Feminists (Re)Building Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe Feminist Forum

Report compiled by
Tomupeishe Maphosa
and
Isabella Matambanadzo

7 – 9 December 2011, Amanzi Lodge, Harare
I'm a feminist. I'm a sister. I'm a feminist.
I'm a wife. I'm a feminist. I'm a daughter.
I'm a feminist. I'm a lover. I'm a feminist.
I'm a teacher. I'm a feminist. I'm a student.
I'm a feminist. I'm a farmer. I'm a feminine.
I'm a thinker. I'm a feminist. I'm an artist.
I'm a feminist. I'm a writer. I'm a dancer.
I'm a feminist. I'm a poet. I'm a feminist.
I'm a politician. I'm a strategist. I'm a feminine.
I'm a creator. I'm an initiator.
I'm a feminist. I'm an actress. I'm a feminine.
I'm a singer. I'm a feminine. I'm a poet.
I'm a feminist. I'm a politician. I'm a feminine.
I'm a strategist. I'm a feminine.

Her Right
She has the right,
A right to say what she is,
A right to say her dreams.
She should not have to choose,
The right that she is.

She is what she is,
She is what she will be.
She is alive, breathes,
She thinks, cries,
She feels, hears and sees,
She is she, herself belongs to her,
Her power belongs to her as well,
Because she is what she is.

by Freedom Nyamubaya
Background to the ZFF

The first African Feminist Forum (AFF) was held in Accra, Ghana in 2006. Subsequent AFFs have been held every two years with the last two held in Kampala, Uganda (2008) and Dakar, Senegal (2010). The next AFF is scheduled for 2012. National forums also have taken place in countries such as Nigeria, Uganda and Senegal. During 2011, both South Africa and Zimbabwe convened feminist forums at the national level.

In line with the AFF, the Zimbabwe Feminist Forum (ZFF) seeks to create a platform for communicating and engaging with Zimbabwean feminists from all strata of society. The ZFF will open the space for more dialogue, dialectical exchange, information, debates, knowledge generation and critical analyses of all sectors and their responses thus far to sexism, and gender oppression in Zimbabwe.

The ZFF’s goal is:

To create a space for vibrant feminist thinking and critical dialogue towards movement building in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa.

The ZFF Objectives are:

1. To provide an alternative platform to engage in critical discourse on the personal, political, economic and social issues affecting women’s rights and development in Zimbabwe.

2. To build a powerfully voiced feminist space.

3. To develop a critical consciousness through the use of feminist analyses and actions.

ZFF Values:

A ZFF not owned by any individual or institution but by the collective commitment and energy of participants that will be governed by principles of tolerance, respect, accountability and self-determination.

The ZFF will focus and debate, from a feminist perspective, on a critical area for Zimbabwe as it negotiates its transition from a long-running social, economic and political crisis – namely nationhood, statehood, citizenship, entitlements and social responsibility. The ZFF will open discourse on the role of feminists (re)building Zimbabwe and re(building) Zimbabwe feminists.

A working group made up of Zimbabwean women who have previously attended the AFF held a preliminary meeting in March 2011 with support from HIVOS to Katswe Sistahood to prepare the process for hosting the ZFF held in December 2011, which is the focus of this report. Host organisations of the ZFF are Katswe Sistahood, an organisation of and for young women whose motto is “I am my sister’s keeper” and the Zimbabwe Women’s Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN), a long-established women’s rights organisation working along feminist principles.
Introduction
The first Zimbabwe Feminist Forum (ZFF) took place from the 7th to the 9th of December 2011, at Amanzi Lodge in Harare. The forum served as the first melting pot for Zimbabwean feminists from diverse walks of life to meet, share, reflect and celebrate. Participants included students, academics, non-profit development workers, mothers, single women, sisters, wives, ranging from the ages of 19-60. We used each one’s resources for an enriched discussion on forming a Feminist Forum, from poetry, music, dance, critical and strategic thinking, were drawn upon.

The seeds for developing in the future a Feminist Forum in Zimbabwe were planted during the December meeting, guided by the expert facilitation of African Feminist and consultant Jessica Horn (Uganda), a member of the African Feminist Forum working committee, and Dr Elaine Salo, a feminist political science scholar based at the University of Pretoria in South Africa.

