TB a Communicable but Curable Disease; Bonela Takes a Stand

By The Business Diary

Tuberculosis (TB), a communicable but treatable disease has been mistaken for a violent killer by most people in Botswana. Known as the twin epidemic to HIV and AIDS, it is a silent killer that has significantly contributed to morbidity and mortality in Africa and Botswana is no exception. In this light, the Botswana Network on Ethics, Law and HIV/AIDS (BONELA) a leading and well-known HIV/AIDS and human rights organisation, is courting stakeholders to take a hard look at Botswana's national response to Tuberculosis or TB as it is widely known.

According to Cindy Kelemi, BONELA's Treatment Literacy Coordinator, over the years, the organisation received a lot of patients who were bringing in TB-related issues which pointed to a missing link in Botswana’s response to TB. "We made a conscious decision to integrate TB into our programming. This was out of the recognition that TB was a big problem to people living with HIV," Kelemi said. The initiative comes from a background where employers had the tendency to lay off their employees when they discovered that they had TB. This was especially the case with domestic workers where the employer feared that the infection could spread to their children.

continued on page 2
It was in this light that BONELA held a TB awareness raising march on the 24th of March - World TB Day. On the same day, the organization presented a TB/HIV Advocacy Document to the Minister of Health Mme Lesego Mosumi. Speaking on some of the issues raised in the document, Kelemi said: “We have decided to take on infection control seriously because for you to win the fight against TB you have to put measures in place to control the disease.” She added that people on treatment should be monitored and that hospitals in the country needed a proper overhaul because most of them were not taking infectious control seriously. A case in point, Kelemi alluded to is when patients queue closely together posing a “high risk infection transfer.”

BONELA is also mooting the idea of roping in prison warders to make them ‘TB literate’ so that they in turn educate prisoners on the proper ways of dealing with an infection. Prisons are known to be breeding grounds for the spread of TB because of their structures which attract close contact of inmates. In this regard, “It is helpful to have a programme that would have been designed by prison officers for the prisoners,” added Kelemi.

Another worrying development for BONELA is that Botswana is yet to apply for the Green Light committee which is an international initiative that helps countries to gain access to funding for multi-drug resistance TB (MDR-TB) programmes and concessionally priced second line anti-TB drugs. “The Green Light committee also offers technical assistance to countries through the application and implementation process. BONELA is concerned that Botswana as a country has not submitted a proposal to the Green Light Committee in order to benefit from this assistance,” said Kelemi.

“Our role as an advocacy organization is to monitor government’s implementation of policies. It is our wish for the government to realize that advocacy efforts are geared to achieve the same goal of eradicating TB. To raise more awareness on TB in the country, BONELA will conduct an awareness raising march on the 24th of March 2009, World TB Day which will culminate in the delivery of an advocacy document to the Minister of Health.”

Further, for TB to be fully conquered, BONELA has recommended the following, that: a TB/HIV advisory committee should be formed in all major health centres to ensure that services are integrated at all levels, the ministry of health should urgently develop a national training programme for health care workers on managing TB/HIV co-infection, and thereafter accelerate the expansion of these integrated services throughout the country; and that the mandate of the District multi-Sectoral HIV/AIDS Committee should be expanded to include regular reporting on collaborative TB/HIV activities among other recommendations.
BONELA Round-up

As part of programme capacity building, the BONELA staff was trained on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) by Forum Syd M&E Advisor, Kemelo Moputing. The training was held from the 19th to the 23rd of January 2009.

The PRISM Coordinator Felistus Motimedi, Doris Kumbawa (Media and Advocacy Officer), Advocacy Officer, Nthabiseng Nkwe, Lenah Baitirile (Gender Officer) and Training and Advocacy Officer, Anna Chalmers attended a Gender and Youth Mainstreaming Workshop on the 21st to the 23rd of January which was organized by Forum Syd. The main objective of the workshop was to equip participants with skills so that they are able to mainstream Gender and Youth in the Organisation.

BONELA held its annual planning retreat in February. The purpose of this meeting was to consolidate the various programme workplans into an organisational global plan. The process was also intended to ensure that programme officers share their plans and identify and jointly plan for activities that can be held collaboratively.

