

# ROZARIA NEWS: SPECIAL ISSUE

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## **RMT Message for the 16 Days of Activism on Violence Against Women: INCREASE RESOURCES TO WOMEN IN RURAL COMMUNITIES**

Rozaria Memorial Trust (RMT) joins the world in observing the 16 days of activism against gender violence whose theme this year is “*Demanding Implementation, Challenging Obstacles: End Violence Against Women* ~ by affirming the continued, un recognized and undervalued role of women in communities, as they take the challenge everyday to address violence against women and girls as well as HIV & AIDS. RMT calls for more resources to be invested to basic social serves at the first point of contact. This is a long terms strategy of reducing the burden of case on women and girls. RMT also calls for increasing women’s rights awareness among the police and judiciary, religious and traditional leaders as key institutions for protection of rights, values and traditions especially in rural communities.

Mbuya Rozaria Marumisa Dizha (1923 – 2006)’s life as an ordinary village woman leader was a struggle for the rights of women and girls. At 16 years she had to leave school and be married off, fortunately, it was before the advent of HIV & AIDS. She always stood against early marriage as she promoted education for girls. She vowed in her life to be a family counselor to those around her, as she recalled the life of violence, divorce and trauma that her own mother had experienced and she had witnessed. Mbuya Rozaria cared for her children who died of HIV & AIDS, and died a home based care patient herself, since the health care system had collapsed. Her prayers and her faith were her fortitude as she searched for hope, strength and courage to confront the responsibilities that come with care work.

The Rozaria Memorial Trust therefore stands in full recognition of all the community heroines who continue to give their personal best efforts and visible leadership towards addressing violence and HIV & AIDS. Education for rural girls, and access to information on human rights for women in these communities goes a long way in building capacities for demanding accountability and implementation of laws like the recently passed Domestic Violence Act in Zimbabwe.

*Nyaradzai Mugaragumbo – Gumbonzvanda, Chairperson-RMT*

## **Culture, Gender, HIV & AIDS and Violence: Murewa Elders Question Negative impact of Virginity Testing and Menopausal Abstinence**

Over 600 people converged at Murewa District on 14 of November for a community dialogue on “*Addressing HIV and AIDS and Gender Based Violence from a Cultural Perspective*”. The event hosted by Rozaria Memorial Trust in partnership with the Southern Africa Aids Information and Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS), brought together the traditional chiefs, headmen, local district government leadership, women, men and young people, with the Minister of Health, Dr David Parirenyatwa as the Chief Guest.

Among the key cultural issues that sparked heated discussions were sexual abstinence among the elderly, virginity testing, taboos around condom use and the impact of truckers at the grain marketing board to sexual life in the township. The dialogue dispelled the myth that menopausal women should not have sex, which in most communities results in grandmother sleeping in different house from her spouse. This at times encourages the old men to look for another sexual partner, or to marry another woman. The Zimbabwe Minister of Health, Dr David Parirenyatwa, stressed that the current laws especially the Domestic Violence Act prohibits virginity testing, which many elders were encouraging as a deterrent to early sexual encounters. It was also noted that virginity testing was traditionally done on girls, and it therefore did not promote the boys’ responsibility.

The dialogue was held as part of the 16 days of activism activities for 2007. Rozaria Memorial Trust ~ an active member of the Gender Based Violence Prevention Network in East and Southern Africa ~ was represented by Trustees Patrick Mugaragumbo, Gladys Yona and Elizabeth Taonezvi. Similar dialogue will be continued in four communities in Murewa in the coming months.

## **Rozaria Memorial Trust Receives the Young Women African Summit award for it outreach to rural girls**

Rozaria Memorial Trust scaped the prestigious Summit award in recognition of its practical approaches to empowering rural young women, at the just ended Young Women’s African Summit, held in Harare this November. RMT supported 4 young women to attended the Summit, held in Harare this November, bringing together 60 young women from over ten (10) African countries.

The RMT delegation included Hilda, Tendai, Silence and Frozen all from Murewa. The profile of these participants included a post high school graduate, unemployed for the last 4 years; a single mother with a nine month old baby; a young woman heading her family since her mother died and father moved on to stay with another wife. The last of the delegation is a young married woman, who husband is unemployed and they both live in extreme poverty assisted by the extended family.

The summit exposed these young women to new information and knowledge about the situation of young women in urban areas and in other countries. It helped

them connect their issues with experiences of others thus giving the hope that they are not alone and together with others they will find a solution. The event, held as part of the 16 days of activism against gender based violence, offered another opportunity for the young people to learn more about HIV & AIDS and violence against women and receive tips on how to protect themselves.

*“Rozaria Memorial Trust is founded on the life experiences of a rural heroine who in her lifetime did strive for the dignity of women and girls especially in rural areas. We therefore will continue to do our best in giving a platform for reproductive health, leadership and mentoring for especially rural young girls in Africa. We deeply thank the organizers, and especially Ms Rutendo Mudzamiri for this award”*, stressed Mrs Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda, Chairperson of Rozaria Memorial Trust on receiving the news.