This report outlines the main proceedings of the ZFF. The richness of the meeting in terms of the laughter, discovery, the respectful atmosphere that accompanied the shared diversity of thought, the widest smiles and sisterly embraces provide the widest backdrop to the words on the report’s pages.

Facilitators’ Profiles

Jessica Horn
Jessica Horn is a writer and women’s rights consultant. She is a founding member of the African Feminist Forum and co-editor of Voice, Power and Soul: Portraits of African Feminists. She has consulted for a range of organisations including private donors, women's rights organisations, international NGOs and UN agencies on advancing sexual and reproductive rights, ending violence against women, supporting women living with HIV and ensuring women’s rights in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding.

Jessica Horn also is a poet with roots in Uganda’s Mountains of the Moon and the shadows of New York’s Yankee stadium. Raised by a flame-full feminist mother, she has committed her creative and professional life to exploring women’s experience and advocating for respect of women’s rights. She is also active in the African Feminist Forum. Jessica is the former coordinator of Amanitare- the pan-African women’s network for sexual and reproductive rights. She has worked for the human rights funder, the Sigrid Rausing Trust, managing granting for women’s and minority rights.

Elaine Salo
Dr Elaine Rosa Salo is the Director of the Institute for Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Pretoria. Prior to this appointment, she was a Senior Lecturer at the African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town. Elaine received her PhD in Anthropology in 2004 from Emory University. Her dissertation was titled: Respectable Mothers, Tough Men and Good Daughters: making persons in Manenberg township, South Africa.

Elaine’s research interests focus on women in higher education and the contemporary meanings of gender amongst youth living in the peri-urban and rural areas of South Africa. Her most recent publications include: a chapter entitled "Glamour, Glitz and Girls: the meanings of femininity in high school matric ball culture" (co-authored with Bianca Davids) in the book The Prize and the Price. Shaping sexualities in South Africa (edited by Melissa Steyn and Miki van Zyl, HSRC Press 2009); as well as a chapter entitled "Women in the academy" published in the collection entitled Gender Activism.
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Perspective on the South African transition, institutional culture and everyday life (edited by Greg Ruiters Rhodes University Institute of Social and Economic Research 2008). She is currently co-editing a special issue for Feminist Africa, with Prof Sophie Oldfield (UCT), that examines the constructions of gender and the body within urban space.
1. **Starting the Journey to ZFF**
   - Grounding ourselves
   - Feminism, Nationalism and the State
   - Inspiration and Questions
   - Vagina Monologues performance

The ZFF began with a poem written and read by Freedom Nyamubaya. The poem speaks of Independence and Freedom, whom she has always considered male and female. Their hoped for marriage does not take place; this is a veiled criticism of Zimbabwe after independence – freedom is yet to be realised. The poem is from her book of poetry, *On the Road Again*.

A Mysterious Marriage
Once upon a time there was a boy and girl forced to leave their homes by armed robbers. The boy was Independence The girl was Freedom. While fighting back, they got married.

After the big war they went back home. Everybody prepared for the wedding. Drinks and food abounded, Even the disabled felt able. The whole village gathered waiting Freedom and Independence were more popular than Jesus.

Independence came  But Freedom was not there. An old woman saw Freedom’s shadow passing, Walking through the crowd, Freedom to the gate. All the same, they celebrated for Independence.

Independence is now a senior bachelor Some people still talk about him Many others take no notice A lot still say it was a fake marriage. You can’t be a husband without a wife. Fruitless and barren Independence staggers to old age, Since her shadow, Freedom, hasn’t come.

“Let’s have a movement and let’s take power”
Tsitsi Dangarembga

“I’m happy I met powerful women like Amy, I read her book in Sociology.”
Regina

“I feel re-engaged”
Mary Sandasi
1.1 Grounding Session

The grounding session was based on a meditation which focused on participants’ centring themselves and becoming present for the forum. Everyone meditated in the spirit of loving kindness, letting go of thoughts and people who may frustrate us, allowing ourselves to change within.