The Gender Officer attended the Women’s Affairs Department (WAD)/UNIFEM project meeting on the 29th of January 2009 at GICC which was organized by WAD. This was to share with stakeholders their plan of activities BONELA Director Christine Stegling, Policy Advisor, Diana Meswele, Treatment Literacy Coordinator, Cindy Kelemi and the Media and Advocacy Officer attended a planning meeting for the Forum Syd Partnership where partners shared their workplans in a bid to identify areas of collaboration and fine-tuning of those activities. The meeting was held from the 16th to the 18th of February 2009 in the mining town of Jwaneng.

The Advocacy Officer and Gender Officer attended youth mentoring workshop held on the 10th March 2009 which was one of the activities that were planned in commemoration of International Women’s Day. BONELA’s Advocacy officer Nthabiseng Nkwe presented on sexual reproductive rights health rights at the forum. Lenah Baitirile, the Gender Officer also attended a Women’s Sector workshop on the 23rd of March. The main objective of the workshop was to elaborate to members the role of women’s sector, and the role that civil society organizations represented play within the sector.

An in-house training on Media and Gender was held on the 18th of February for BONELA programme officer to equip them with appreciation of these cross-cutting programmes to assist them in their trainings. On the 25th of February, a finance training was held for BONELA staff to enhance their appreciation of financial management. The meeting highlighted crucial procedural issues which will be rectified to ease processes such as the audit.

On March 2009, the Policy Advisor, Treatment Literacy Coordinator and Arnold Sokwa, the Treatment Literacy Program Assistant met with the Public Health Watch Project Coordinator from the Open Society Institute (OSI), Erin Howe. The meeting discussed the planning process for the TB infection control policy monitoring project that BONELA will carry out in 2009. Between December and February, the Policy Advisor and the Treatment Literacy Coordinator worked on a proposal for funding for the planning phase and BONELA has already received the requested funds from OSI and is currently in the process of gathering data to inform the writing of a proposal for the policy monitoring project.

The Treatment Literacy Coordinator, together with the Treatment literacy programmes assistant, the Aids Rights Alliance for Southern Africa and the Open Society Institute visited the Dukwi Refugee camp, Francistown Network of support groups under the auspices of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to consider the draft Regional Policy Framework on Minimum Standards for Mobile Populations and Communicable Diseases. The meeting discussed the many reasons advanced for the virulent spread of communicable diseases, particularly HIV and TB including poverty and economic marginalisation, high rates of sexually transmitted infections and sexual networking, which are closely related. The Policy Advisor also represented BONELA in a Technical Working Group that is drafting the Global Fund on Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFTM) country proposal. BONELA hopes to secure GFTM funding to up scale and decentralize the treatment literacy program to 11 new districts and that the funds will also be used to expand the PRISM Men who have Sex with Men needs assessment to 11 more districts to create baseline information which will inform planning for prevention programs targeting sexual minorities. On March 31, 2009, the Policy Advisor traveled to Palapye to join the TWG for the proposal drafting. The proposal is due to be submitted on the 1st of June 2009.
of the District Aids Coordinating (DAC) office and the Boteti treatment literacy programme under the leadership of Chirwa Mahloko in partnership with the District AIDS Coordinating Office. The intervention forms part of the department’s monitoring and evaluation initiative. The aim of the visit was to assess the level of impact created by the interventions employed in the previous year. Such interventions included capacity building for treatment literacy focal people in the various districts. The treatment literacy department held meetings with the DAC officers in Francistown and Letlhakane to find out the effectiveness of the treatment literacy initiative in strengthening the district’s response to HIV/AIDS. In both districts, authorities alluded to the fact that the programme has been instrumental in promoting adherence in the districts, thus contributing to the district prevention strategies.

In Dukwi Refugee Camp, a meeting was held with Red Cross Botswana, UNHCR, members of Dukwi Camp Support Group and the nurse from Dukwi Clinic. The need to build a sustainable treatment preparedness programme was echoed by all stakeholders present at the meeting. BONELA and ARASA made a commitment to intensify efforts in advocating for access to ARV treatment for refugees. On April 15th, the same stakeholders will convene again in Dukwi Refugee camp to map an advocacy strategy for access to ART for refugees in Botswana.

In February, the PRISM team with the assistance of Training and Advocacy department and LeGaBiBo, held a two-day workshop with the consultant for the PRISM training manual for content development. The PRISM team also had a consultative meeting with the Francistown District AIDS Coordinator (DAC) about the PRISM programme. In the same month, the PRISM Coordinator made a presentation on the PRISM programme at the pre-National AIDS Council (NAC) as well as at the Partnership Forum Committee meeting on the Men who have Sex with other Men study findings; this was a follow-up presentation on the Needs Assessment presentation done to same committee last year.

