12
- **Note about *Young Women's Voices*** 14

Welcome to *Young Women's Voices*

Young Women's Voices is a bulletin that tells the stories of young women in Southern Africa, working hard to change their lives. It aims to connect groups of young women scattered across Botswana, Namibia, and Swaziland, helping them to share their experiences, learn from one another, and record a page of "*her*-story". While other people might be interested to read about this ground-breaking work, Young Women's Voices is first and foremost for *You*, the young women working hard in their communities.

Taking control in your life is the theme of this first issue of *Young Women's Voices*. People who manage to take control over at least some part of their lives are able to make more informed decisions and feel more self-confident. Taking control is an important first step towards becoming a successful woman. Of course, it's not an easy journey.

With support from CIET facilitators, groups of young women in communities across Botswana, Namibia, and Swaziland are working hard to realise their dreams and secure some financial independence, taking steps towards becoming "independent women" of the 21st century. They know their skills and strengths, and are busy challenging themselves, working together to develop successful enterprises in their communities. *Young Women's Voices* records the stories of some of these courageous and resilient young women: women who are taking control of their lives by taking control of their finances.

In this issue you will learn how a group of young women in Swaziland have moved on from conflict and set up a vegetable garden that is generating profits. You will be encouraged to hear about the bold first steps of a group of young women from Botswana. You will be thrilled by the professionalism and determination of a group of young women in Namibia. We hope these stories, and much more, can help you to learn from the experiences of other young women facing challenges similar to your own, and also inspire you as you embark on your journey as young female entrepreneurs.

In future issues, we hope to tell the stories of many more of you. See the back page for how to get your stories into *Young Women's Voices*.

Grace Wanjiru Waichigo

Editor, *Young Women's Voices*

Moving beyond conflict to success in Makhosini

All enterprises experience challenges, especially when starting off. What's important is finding ways to overcome these challenges. A group of young women in Makhosini village, in the beautiful south of Swaziland, are rising past their challenges to become a success. Like all the groups in Swaziland, they are supported by the CIET facilitators in Swaziland: Sis Nobantu, Sis Thamie, and Sis Zanele.

The vegetable garden

Before we tell you their success story, let's take a few moments to think about what conflicts in groups are about. Different people have different personalities and beliefs. It's part of what makes life colourful and interesting. Just imagine how boring life would be if we were all the same. But these differences can lead to disagreements and arguments. This happened in the group of young women in Makhosini, and their first task was to deal with this.

"Move beyond conflict and focus on vision"

CIET facilitators mentioned above were responsible for bringing the young women together. They described the initial instability of the group as follows, "They had lot of infighting when we visited them for the first time after the training workshop. We discovered that the conflict was caused by gossip between group members".

The group initially started with 11 members, but due to infighting many members left the group. However, despite the gloomy start the group has blossomed into a successful agribusiness. Only two members held on; determined to continue. Their vision was to start a small enterprise for planting and selling vegetables in their community.

The next challenge for these young women was financial; they did not have the money to buy or rent a piece of land. At this stage the group got lucky. They introduced themselves and their ideas to the new chief of Makhosini.

cont...

The young women busy working for their vision

The new chief happened to be related to one of the young women, but was also impressed by this group of young women united in taking control of their lives, and with a business plan that could also benefit the whole community. He eagerly offered his help and supporting the young women's enterprise became one of his official projects as chief. The chief gave the young women a piece of land and a generator.

The group wasted no time, backs bent, hoes parting the soil, opening it up for the young and tender lettuce roots. Fingers scratching the soil, and placing the roots into the ground, before gently yet quickly covering them; these young women moved from one hole to the next, and from one row to the next, giving each lettuce the attention it deserved, and pouring water into each hole to make the young roots more comfortable in their new environment. The towering hills and trees watched in silence. There was the occasional whisper from the wind, and the swaying of the tall grass, as they worked the land.

The green leaves sprouting from the ground were a refreshing change from the tall, brown, stiff and dry weeds and grass that surrounded them, although this made the lettuce look even more vulnerable. The young women nurtured the lettuce with patience for months, before harvesting. This was their vision.

They were able to sell the harvested lettuce to the local community, making a profit of 200 rand. This was the beginning of their financial success. They have put some of the profit back into the business to buy spinach seeds, cabbage seeds and other vegetables, thus having a variety of products to sell. They are a shining example of the importance of persistence and commitment, in spite of initial difficulties.