By way of individual self introductions, everyone gave their names, brief explanations of who they are, what they do, what they like and what they bring. The women spoke of creativity and art, returning to the land, re-engaging with certain aspects of our lives, understanding ourselves, recognising how we are changing and our relation to our bodies in their introductions.

In a bid to understand the forum’s background and intentions, Everjoice Win, a member of the African Feminist Forum working committee, gave a brief overview of the African Feminist Forum (AFF). The AFF was born out of the realisation that feminism was losing the edge in terms of thinking and activism to the gender and gender mainstreaming discourses on the continent. The AFF’s intent is to provide a space for African feminists to ‘think, talk, and create’.

The AFF is a forum for feminist perspectives on issues, rather than a network or coalition. This engagement allows feminists to bring what they want, take what they want through acknowledging that the space has been created. AFF is by invitation – just as ZFF has chosen to do too. The invitation is based upon women who identify themselves as feminists. The AFF targets individuals rather than organisations and the forum has developed the Charter for African Feminists, which describes the key principles that feminists abide by in the AFF space.

Jessica Horn further elaborated on the AFF explaining how it is a ‘movement’ space, as feminists are able to self organise and the forum/space is a resource for solidarity. AFF also has replicated itself at national level in other countries such as Uganda, Nigeria, Senegal – and now Zimbabwe.

As part of the grounding process, participants expressed their hopes and desires for the purpose of a ZFF.

Our hopes and desires for ZFF

- Build an edge – sharpen our Zimbabwean feminist activism
- Get unstuck from gender mainstreaming
- Refocus from just ‘antimugabe.co.zw’; it’s not right that the anti-Mugabe project is what activism has become; when he is no longer president, what will activists do then? To strategically think about the ‘then what?’; what are the other things that matter?
- How to take a feminist discussion and discourse out to young women in rural and high density areas as they are the missing link
- Re-energise, get mentorship across the board
- Learning and growing
- Ways to theorise our own everyday women’s lives
- Expand African feminist theory
- More grounding in the issues to create change in how we ‘do business’ – personal and work
- Adding feminist ‘spice’
• Integrate feminist consciousness into the socialisation and education of girl children – to be who they want to be – women’s independence
• Use my own feminist energy, grow, share experiences
• Build solidarity on issues in this safe space
• Separate work agendas and personal political passions
• Dispel myths about feminism
• Bring out more feminists – grow in numbers
• Learn and share
• Learn from past experiences that blocked progress
• Engaging feminist politics as a young woman
• Know the history and politics of feminist activism
• Therapeutic space/healing
• Collective political consciousness
• Movement with participation
• Space for alternatives – naming, thinking, strategising
• Tackle the taboo issues – abortion, sexual orientation
• Contribution around current discourses, focus on the ‘now’, e.g. push for special measures, economic and political systems
• Space to create ‘sharpness’
• Find things to think about, reflect upon
• Prioritise, conclude with a list that we give legs to by acting on it whilst drawing on our expertise to do this
• Space with ‘no ifs and buts’
• Allow us to be ourselves and build collective consciousness
• Get to understand feminism and walk the talk
• Discuss feminism with others
• Listening
• Pin down critical issues that contributed to the stagnation of feminist issues, e.g. donor aid made us ‘eclectic’
• What are our own African realities/histories within feminism?
• Respond to our context
• Open space so that we unpack and understand
• Grounding in our own reality
• Connecting and reconnecting
• Commonalities and differences

“I want us to get ‘unstuck’ from gender mainstreaming”

“This is a great space to be in as we discover the commonality of our concerns”
1.2 Feminism, Nationalism and the State
This session, conducted by Elaine Salo had three main components to it:
  - Mapping alternative visions
  - Nationalism and identity
  - Engagement with policy

1.2.1 Mapping alternative visions
Alternative visions allowed us to consider our own brand of feminism. Participants were asked to reflect on issues within ordinary daily life; to consider how they would tackle these issues and the processes that would be undertaken and, to envision an end goal. The forum was divided into four (4) groups - Ghana, Kenya, Mali and Tanzania.