The PRISM team also held a stakeholders meeting in the month of March to disseminate the MSM study findings.

BONELA hosted organizations implementing PRISM in Southern Africa for an exchange visit and participated in a day’s workshop between the organizations and visited BONELA PRISM stakeholders. Visiting partners and LeGaBiBo held a learning and sharing meeting where strategies on advocacy and visibility were discussed.

On March 3rd 2009, Nthabiseng Nkwe and Malebogo Batsile traveled to Molepolole to attend a pre-assessment meeting with teachers of Boribamo and Sebele primary schools. The meeting provided an opportunity to assess the needs and gaps that both schools have in respect to HIV, stigma and children’s rights before the actual workshops are held with those schools, so as to inform the workshop preparations. On March 5th, the same meeting was held at Kanye with Matsaakgang and Segopotso primary schools.

---

**Ignorance of the Law: A Breach of Democracy?**

*By Diana Meswele*

As part of its vision to ‘make human rights a reality in the response to HIV and AIDS in Botswana’, the Botswana Network on Ethics Law and HIV (BONELA) facilitated a one-day seminar with Magistrates to discuss domestic violence as a legal issue that affects individuals, especially women possibly exposing them to greater risk of HIV infection on 4th of April 2009. The discussion considered the recently enacted Domestic Violence Act with the view to meaningfully engage with it, exchange experiences, challenges and ideas with magistrates, who are key in the delivery of justice in Botswana.
BONELA as a human rights organization is guided by a philosophy that empowering communities with information and knowledge is the first important step in enabling them to protect, promote and fulfill their rights and those of others within society. Magistrates fall within that community and the seminar with them formed part of a more comprehensive BONELA training programme on human rights, law and health.

In recent years, in recognition of domestic violence as a growing social phenomenon with possible far reaching implications such as increasing the transmission rate of HIV among women, BONELA has been engaged in national discussions and actively participated in the lobbying for the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act. In 2007, BONELA facilitated a think-tank on the draft Domestic Violence Bill to appreciate the bill as well as to gather ideas on how to address some of the key emerging gaps in the legislation. As follow up advocacy on the new act, BONELA is engaged in awareness raising of the public and stakeholders to ensure a meaningful implementation of the act to protect women against violence.

During the seminar, BONELA magistrates expressed ignorance of the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act. Ignorance of the law among its implementers leaves very little to one’s imagination of the possible levels of ignorance among the general public not only of this much celebrated act but of laws in general. Failure to facilitate the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act amounts to the same situation that existed before the enactment of the law: a continued vulnerability of women to violence; and a failure to educate Botswana of the laws of Botswana amounts to charging ignorant persons with a law that may be heard for the first time in a court of law.

Failing to create an awareness of laws among the public is a serious omission tantamount to poor delivery of access to equitable justice and considered in a larger picture; the failure of a democracy to promote and protect the rights of women as provided for in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Seeking justice is a human right in itself, as stated in article 8 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.’ everybody has the right to an effective remedy by the competent tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted to him/her by the constitution or by law” this article presumes the inherent imperative contained within processes of legislation to include creation of awareness of the law by citizens in order to use it to protect their rights.

Democracy enables a society to offer survival, security, free social interaction and esteem during periods of change. Botswana has been independent from colonial rule for 43 years and is generally viewed as a mature democracy in the African region which has graduated to middle class economy. Using the analysis of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Botswana has long graduated beyond the survival and security phases. We are now at the stage where citizens should take responsibility for their self actualization. However, morale is low in this regard as our social welfare system and our legal environment does not actively promote meaningful participation by citizens.

One of the key fundamentals of a true and mature democracy is recognizing the public as important and capable stakeholders in deciding processes that affect their lives. This implies that keeping the public informed through transparent operations at all levels of democratic rule will ensure an informed public. An important role of an informed public is to actively contribute to governance processes including the promotion and the upholding of the country’s laws whilst also plucking from the same laws to protect themselves.

The state has the number one responsibility to promote, protect and fulfill the human rights of all its citizens. Therefore; failure to educate the public about the laws of the state is tantamount to failure to protect, promote and ensure the fulfillment of human rights. A citizen who is not aware of the law may not be able to claim their rights or to help to promote and protect the rights of fellow citizens. BONELA training plan on the Domestic Violence also targets members of the police force and lawyers. From the seminar with magistrates, a recommendation to train court clerks came out, as they receive new cases and in most cases decide whether or not they view a case worthwhile to be brought before court (lets make this to also imply they officially do not have that mandate but do it anyway).

