

Masimanyane Women's Support Centre

HISTORY

Masimanyane is a women's support centre that has begun to integrate interventions with men into its work. It is a grassroots women's organisation based on feminist principles of power and equality and operates from a feminist approach of understanding the needs of women and applying these to their work with men. Masimanyane provides support to survivors of VAW, and advocates for the rights of survivors. It has been in existence since 1996, and operates from East London in the Eastern Cape. Its vision is to contribute towards a free, secure, safe and gender-sensitive environment where violence against women is completely eradicated and women's human rights are protected.

Some work had begun in the country in the 1990s concerning men's involvement in the struggle to end violence against women. Masimanyane had been part of numerous dialogues and had a number of concerns about these developments. The organisation then conducted a study of national and international programmes (including South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Australia, England, Sweden, Norway, Canada, USA).

KEY FOCUS AREAS

Masimanyane's key focus areas include;

- Accessible counselling;
- Crisis intervention and support to women who are/ have been victims/survivors of domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse;
- Legal advice, support and referrals;
- Training and public education programmes;
- Impacting on policy and legislation through research, advocacy and lobbying.

MEN'S PROGRAMME

BACKGROUND

During the last few years, Masimanyane has begun to work towards a more holistic vision of intervening in the VAW cycle, including programmes that work with men. Interventions that target men are seen as attempting to address the underlying problems that fuel domestic violence. The organisation believes that VAW is multi-faceted and needs to be dealt with in such a manner that individual, family, community, societal, cultural and spiritual issues are addressed. Masimanyane recognises the importance of contextualising VAW within the social, political and economic realities of their communities.

The organisation's strategy of contextualising violence against women in communities is through human rights training. A human rights framework provides a means by which to talk about violence against women in the context of women's total experiences of violence and discrimination socially, politically, and economically. The human rights approach challenges the views that culture is static and that men's rights/authority will be challenged by expanding women's rights (Harper, 2003).

A separate men's programme was instituted (the MMP) which at its core integrates the experiences of men and women. In line with international norms, organisers maintain that men's projects, run separately from organisations offering assistance to women, run the risk of offering services that do not take women's experiences into account. It is implemented in conjunction with a women's support organisation to enable the goals, philosophy and activities of the organisation to impact on the men's programme. An underlying philosophy is that men's groups must be accountable to women's groups when working on violence against women.

The Masimanyane Men's Programme aims to include men and boys in the struggle to end all forms of violence against women and to entrench women's rights. It emphasises the need for men to work alongside women in order to change the value systems that oppress women and children and dehumanise men. (Harper, 2003). Harper, the counselling psychologist and head of the men's programme at Masimanyane, argues for participants to be involved to address the social context of men's violence while

also addressing individual men's actions. He believes that it is important to talk and work with men using the values and concepts from the culture or cultures that have impacted on their socialisation.

Although the current programme does not target perpetrators for counselling, some of the men trained have participated voluntarily in order to end their own use of violence in the home. In previous versions of the men's programme, aspects focusing on perpetrators did exist but were scaled down due to the cost implications of expanding such components. Without sourcing additional funding, it was not possible to develop them into a larger programme. Currently Masimanyane is studying various models of perpetrator programmes, and may re-introduce such targeted initiatives.

There is a desire in South Africa today to redefine what African culture and values mean and to search for an authentic, pre-colonial African culture. Sometimes when people talk of 'going back' to traditional cultural values, they fail to recognise the impact of changes in the landscape of people's lives since those times. This also affects the meaning of cultural practices. For example, the bride price practice known as *lobola* was once about establishing kinship, but it has come to be seen by many as the act of purchasing a wife. Many men use this as a justification for their violence. So it is seen as important to show people what the original meaning of a custom was and how that meaning has been distorted in systems that protect men's positions (Harper, 2003)

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the men's programme is to end men's violent behaviour and to oppose dominant, controlling actions within a framework that challenges societal values and addresses political, legal and economic concerns.

APPROACH

Following their study of other men's programmes, the MMP was established based on an approach that:

- Is pro-feminist in the sense that includes an analysis of gender and power. It takes into account women's lives and their realities and does not only look at men and their lives, in isolation of women's lives;

- Ecological and works with men on multiple levels in their environment (individual, family, community and national level);
- Advocates for the men's group to be based in Masimanyane instead of establishing a separate men's organisation. This approach is underscored by the fact that many men's groups never relate to any women's organisations and therefore have little or no understanding of how men's participation in this form of activism impacts on women. The MMP is also very conscious of resources and the fact that resources for women's organisations are still very limited.
- Contextual and is therefore tailored to each site/community;
- Does not focus on perpetrators, as it is believed that this would have limited impact and is costly;
- Recognises that not all men are violent, and not all men support violence against women – but that most men are quiet about the issue (silence).

The 2 governing principles for all the work done by the MMP are accountability and responsibility; taking personal responsibility for beliefs, actions and values that have been constructed within a particular context, and being accountable to each other, but especially to women.(Harper, 2004)

IMPLEMENTATION

The MMP programme is community-based and works in 8 areas around East London, 3 of which are rural. The programme is about challenging men, training them to be agents of change in their own communities, linking them with women's groups in their communities, and supporting them in this process. The specific areas identified are those where there are high rates of HIV infection, violence against women and child abuse. The areas to be targeted must also be areas where the organisation has already worked with women and held public education and training programmes for women in the area. In this regard, the work with men is viewed as complementary.