END

The young women of Mhalangatane putting a shine on life

Deep in the hills of the small but beautiful country of Swaziland, in the small rural community of Mhlangatane, you will find a group of young women taking control of their lives, and working hard to secure their financial independence. Starting an enterprise requires commitment, hard work, vision, and capital, and these 11 young women have taken this seriously. Getting capital was a challenge for the 11 young women. Undaunted, they approached a member of their community and successfully presented their business plan, explaining they needed 400 rands to get started, and promising to pay it back as soon as they got their first income. Armed with their business plan and this loan, the young women noted the direction of the wind and set their sails, and there has been no stopping them as they continue to sail towards their vision.

They could not afford to rent a working space, so one of them volunteered the use of her two roomed house. Cramped in the small kitchen, they lit a fire with wood they had collected; the flame was a reflection of their passion. Despite open doors and windows the smoke clouded the room, but none of the girls complained; in the pot on the fire were melting ingredients to make floor polish. The young women had decided to produce and sell floor polish, fabric softeners and bleach; testing their popularity in the community before deciding what to focus on. One of the young women stirred the ingredients in a heavy pot with a wooden cooking stick while the others looked one, some discussing their vision, and some staring quietly at the pot, perhaps wondering if their hard work and risk would pay off.

"The girls are limited only by their creativity and vision"

The young women staring contemplatively at the boiling pot.

After mixing in further ingredients, the young women poured the still liquid polish into plastic containers. They then confidently took to the streets, knocking on doors, introducing both

Cont...

Mixing and packing; ready to be sold

both themselves and their product. Their hard work paid off and they made enough money from their sales to pay back their loan. CIET's facilitators Sis Zanale and Sis Thamie's words capture the group's success vividly; "They sold it all and managed to pay back the loan. They reinvested part of their profits into their business, focusing on floor polish."

These young female entrepreneurs were wise enough to understand that this success was just the beginning. A sustainable growth of the business was and continues to be important for these young women, and they are not greedy or afraid to make sacrifices for their vision.

They are moving from strength to strength, and four months on, they continue making profits with every bulk sale of floor polish. United by their vision and determined to take control of their lives, they are now strategically expanding their enterprise to produce washing soap. They recently organised a raffle to fundraise for equipment to support the growth of their enterprise and with the *her*-story of the group, the success of the raffle was not a surprise.

They are steadily gaining the respect and support of their community as they work hard to take control of their lives. Asked about their plans for the group, CIET facilitators enthusiastically reply, "A feast! It will be the first group in Swaziland to have a feast".

The feast involves the slaughtering of a cow to celebrate their success and to introduce the group officially to the community. They are a great example of young women working hard to be independent women. Their polish enterprise is really putting a shine on their lives.

END

The inspiring story of the young women of Nata

Supported by CIET facilitators, Mma Ditiro and Mma Chipo, a group of young women in Nata, a small village in the north of Botswana, borrowed a piece of land from a local group and are now busy setting up a vegetable garden. They collected manure and spread it across the ground, not taking chances with the health and growth of the vegetables. They are growing a variety of vegetables; according to what their informal market research tells them will be popular in their own community and surrounding communities. Even as they continue to monitor and nurture their vegetables, they take to the streets, making themselves known to the community, and trying to create a market for their produce. They have not yet had their first harvest, but the village is already aware of their activities. Yes, this may be their first entrepreneurial activity, but these young women are handling it as experts. Their go-getting attitude has already earned them the respect of the village. They are invited to community workshops and training sessions, especially about agriculture.

They are now busy fundraising to pay the water bill, as they have to use piped water. These young women believe so strongly in their vision that they are making personal contributions to their enterprise, even though this is hard for them to manage. They will use this money to prepare a food bazarre, which they hope will raise enough money to cover their expenses until they have their first harvest.

"What is so special about these young women?" one may ask. "Such activities should not come as a surprise to us, this is what is expected of intelligent young women".

It is true that many young women right across Africa are trying to take control of their lives and secure their future. But the history and situation of Nata makes what these young women are doing even more remarkable. Mma Ditiro, the CIET coordinator supporting groups of young women across Botswana, explains: "I hate the way I introduce Nata as it sounds gloomy and doomed. But this is what makes the perseverance and determination of these young women so special". Nata is a small village about 200km west of the city of Francistown, in the Makgadikgadi salt pans. The soil is sandy and white, making it hard to grow anything, let alone the vegetables these young women are planting. As Mma Ditiro explains, "In summer, the glare from the sun reflected off the white sand makes one squint." Yet the young women of Nata are raising their heads high and keeping their vision clear. They have chosen to invest their time and money in agriculture, changing what some would describe as impossible or too demanding into something achievable and successful.