After intense discussions, focusing on four elements:
  - Visions
  - Freeing the body
  - Recovery of the sacred
  - Beyond logos

The groups’ visions were as follows:

**Ghana**
A world in which:-
  - Where women do not toil
  - Women are strong to face their problems/to find solutions to their problems
  - Women also get to experience the other interesting parts of life, rather than working continuously
  - Women do not die sad

Summary of alternative feminist vision
1. A world where women do not die sad, where we understand her worth
2. A world where we all live fully in body, mind and soul, not just exist
   - Where reading is feeding
   - Where no woman toils
3. An economic system that feeds the majority – no individualism
4. A space where there is multi-generational interaction, learning from history as we make history
5. Where we have an open society that embraces our diversities and self expression; where we feel free to be ourselves
6. Where the journey of spirituality is about questions; no abuse of religion
7. Where we affirm and celebrate being African black women
8. Where women freely participate in society with shared roles
9. Women are free to pursue their careers without being judged as bad mothers
A feminist space should be:-

- A space where women participate despite their other roles/responsibilities
- A space where you have the inner strength to be yourself, to do what your inner self tells you to do. The inner force is stronger than the external force, where we are not constrained by external forces
- A more open society that is more embracing (less judgemental)
- A space where people are more free to discuss, debate
- Where there is no abuse of religion
- The journey of spirituality is about questions
- A space where there is multi-generational interaction (dialogue), learning from history and then making history; where young women should be educated about their rights
- A space where we are not afraid to share our problems
- Where there is no discrimination against Africans
- Where there is African solidarity

“Think, talk and create. Bring what you want, take what you want, the space has been created, shape it in the way you need”

“This space translates into what I feel inside, but have only been able to express it here and now”

“This is the space where individual and collective desires are fulfilled”
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Kenya
Mapping alternative feminist visions
- African feminists clearly articulate the African feminist vision for the continent, politically, economically, socially, etc.

What is this feminist vision?
- A world in which African women are full citizens of the world and realise our potential regardless of race, class and gender
- African feminists concretely engage in the spaces where decisions about our day to day realities and the continent are made
- African feminists have access and control of the resources in a way that allows them to determine their own agenda

Mali
Issues
1. Economic justice – space for women through trade, tax, competition, ownership and policies
2. Bodily integrity – the personal, and rights
   - “wear what you want”
   - “walk wherever you want”
   - “do not question me”
3. Making reading a part of culture
   - Creating relevant materials
   - Packaging, making it interesting
   - Getting information and exploring
4. Role of the media – how to make it positive, interrogating it
5. Self defining – images and opening up spaces and not be in boxes (what does a feminist look like?)
6. Patriarchy – hierarchies – where and when do we negotiate, e.g. names, spaces, lineages, and culture
7. Challenges of feminist cultures in work spaces (organisations and feminists) – where do hierarchies end?
8. Feminist labels – breaking the myths
9. Feminists compromises and being accommodative, e.g. laws, political rights, political spaces
10. Morality, Religion, Cultures, e.g. the female rapists issue, LGBT, abortion, rape

Visions
1. Clear definition of a ‘feminist’
   - Collective definition
   - People who understand it (packaging)
   - One that people can resonate with
2. Always looking/challenging issues from a feminist perspective
3. Demystifying feminism and have a collective voice and creating and owning spaces (control)

“It is not right that the common belief is you don’t go up, unless you have slept with some man. As feminists, how do we put our own in positions of power to safeguard our interests?”

“Let’s not just be anti-something, but for something”
4. Re-writing morality, religion, culture – “unlearning and relearning”

**Tanzania**  
**Visions**
- A desirable place
- Ability to create a space where women can actively participate without fear, without stereotypes
- Ability to create a safe space for women to express, challenge oppressive forces
- To create the possibility where one can be/is free to express personal opinion without conflict across different contexts

**Freeing the body**
- The ability to do away with stigma/gendered stereotypes of what is culturally acceptable for women (as well as for society)
- The ability to be comfortable with the loneliness that comes with making choices that are normally considered to be feminine
- To build supportive solidarity to confront and expand options available to women
- Recognising and taking care of the female body’s demands and its desires