MMP begins by presenting a general workshop where the programme is outlined and men are invited to participate. The Masimanyane women staff interview the partners of the men who wish to participate in the programme before the programme begins to clear

up any misconceptions or ideas that they may have concerning the programme. The first stage of the programme is a training programme that looks at issues of gender, women in the community and the relationship between men and women. Other areas that are included in the training are gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS, links with women's organisations, personal development and advocacy. Two men from each group are selected to attend two further courses that examine issues in greater depth and that impart group and training skills. In terms of follow-up after the training, the group meets twice a month for group work and one-on-one counselling which is optional.

The ultimate objective of this training is to create a broad tier of men to work alongside women for social change. It is believed that this should be a community-centred initiative, rather than an external one. To date, 500 men have received initial training, and of these 120 received additional training.

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

Many partners of men participating in the programme have related stories of personal changes and spoken about a difference made in their lives and their families. There are examples of other men being challenged to end their violence towards their partners by men who have attended the MMP training. The men who have been trained then monitor the progress of the offenders. There are also many examples of the work that men have undertaken in their communities, such as life skills teaching at schools and running local radio slots to challenge men about gender-based violence and their attitudes towards women.

IN ADDITION TO THE ABOVE

- Men have gone out to teach young boys about gender;
- Men have started working alongside women's groups;
- Men have started working with other men (formally and informally);
- The SA Police Service, priests and chiefs have been challenged where their actions are seen to be harmful to women;

- The work has provided the opportunity for women to improve their own lives by leaving abusive environments, and to find support and a voice where they were denied one before (Harper, 2004);
- The MMP has played an important role in the formation of legislation to improve women's lives and hold both national and local government accountable for their actions.

CHALLENGES

- In undertaking their work, the Masimanyane Men's programme has found that the following contextual factors have made it difficult to organise and mobilise men:
 - Access and entry into communities;
 - Fundamentalism – religious, cultural or traditional practices;
 - Support not being visible. When people are engaged at a one-to-one level a lot of support is expressed for the aims of the programme. However, when these people are asked to stand up and say something publicly, they are reluctant to risk it;
 - Trafficking in women and drugs;
 - Men not living out their learning/stated changes.

IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

The programme is linked to other men's groups and other networks. However Masimanyane is selective about who the MMP is linked to as not all groups share their pro-feminist views, nor do they hold men to the same levels of accountability and responsibility. The work has impacted on the work of Masimanyane as it has increased the number of groups the organisation deals with. This work has resulted in an increase in the number of people accessing the organisation's services and programmes and has in turn expanded Masimanyane's impact.

There have been some difficulties in terms of including men in the organisation, specifically related to the cautions expressed by feminists, as noted in the report. Some of the men and women began to act out traditional patterns of behaviour, and the reasons for

this had to be identified and then challenged. The actual experience of integrating the programme has led to the organisation developing material for training staff around the issue of including men in Masimanyane's activities.

ORGANISATIONAL REFLECTION

The Masimanyane Men's Programme noted the following key considerations for the future:

- The need for continued personal reflection for those implementing and those participating in the

SUMMARY

Masimanyane Men's Programme is located within a women's support organisation. This informs the philosophy and approach of the Programme – its viewpoint is humanist, empowering and inclusive. The Programme's starting point is Masimanyane's vision of a society free from gender violence and bias. Because of its location within a women's support organisation, the Programme can ensure that its work is relevant and supportive of (as well as supported by) the women's movement.

Masimanyane Men's Programme is intimately located within the geographic area that the NGO services. Masimanyane has ensured a system of research and evaluation that informs the direction of the Programme and provision of services. The research includes consultation with women who are partners of men the Programme targets, and/or survivors of violence. This process ensures that the approach is holistic, tied to the cultural, traditional, socio-economic and political circumstances in which the target groups are located. It also ensures buy-in from women in the community.

programme to assess and ensure that they are continually implementing the objectives through personal choice;

- Ensuring that the focus is on impacting women's lives and is not just a temporary and/or 'feel good thing';
- Ensuring that the work is located within a political context through the national and provincial Masimanyane advocacy work;
- Maintaining the energy and sustainability of the programme.

Masimanyane as a whole is a well-resourced organisation, with a broad range of support from government and local and international foundations. The Men's Programme is located within the organisation and thus has access to its administrative and evaluation processes. This ensures that not only will the Programme have relative financial security, but that it will also document and monitor its progress according to Masimanyane's general standards. In spite of this stability, the programme does not attempt to run perpetrator programmes, seeing them as unnecessarily costly.

The Men's Programme has been strategic in its media and community interventions. Its participation in workshops, conferences and public events has been targeted at maximizing advocacy of the issues, and at men taking responsibility for violence, as well the parallel goal of establishing the Programme in the public consciousness. The work on radio and during the 16 Days of Gender Activism in 2003 has increased the social capital of the organisation and its aims.