For the future, BONELA recommends for the state not only to legislate but to develop dissemination strategies that include training of administrators of the law including magistrates, prosecutors and officers of the courts as well as a comprehensive public education program to raise awareness of the public regarding specific pieces of legislation. We recommend as soon as a law has been enacted and is available in print, expedition in disseminating it to all sections and necessary stakeholders by the Attorney General’s Chambers. Further, a well thought-out awareness programme should be facilitated by the Attorney General’s Chambers in collaboration with a relevant sector to educate organs of the judiciary system as well as the general public.
Catch Them Young: BONELA Trains School Children and Teaches on HIV/AIDS, Stigma and Children’s Rights

By Malebogo Batsile

The BONELA Children’s Rights Project aims at addressing stigma and discrimination against children infected and affected by HIV and AIDS through a human rights approach. It also aims at reducing stigma and human rights violations amongst teachers and students through training on rights based approaches to addressing stigma. This year the project will cover different schools in Botswana, namely Tsiamo, Tshwaragano, Boribamo, Segopotso and Matsaakgang primary schools. Pre-assessment meetings were held where school teachers expressed their gratitude and anticipation of the workshops since they aim at addressing how to address stigma regarding HIV and AIDS in schools.

The first workshop was held on the 16th of March at Tsiamo Primary School with all teachers and 30 students from standard five to seven. The four day workshop addressed issues of HIV, stigma and human rights in an interactive manner. This approach proved fruitful as the children were more responsive and led discussions that came about on the topics of stigma and HIV. Through group discussions, the school children came up with countries of their choice as a model for which they planned for children’s rights campaign strategy. The observation was that through the training, the students were able to understand that children’s rights are also human rights and that rights come with responsibilities. Students also highlighted that stigmatizing someone is violating that person’s human rights. This was a very active and interactive group with a lot of questions and comments on the issue. Educational games were used to help students understand concepts of stigma and HIV and AIDS.

At the end of the workshop, students appreciated BONELA’s initiative and indicated that they will utilize the material to educate others who were not part of the workshop and refer cases of stigma and human rights to BONELA. The project also intends to hold workshops in other areas such as Molepolole and Kanye.
B March in Pictures

The audience answered questions on how to identify TB

Arnold Sokwa giving the audience the facts about TB treatment

Cindy Kelemi, BONELA Treatment Literacy officer
Nothing About Us Without Us: Africa’s First-ever Sex Worker Conference

By Anna Chalmers

On the 3rd of February, 150 sex workers and organizations that handle sex work issues from all over Africa met at the first Africa sex worker-led conference held in Johannesburg under the theme Every Sex Worker is a Human Rights Defender. Among the organizations representing sex workers was BONELA, together with other such organizations from Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The main aim of the conference was to establish a pan-African movement and alliance that will be a voice and platform to respond to the on-going human rights abuses directed at sex workers throughout Africa.

For the first time in their working lives, sex workers regained their dignity and respect as they read the petition to the world that has long persecuted them. Unflinchingly, they made it clear that sex work is work and must be acknowledged as such legislatively. They called for an end to violence punctuated by beatings, theft, indiscriminate arrests, stigmatization, and mandatory testing. They also demanded that governments and non-governmental organisations involve them in plans, programmes and projects intended for them under the slogan: Nothing Without Us About Us.

From all the presentations and narratives, it became very clear that sex workers in Africa, even where supportive policies exist such as Senegal, face barriers from gatekeepers who are in control of sex workers reproductive health rights and are drivers in compromising their health and wellbeing. Top on the list are health workers, whose discriminatory attitudes against sex workers make it impossible for them to access information let alone treatment on STI and HIV and also reducing access to both female and male condoms. The families and communities that sex workers live in on the other hand stigmatise and marginalise them whilst the pimps and brothel owners whom sex workers give business to manipulate and exploit them. They are also used as guinea pigs for research. The media publishes ridiculing, demeaning and stigmatizing articles using derogatory language and pictures accessed from police without consent.