These young women of Nata face many challenges. Unemployment in the village is very high; there are no government offices and villagers have to travel to the nearest town for services. Nata is located halfway between the city of Francistown and the two towns of Maun and Kasane, popular tourist destinations. As well as tourists, many truck drivers come through Nata en-route to Zambia and South Africa. These men are notorious for engaging young women in transactional sex (sex in exchange for money or material goods). However, money is not all they leave the young women with: HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancies are a common legacy. All the more important, then, that young women in Nata are starting to take control of their lives, despite the challenges and pressures they face. They are role models to many young women across the continent.

Young women of Ghanzi taking their first steps

Start small, but dream big. This is good advice for people starting out with limited capital and perhaps not sure of how to get started on their big enterprise dream.

A group of young women in Ghanzi in the west of Bostwana have decided do just this: to start small even as they dream big. This is all in the spirit of not wasting time in taking control of their lives. Just one day after completing a CIET workshop about self-esteem, communication and negotiation skills, group working, and planning an enterprise, they could not hide their enthusiasm, and took their first steps as young entrepreneurs without waiting to be pushed.

They knew they needed time to think through their business idea, and to formulate a business plan. Yet they decided to do this on their toes. A day after receiving training they took to the streets, selling sweets to raise money. From this simple but labour-intensive activity of selling sweets, they made enough profit to buy the materials they needed to start washing cars and they plan to hold a car wash every month. This is not their end but a means towards their longer term plans.

Although they are starting small, these young women have a big dream: they want to start a guest house. With their enthusiasm, commitment and sense of urgency, one must think they will achieve this sooner rather than later. This group have wasted no time in implementing their ideas. They are not afraid to ask for help and direction when unsure of themselves, and their strength comes from their tenacity and energy for hard work.

These young women came together only recently, yet their sense of urgency is impressive. We look forward to documenting more about their future success.

END

The "young and brave ladies" of Okondjatu

The young women of Okondjatu, Namibia

In Okondjatu, a small Herero community in east central Namibia, a group of young women entrepreneurs are trying to raise enough money to realise their dream of opening a hair salon. To raise the capital, the young women are putting into practice their cooking skills. Just four days after attending the skills workshop run by CIET facilitators (covering life skills, group working, and planning for an enterprise), these young women borrowed a site and equipment and undertook their first barbecue takeaway.

Cont...

They had to act quickly to make this event coincide with the day civil servants received their salaries, so they could afford a little money to treat themselves to some roasted meat or original Russian sausages. One of the newsletter editors was lucky enough to visit the group on that day, together with Mr Matthew, one of the CIET coordinators in Namibia, who can confirm that the original Russian was very good!

Busy cooking for their clients

When further asked about the progress of the group, Mr. Matthew explains "Their business is going well; we even contracted them to cater for workshops around the area". Nonetheless, he is quick to clarify the group's strategy, he writes, "the issue of selling meat is only for fund raising. Their business idea is to open up a hair salon, because currently Okondjatu does not have a hair salon, and there is a demand for one."

Patiently building up the capital they need to start their hair salon, these young female entrepreneurs are continuing to put their cooking skills to good use and are now providing basic catering services. They were even able to organise themselves to sell roasted meat and sausages at their local livestock auction, held twice a month.

These young women are a good example of the importance of identifying the needs of your community, and empowering themselves while satisfying the needs of the community. But their journey is not without its challenges. It is well known that location, location, location is important for the success of an enterprise that provides services to "walk-in" clients.

Community representatives were impressed when these young women introduced their ideas to them, and the traditional council offered them a wonderful site at the main crossroads to operate their takeaway service. Unfortunately, it seems this site is on the main pathway for livestock through the community, which depends heavily on livestock. The young women are presently waiting hopefully for a resolution to this issue and allocation of a suitable site for their takeaway.

However, they are not idle while waiting to hear back from the traditional council. They continue to provide catering services to build up their capital and their success is clear. They have made enough profit to open their first savings account at the local post office. There is no stopping this group of young women. It has only been one month since they first came together, and their zeal and resilience is admirable. They even have a name for themselves: *the young and brave ladies*!

END

The accomplished young female professionals of Windhoek

The price list and some of the merchandise sold in LG hair salon

Traditionally, in Africa and elsewhere, a woman's place has been the home, as a wife, mother, and caretaker. Men explored the world, experimented with revolutionary ideas and started businesses. Women depended on men for their financial needs. But times are changing and so are women. Young women across Africa are working hard to secure their financial independence and stability. A group of young women in the Moses Garoeb area of Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, are joining this wave of young female entrepreneurs. Mr. Matthew, a CIET coordinator working in Namibia, proudly describes the group as a "success story".