**Recovery of the sacred**
- Recognising and celebrating ourselves and women we consider as brave, inspirational, who’ve made a difference (eg Mbuya Nehanda)
- Freedom to be able to borrow and incorporate sites of empowerment in Zimbabwean women’s history to inform an expanded feminist vision

**Beyond logos**
- Fostering and promoting women’s individuality through ZFF
- How do we make women’s hidden lives visible, celebrate it (female ex-combatants)
- A vision of a world where there is a healing space for women in different forms of distress
- To identify and recover women’s sites of feminist knowledge
- Embracing diversity

The four groups noted how despite different approaches, their alternative visions were interconnected and they had the same concerns and fears that they hoped they would be able to tackle through ZFF.
1.3 Nationalism and identity
This next session focused on identity – specifically looking at how we identify ourselves, and place ourselves in the world; and, at how our self-identity grounds us within a context.

Identity
- Who are you?
- Describe your identity in terms of ancestry gender, language, home location/place, language, ethnicity, age, marital and parental status
- Indicate place/home location of those a generation before you and a generation after you

In response, most of the participants focused on their family background, where their family/ancestors originated from, their totem, children and influences (their father or certain powerful women). It was apparent that the room was filled with a multiplicity of places and languages. In defining our identity we tended to constantly reach out, crossing the usual boundaries of rural/urban, class, country borders, and oceans.

Diversity at home
- What are the diverse languages spoken in your city/country?
- What ‘types’ of people live in your city/country (describe them in terms of ethnicity, language, ‘race’, gender, age)

We knew of ancestors from Malawi, Swaziland, South Africa, and India. We speak in Shona, Ndebele, Chewa. We acknowledged the work our parents and grandparents did and how we build upon their efforts and have grounded ourselves upon their hard work and beliefs. There is so much history and diversity that contributes to our identities, but has been allowed to become invisible.

Zimbabwe
- Who is considered Zimbabwean?
- According to the government?
- Use the markers of official citizenship here – passports; identity documents; ‘race’, access to education, social security/pension, state housing

The general description of a Zimbabwean used the official markers of citizenship – citizenship by birth, registration, marriage, adoption, who gets a passport, which type of identity document. When the economy was better, citizenship also influenced access to education, social security, pensions, state housing. Race was explained as being used as a marker on some identification documents, which can further influence acceptability in certain circles.

The constraints of identity and citizenship faced by many within Zimbabwe were highlighted by one of the participants who felt prejudiced by a system which determines citizenry in ways which are confusing. She was forced to renounce being Malawian but she had never considered herself Malawian. She was born in Zimbabwe of a Malawian father, and was initially given documents supporting her natural citizenship as Zimbabwean. Only when applying for her second passport was she told she is not Zimbabwean, and cannot have Zimbabwean identity documents unless she renounces her being Malawian. She had to go through a process that in effect, has nothing to do with her, but is entrenched in bureaucracy.
Where are the fault lines?

- Where are the major lines of social tension between state officials (police, home affairs officials, ministers) and the population?
- Which sectors of the population are targeted for state opprobrium / ‘tongue lashing’?

It emerged that the media is very powerful in creating lines of tension, and currently, these lines are along political party lines. Men appear to be the major citizens as their stories are given relevance and daily prominence. The portrayal of social tensions is based upon power vs. power, and the privileged vs. privileged; it is mostly men in positions of power and privilege.

This opened the discussion on women in positions of power as the forum interrogated the processes by which women have attained positions in government. A key question asked by one of the participants was: “Are there feminists in formal power?”

To gain access to positions of power, women get out of their bodies, and they begin to think and act like men. In formal power positions, they defend the interests of the state and not of women. Within the spaces of power, there are gendered relations based upon the male mantra ‘tinovakwira tovakwidza’, which basically means exchanging sex for moving to the top. Women’s bodies have been sites of degradation and abuse by men since the liberation war where rape and sex for favours (food) were the norm.

Women in positions of formal power, depending on how they got there, may be forced to seek favours, popularity and agree to things that do not contribute to the betterment of other women. The systems of patriarchy which underpins and permeates through systems of government need to be tackled if women in power are not to be prisoners of their positions.