These countless human rights abuses in all point to criminalisation of adult sex work as the driving force to their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Denying sex workers recourse and access to justice against sexual violence pushes them to operate in unsafe spaces such as bars, inside trucks and cars, in the streets, under bushes and public toilets.

continued on page 10
December 10, 2008 - While many were busy preparing for the festive holidays, the transgender community from East and Southern Africa gathered to discuss the daily challenges they face. The African transgender voice has been very minimal with only one transgender organization on the whole continent, being Gender DynamiX (GDX) based in Capetown South Africa, which has played the role of encouraging the emergence of trans activists in different countries. African transgender activists vowed to join hands to build the movement and to fight all forms of oppression directed toward transgender people in Africa. The director of GDX Liesl Theron said “This long overdue meeting forms an integral part of trans history on our continent and a cornerstone for our future work.”

The workshop which hosted participants from Burundi, Botswana, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe started with a welcome cocktail function at the new offices used by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) in Cape Town. Cary Johnson, the Director for Africa and Liesl Theron, welcomed everyone and shared the vision and ideals of the workshop. The Gender Identity Strategic Workshop’s main purpose was to recognize and monitor the very specific needs that transgender people in Africa are challenged with, drawing lessons from the participants to inform the trans struggle across East and Southern Africa, and to begin the process of documenting human rights violations against trans people in Africa. Skipper Mogapi, the trans alternate at the Trans Secretariat of International Lesbian and Gay Association said, “This was a dream come true, seeing trans people together in their space raising their concerns without being intimidated. We know what the issues are and can now deal with them.” A transgender man, Victor Mukasa, IGLHRC’s Program Associate for the East, Central and Horn of Africa said, “Transgender issues have been in the dark for so long. I am glad that trans Africans are speaking out now and bringing into light the various human rights violations that they face daily. They are now visible and real and so are their issues which need to be addressed immediately.”

This was the first partnership between IGLHRC and Gender DynamiX in the struggle to address the imbalances experienced by trans people. To strengthen one of the objectives of documenting human rights and make transgender people visible, Busiswe Kheswa from Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action video recorded the session, whilst Zanele Muhli, an independent photographer and activist captured images and Gabrielle le Roux drew portraits of volunteering participants.
These unsafe places are a result of society’s creativity in engineering and fueling suffering and marginalisation but failing to protect its members through policies and programmes that treat sex workers as human beings with rights. Governments fail to see them as legitimate workers who bring profit to some and pleasure to others, instead they see them as objects of moral decadence, shame, humiliation and embarrassment and place the offence and decadancy on the seller of sex rather than the buyer.

From these experiences, sex workers, through the alliance, are vehemently demanding to be accorded respect and dignity rather than rescue. Sex workers are asking the civil society, all African states, international bodies, the media and the private sector to stop seeing them as criminals, nuisances, vagabonds and loiterers, but as partners in the fight against HIV/AIDS who should be empowered to articulate their expectations at personal and developmental levels, design and implement programmes on condom negotiation, protection against violence, legal rights, self-esteem, power, control and autonomy rather being taught how to sew with the intention of rehabilitation.

After all has been said, the conference led by sex workers declared to the whole world through the South African media the different political, economic and legal realities in Africa countries. The statement highlighted the; political instability and conflict which causes migration of sex workers; persecution of sex workers using laws and policies which criminalize sex work and aspects of the industry; violence and discrimination including police harassment and brutality and other forms of state-sponsored violence; denial of access to basic services including sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial, justice and legal services; exclusion from financial and other socio-economic institutions; exclusionary and discriminatory practices from civil society organizations and service providers.

Having established the common grounds and the critical areas that the alliance activities had to be framed upon, several declarations were made. These are, decriminalization of adult sex work; documentation, monitoring and reporting of human rights violations; the recognition of sex work as work; ensuring free, friendly universal access to healthcare; building solidarity and mobilizing sex workers and building; ensuring participation, representation and leadership of sex workers at all levels within the Alliance.

The countries gathered at the conference committed themselves, for the next 24 months, to this framework of action and made a commitment to advocate for the rights of sex workers and work tirelessly to expose human rights abuses occurring in Africa. The alliance will bring to the surface things that society does not want to think nor talk about i.e. poor education; violence against women; expose LGBT discrimination; hate crimes; xenophobic attacks; expose morality on sex work; debates about culture and sex work; enable understanding of issues around patriarchy and sex work; bring to discussion issues about love, sex and money; and investigate into the uncomfortable places and ask uncomfortable questions why it horrifies us that people have sex without love and for money.