After attending a CIET workshop about life skills and planning for a group enterprise, these young women decided to open a hair salon, and they did not waste time in organising themselves. Realising that a working space is what they needed most, they approached one of their parents for help. Even then, these women were professional not personal. They identified an ideal location which was owned by the father of one of the young women in the group and scheduled a meeting with him. Though the father was not able to meet them on two separate occasions, the young women refused to make the meeting personal. They patiently yet persistently called for another meeting. When the father was finally able to meet them, the young women proficiently presented their business plan as a group and negotiated the rental price as a business entity. Granted, the premise is not a state of the art hair salon as seen in movies and magazines, but these young women are confident of their vision, and are not afraid of starting small.

They started their business immediately, and continued to look for other means of generating income. They rented out a chair which they rarely used in the salon. They also each made personal contributions. They did not hesitate to invest their energy, time, ideas, and money into their vision.

Cont...

The founders of LG hair salon busy braiding a client

With the small amount of money they accumulated they could afford to buy hair merchandise to be sold at the salon. They then got busy putting to good use their talents and skills in plaiting hair and making profits. They are now generating enough income to pay their rent, buy new stock and pay themselves. They also wisely put some money aside, saving for future investment into the business. Their creativity, determination and achievement are admirable group qualities.

Confident of themselves and the control they have over their lives and their success, they formally introduced themselves to their area councillor, and requested a letter from the councillor's office confirming that they now have a legal business that should be recognised by the relevant authorities. They have also requested an appointment with the regional governor, to further introduce both themselves and their business. Their professionalism and leadership as young female entrepreneurs is splendid. They are a role model to both young and mature women within their own community and beyond.

"Confident of themselves and the control they have over their lives"

END

Entrepreneurial Tips

How do you take good ideas and turn them into an effective enterprise? Here are a few tips:

Identify something that can work

Determine the needs of your community, and try to match this to your strengths as a group. For example, does the community need a bakery, a tuck shop, a tailor, or catering services? If, as a group, you are interested in and have the skills for the sort of product or service the community needs, why not go ahead and plan to develop an enterprise?

Plan

You need a business plan. This is especially important when you are starting an enterprise as a group. Basically, in a business plan you explain your business idea:

- What is it that you want to do?
- Why do you want to do it?
- How are you planning to do it?

It does not have to be complicated; something simple that spells out your vision is enough.

It can also be useful to do what some people call a **SWOT** analysis. In this, you look at your **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats.

- **S**trengths: are what you are very good at
- **W**eaknesses: are what you struggle with or what you are not good at
- **O**pportunities: chances or openings which are beneficial to your business
- **T**hreats: things that can be harmful to your business

A **SWOT** analysis of your group can help you to make informed decisions.

Where to get funding

There are many different ways of raising funds; there are some examples in this issue of *Young Women's Voices*. In many groups, the young women themselves put in some initial funding, even if quite small amounts. In Botswana, Namibia, and Swaziland there are government and non-government bodies that can help by providing loans or even grants to start up your enterprise. You need to find out the requirements of the different bodies. Your CIET facilitators can help you to make applications to these bodies in your own country and area.

Usually, to get a loan or grant you need to have a business plan. It is always wise to start small. The amount of money you start with is not what determines the success of your enterprise; it is your commitment and hard work. You can start with a small manageable loan and pay it back from the income generated by the business.

Plan well, and act!

It is easy to talk about starting the perfect enterprise, but getting it started can be challenging and intimidating. You might spend time thinking of a great business to start, only to find that somebody else has just started it because you took so long. While planning and discussing is important, there comes a time when you have to stop thinking and start doing!

Issue 1, Sep 2010

Young Women's Voices

Note about *Young Women's Voices*

This bulletin is produced by CIET, and is intended for the groups of young women CIET is supporting in Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland. We plan to produce an issue four times a year; this is the first issue.

We would like to hear from YOU! What have been your experiences in setting up an enterprise? What have been the challenges? How have you overcome them? What are you most proud of in what you have achieved? Do you have any advice for other young women?

In order to get your story into a coming issue of *Young Women's Voices*, please speak to the CIET facilitator (s) for your group, so that they can pass on your stories to the editor of *Young Women's Voices* (Grace Wanjiru Waichigo). We would particularly like to have stories with pictures of what you have been doing. You can give us your stories in any form you want: tell the CIET facilitator what you want to appear in the bulletin, or write a poem or a story, or draw or paint a picture.