Without a critical mass of women and a strong challenge to the patriarchal system entrenched in all sectors, women in positions of power face too much loneliness, loss and costs to muster the courage to challenge the system. How to identify and get feminists into positions of power remains a central question in a gender and governance discourse that moves beyond only formal equality between women and men, to a broader social transformative agenda.

Where does gender feature in all this?

- Where are different groups of men and women in the Zimbabwean grammar of nationhood?
- Which women fit (i.e. what are the roles officially used to describe them in state / radio discourse or language)?
• Which men fit? (i.e. what are the roles officially used to describe them in state / radio language)?
• Which women don’t fit? Which men don’t fit?
• How are these ‘miss-fits’ described?

The participants encouraged each other to use our realities to contribute and influence women at the top; to become critical feminists who act as yeast in dough. The best way to achieve this is to stand for something rather than being against things only, constantly asking ourselves: ‘and then what?’.

Where are the spaces for the ‘miss-fits’?

• Where are the alternative spaces of the women and men who challenge the official definitions of the Zimbabwean ‘citizen’
• On what grounds do they describe rights of citizenship?
• Zimbabwean-ness?

The female miss-fits are usually single women, LBT, and women with no children. They are also the ones who are labelled feminists, as it is assumed only feminists can deviate from the norm. Single women are assumed to be husband stealers and adulteresses who destroy homes. LBT are considered immoral. Women with no children are seen as useless, having made no contribution to expanding the (male) lineage.

If the miss-fits are considered feminist, questions were raised on whether one can be married and a feminist? Christian and a feminist? Noting that the question is never raised as to whether one can be a Christian and be married – an issue addressed in the Bible in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 7, participants reflected on the need to research, read, understand and be critical thinkers able to present different perspectives in an argument, so that we do not wrongly, and judgementally, become divisive by marginalizing people through a narrow definition of “feminist” that seeks to bring about homogeneity.

Is nationalism in the interests of feminism?

Historically, Zimbabwean women have actively been part of the struggle for racial dignity and justice and actively took part in the liberation war. But, according to the African feminist scholar and academic, Dr Amina Mama:

In Zimbabwe, the Mugabe government has played a contradictory game of gender politics. Here the initial commendation of women’s role in the liberation war and the support for women’s legal and civil rights soon gave way to a series of retractions. If the early 1980s saw the mass detention and abuse of hundreds of women by the police in ‘Operation Clean Up’, the 1990s were characterised by the refusal of the law courts to uphold women’s rights to inherit property and own land under civil law. Discriminatory judgements are invariably based on male judges’ assertions that such rights are not ‘customary’.¹

The forum noted that the area of feminism and nationalism in the context of Zimbabwe is one of the many areas where far more research is needed in order to generate discussions, theories, informed

¹ Amina Mama (2001) pg. 70
knowledge, and to develop a discourse on these issues that is grounded in Zimbabwe’s political, economic and social history as well as the history of the women’s movement in the country.

Engagement with feminist research methods also is required to build a greater understanding of the nexus between research on women, gender equality, justice and development and policy formulation in the Zimbabwean context.

This was a brief session reiterating the importance of active research and constant knowledge generation. This will allow women to speak for themselves from positions of knowledge.

1.4 Inspiration and Questions
The final session sought to bring the day’s experiences together whilst also considering what we collectively want ZFF to be.

Issues raised included the realisation that we need to find strategies that translate (positive) policy into the lives we envision.

Participants also debated the purpose for building a feminist movement. Are we missionaries aiming to convert all we meet to feminism? It was agreed that that is not how to go about it as missionaries in our historical context used a ‘repeat what I say’ approach which does not raise critical thinking, instead people/converts are expected to be passive and accept the interpretation of the word as it is given. With feminism, the process should raise consciousness, fuel the heart and mind, open debate, and feed the mind and soul to meet both the practical and strategic gender needs of all women.