From the 3rd to the 5th of February the training officer Anna Chalmers and four sex workers from Botswana attended a Sex Work Conference in Johannesburg. The main objective of the conference was to form an African advocacy alliance for sex worker rights. On the 22nd to 26th February the officer also attended a Human rights training in Johannesburg organized by ARASA.

In February 2008, the Treatment Literacy Coordinator, participated in a donors meeting that was hosted by the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition in partnership with Open Society Institute and the Collaborative Fund in New York- USA. The aim of the meeting was to expose the donor community to the work that International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (ITPC) is doing in the different regions. The Treatment Literacy Coordinator represented the Southern African treatment Access Movement (SATAMO) which is an independent regional arm of the ITPC.

From the 26th to the 30th of January Arnold Sokwa and Chirwa Mahloko were in Johannesburg as joint-facilitators at a training targeting SATAMO grantees from Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe on Treatment Literacy.

The PRISM Coordinator attended the World Bank HIV and AIDS and vulnerable groups workshop with other government officials at Cape Town and made a presentation at same workshop on what BONELA is doing with vulnerable populations (sex workers, MSM/ WSW, prisoners) in February.

In March, the PRISM Coordinator and Assistant participated at the Schorer regional meeting in Pretoria, and this meeting to set the tone for PRISM implementation in 2009 by Southern Africa and Latin America partners.

From March 24th to 27th the Policy Advisor was in Cape Town to attend a Global Fund regional proposal seminar organized by the OSI Public Health Program. The meeting hoped to help to increase participants’ knowledge about the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and opportunities for becoming involved in Global Fund grant development and project implementation at the country and regional levels. It also created space for participants to assess opportunities for developing a regional proposal to the Global Fund that will focus on sexual minorities.
Exclusion of Vulnerable Groups a Major Gap in HIV/AIDS Response

By Felistus Motimedi

In March 2009, The World Bank with the assistance of other donors and technical agencies brought together professionals and activists to interrogate gaps that exist in the HIV/AIDS response in relation to vulnerable populations such as sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSM), women who have sex with women (WSW) and prisoners in different countries and how the identified gaps could be mitigated.

The discussions centered around the exclusion of vulnerable populations in HIV/AIDS interventions as a result of punitive laws and lack of services in most countries; addressing stigma and discrimination, strengthening grassroots and associations; service delivery for vulnerable groups; data collection; monitoring, evaluation and research; the role of external donors and technical agencies, media and HIV/AIDS. Non-governmental organizations presented on current activities being carried out for different vulnerable populations and BONELA highlighted activities that are currently being implemented for and with MSM/WSW/Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Trans-genders (LGBT), prisoners and sex workers in the organization.

Government representatives also made presentations on what they are doing for vulnerable populations and the Botswana delegation cited the commitment that the government has made on populations such as sex workers in certain districts. They however indicated that other populations were not catered for and acknowledged that BONELA did a lot of work with those. Although many felt that donors and governments contributed to insufficient services for vulnerable populations or lack thereof, there was a consensus that HIV/AIDS programs and services must be responsive to the unique needs of vulnerable or minority populations in various countries.

The workshop also emphasized the need for countries to provide a framework for mounting an effective national response to HIV/AIDS for vulnerable populations that meet international human rights standards, prioritises public health and supports the management of custodial institutions as well as respect human rights and international law as respecting the rights of vulnerable populations is a good public health policy and good human rights practice. The standards and norms outlined, therefore, in established international human rights instruments and public health guidelines should guide the development of responses to HIV/AIDS in countries such as Botswana.

At the end of the deliberations, there were nine steps that were identified as needing to be addressed as a matter of urgency:
1. Political leadership, for leaders to have the will and commitment in these issues as well as acknowledge that high risk behaviours for the transmission of HIV occur even in same sex relationships, within prisons and transactional sex (especially injecting drug use, sexual activity, and sexual abuse/violence);
2. Legislative and policy reform at national and international level, ensuring guaranteed protection against discrimination based on gender, age, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV status;
3. To take specific, concrete steps to improve prison conditions to meet minimum international standards;
4. Identify MSM/WSW/LGBTI, prisoners and sex workers as key vulnerable populations when allocating national and international resources to combat HIV/AIDS;
5. Improve health standards and continuity of care and treatment;
6. Provide health standards and interventions by prioritising funding and resources for interventions that demonstrate needs and evidence based and,
7. Staff training and support with the development of education materials and programmes for different cadres in healthcare provision;
8. Evidence-based practices and interventions by prioritising funding and resources for interventions that demonstrate needs and evidence based and,
9. International, national and regional collaboration through the provision of services of experts and technical advisors on effective and ethical management of HIV/AIDS in vulnerable populations.