### **Strengthening Partnerships in Addressing Violence Against rural women and girls.**

The 16 days of Activism on elimination of violence against women, came at a time when Rozaria Memorial Trust was now fully registered as charitable Trust according to the laws in Zimbabwe. The first Board meeting of the Trust gave full commitment to ensuring that RMT was a key player in addressing violence against women and HIV & AIDS. The establishment of offices in Murewa was stressed as strategic especially recognizing that the organization seeks to have more focus on rural women and young people. At the same time it was important for the organization to appoint volunteer liaison coordinators in Harare, Nairobi, Kwekwe, South Africa and Geneva to ensure that the Trust is widely represented and its networking is enhanced.

The *National Gender Forum*, facilitated by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was a real launch pad for RMT as it provided the platform for meeting with other organizations, sharing information and identifying entry points. The presence of a dynamic and responsive team of gender advocates was also encouraging as they nurtured new organizations like RMT. The only challenge with this Forum is the travel costs for out of Harare and rural organizations. With problems of communication, electricity and unreliable email/internet in rural areas, RMT had to invest in ensuring that at least the volunteer coordinator attended the various meetings. RMT was therefore active in the HIV & AIDS and the Advocacy Sub-Committees of the National Gender Forum in 2007.

Partnership with the Murewa District government officials was also very strategic and facilitative. The Chief Executive Officer for Murewa District was always available to advise on matters of policy, process and protocol. This was crucial as RMT was then able to visit Chief Mwangwende, who is the highest tradition leader for the district and also the chair of the Council of Chiefs in Zimbabwe, for his support and participation in the District Dialogue. The local Ministries of Gender, Youth and Employment Creation is now a key partner with RMT being invited to participate in both the district and national launch of the 16 days of activism on elimination of gender based violence.

SAfAIDS is one of the regional organizations that immediately believed in RMT's vision and enthusiasm, and agreed to co-host a district dialogue on role of culture in addressing SGBV and HIV & AIDS. Both RMT and SAfAIDS are members of the SGBV Prevention Network for East and Southern Africa. The SAfAIDS Director, Mrs

Lois...stressed the importance of supporting innovative initiatives in communities like those promoted by Rozaria Memorial Trust.

At the Africa and global level, RMT has continued to strengthen its cooperation with other organizations, with African Women and Child Features remaining a strong mentor providing incubation support to RMT. Raising Voices, a Uganda based regional organization and host of the SGBV Prevention network brokered a partnership for RMT with America Women Jewish Society (AWJS).

Building an organization founded on the vision of an “unknown rural heroine” demands a strong support of individuals who when they hear the story of Rozaria, they equally commit to RMT vision and mission. In its nascent existence, RMT has received tremendous encouragement from many people, and among them include Hazel Chinake, Gender Officer at SIDA Harare office. She equally recalls the life of her late mother Edith, and the many years she equally toiled and gave her best caring for orphans. Through RMT we remember and prays for Mbuya Edith. Hon Phoebe Asiyo, the UNIFEM Goodwill Ambassador who herself is a grandmother encouraged RMT continually, emphasizing that Africa could be rebuilt by also harnessing the skills and tools used by rural women who are excellent social entrepreneurs.

Rosemary Okello, Director of AWC Features always said that where one is driven from the heart, transformation is bound to happen through positive action, and in sisterhood we have to support each other. Providing incubation support to RMT, Rosemary has offered her organization as training ground for RMT volunteers and staff, offered the use of her organization systems as RMT registered and became operational, disseminated Rozaria News, and gave a word of encouragement always. Among the many other persons, the most profound has been the silent support provided by Charles Gumbonzvanda, Director of Watershed Motors, who donated a grant for rental and operational costs in 2007 thus enabling the organization to engage professionally with various stakeholders. Charles has offered to serve as a RMT volunteer Policy and International Relations based in Geneva, Switzerland. The RMT Board of Trustees sends it deep appreciation to all individuals and friends who continue to give their time, talents and advise to this organization.

### **Upcoming Events:**

- ❖ Community Dialogues for Religious Women on Gender, VAW and HIV & AIDS, December 2007.
- ❖ Essay Competitions for In-School Students on the theme “My Grandmother” for Muhumwe Cluster of Schools, Zimbabwe

*The Rozaria Memorial Trust is a non-profit charity organisation, established in memory of the late Mbuya Rozaria Marumisa Dizha (1923-2006), a rural grandmother who spend her life promoting education and self empowerment for rural women and young people. RMT contributes to the empowerment and rights of women, and young people in poor communities in Africa, thus enhancing their economic, social and spiritual well being.*

### **For Further Information Contact**

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