The workshop ran parallel to another one by World Bank which focused on Impact Evaluation of HIV and AIDS Intervention and representatives from government and NGOs of the eleven countries had attended this workshop as well. Eleven countries namely, Botswana, Burundi, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe were represented by government officials and non-governmental organizations. Donors and technical agencies that were present included the AIDS Alliance, Ford Foundation, HIVOS, OSI, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC and the World Bank.

Generally, participants agreed that we must all take responsibility for advocating and incorporating MSM/WSWLGBTI, sex workers and prisoners into the national AIDS response of our countries.
You must be the change you wish to see in the world ~ Mahatma Ghandi

Let me use this last opportunity to address friends, partners and members as the Director of BONELA in the newsletter to talk about change. I will be leaving BONELA at the end of June after almost nine years to join the International HIV Alliance as their Senior Advisor on Human Rights and Involvement of People Living with HIV in the United Kingdom. This is a time of change for me personally and for the organization to adjust to a change of leadership. But, after all, BONELA has always been about change.

Over the past nine years BONELA has stood for challenging the setting of priorities in the national response to the HIV epidemic; changing unjust or inadequate laws; changing peoples’ mindsets about those of us who are living with HIV; creating greater coherence and partnership amongst civil society organizations; building a critical mass of community activists who are conscious about their rights and willing to claim them and making a real change in the morbidity and mortality of people who are living with HIV. Change, at personal and at societal level is often uncomfortable and connected to anxiety and the fear of the unknown. Change provides, however, an opportunity for growth and learning. In my personal view, BONELA has always made good use of emerging opportunities and as a result has grown into a leading, credible civil society organization with exceptional integrity. We have also continuously changed the way we work, the way we appreciate the world around us and the way we analyse our environment in order to effectively respond.

The work we do and the approaches we use as an organization have often been regarded as defiant to the existing order and colleagues in government, civil society and development partners sometimes describe this perceived defiance as culturally insensitive, many times remarking ‘this is against our culture, or the way we do things in Botswana’. As if culture had ever been static when in reality it is always in flux and changing, adjusting to new realities and opening unknown avenues for participation.

Undermyleadership, BONELA has always spoken up on behalf of those who are voiceless, faceless and often perceived as ‘negligent minorities’, or simply ‘non-existent’. I have been truly blessed with a team in BONELA who shares a vision and an amazing passion for justice and inclusiveness, understanding that only when our response to HIV (or any other social problem) is based on our common humanity and includes even the most marginalized in society will we have a realistic chance of reducing new HIV infections and morbidity and mortality of those already infected.

I am convinced that this exceptional team will continue to fight injustice, providing a sometimes uncomfortable dissenting voice while at the same time creating meaningful partnerships with government, development partners and, most importantly, with civil society organizations and community members. I am incredibly proud of each and everyone in the team and will truly miss all of them. Fortunately, I will stay connected to BONELA and the team as my new position will allow me to continue to be part of the global movement for a meaningful involvement of people living with HIV and the realization of human rights for all in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Let me close by emphasizing that we all have a part to play in this global movement and that non-participation or not contributing our bit in the fight against social injustice is a non-choice, or in the words of the accomplished Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”

About BONELA

The Botswana Network on Ethics, Law and HIV/AIDS (BONELA) is a non-governmental organization committed to integrating an ethical, legal and human rights approach into Botswana’s response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. To learn more, visit us online at www.bonela.org.

Interested in becoming a member? We welcome those from the legal community, academia, community-based organisations, and public and private sectors as well as people living with HIV/AIDS and concerned individuals.

The BONELA Guardian

This quarterly publication is on the lookout for timely, insightful articles on topics related to HIV/AIDS and human rights, ethics, policy development or the law. We also accept first-person accounts, opinion pieces and responses to previously published articles. For further information, please contact the Editor Doris Kumbawa at media@bonela.org.

Botswana Network on Ethics, Law and HIV/AIDS

Postal address: P.O. Box 402958
Gaborone, Botswana
Tel: +267 333-2515, Fax: +267 333-2517
Email: bonela@bonela.org
Web: http://www.bonela.org

Page 12