Day One of the ZFF concluded with a performance by the Vagina Warriors from Katswe Sistahood. In keeping with the 16 days of Activism on Violence against Women, the monologues focused on abuse, in particular forced sex, rape, date rape, rape at work, marital rape.
2 Building a Platform for ZFF

- Grounding ourselves
- Feminist platforms and feminist movements
- Dreaming ZFF
- Our feminist ethics through the AFF Charter
- Roles
- Inspiration and Questions

2.1 Grounding ourselves

Freedom Nyamubaya shared a song with us. She sang about love and how it feeds the soul. Jessica Horn went on to speak about us opening ourselves up to the revolutionary power of love in our lives. She shared the word ‘sentipensante’ meaning ‘feeling – thinking’ which defines language that speaks the truth. We should approach our lives through ‘sentipensante’, which encourages us to be fully present.

She shared the following readings/quotations with us:

In the segregated South those black and white folks who struggled together for racial justice (many of whom grounded their actions not in radical politics but in religious conviction) were bound by a shared belief in the transformative power of love. Understanding that love was the antithesis of the will to dominate and subjugate, we allowed that longing to know love, to love one another, to radicalize us politically. That love was not sentimental. It did not blind us to the reality that racism was deeply systemic and that only by realizing that love in concrete political actions that might involve sacrifice, even the surrender of one’s life, would white supremacy be fundamentally challenged. We knew the sweetness of beloved community.
- Bell Hooks, *Killing Rage*, p. 265

Hunger. A system of isolation: *Look out for number one*. Your neighbour is neither your brother nor your lover. Your neighbour is a competitor, an enemy, an obstacle to clear or an object to use. The system feeds neither the body nor the heart: many are condemned to starve for lack of bread and many more for lack of embraces.

One of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites...What is needed is a realisation that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anaemic...Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.
- Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., “Where Do We Go From Here”, Speech delivered at the 11th Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, August 16 1967, Atlanta

Why does one write if not to put one’s pieces together? From the moment we enter the school or church education chops us into pieces, it teaches us to divorce the soul from the body, and mind from the heart. The fishermen of the Colombian coast must be learned doctors of ethics and morality for they invented the word *sentipensante*, feeling- thinking, to define language that speaks the truth.
- Eduardo Galeano, *The Book of Embraces*

Participants started by recalling the major points of inspiration, questions and useful creative tensions from the day before.

**Inspirations from Day One**
- “Independence is a man; freedom is a woman”
- Need space to think, read & ‘sharpen’ our feminist edge
- We learn from history as we make history
- Focus on the ‘then what’? (alternative visions/practice)
- Embracing ‘miss-fits’
- Nurturing a spirituality based on asking questions
- Fighting for a world where no woman dies with sadness in her heart
- Appreciate the loneliness that comes with brave action
- Build spaces where women can heal from the many pains that they have experiences
- Young women are keeping the fire going
- “What is this movement for? It is there to take power with our sense of a better way”
- “There is something indestructibly good about what we are doing”
- Creativity is our resource

**Questions from Day One**
- What is feminism to us? What does a Zimbabwean/Pan African critical feminism look like?
- What communities are relevant to my feminist practice? Just the state? Other communities?
- Has the concept of ‘nationhood’ taken root across Africa?
- What does the presence of women’s bodies in a space of formal power and decision-making mean for women collectively?
- Is the ‘shadow side’ of nationalism - the (ab)use of women’s sexuality in a system of men’s power?

**Creative tensions in feminist thinking/activism**
- Transforming from ‘within’ (e.g. the state) - building alternatives ‘outside’ (the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house)
- Focus on state policy - invest in community action and change
- Always stand in unquestioned solidarity - embrace that critique is important/sometimes might need to ‘challenge’ your sisters
- Mobilise with only the ‘like-minded’, or mobilise with a broad group if they help you reach your target
- How much will you ‘compromise’?
“Being a combatant (freedom fighter) does not make you a revolutionary”

2.2 Feminist platforms and feminist movements

Looking at the above montage, participants opened a discussion on feminist platforms & feminist movements. The following questions guided the discussion:

- What is feminism to you?
- Historically—what are feminist platforms/movements that have contributed to change in Africa/elsewhere?
- What have their primary strategies been?
- Who is involved?
- How can/do feminist platforms and movements nourish us?
- What makes a social movement?

Movements identified and discussed included:
- Wangari Mathai’s green belt movement in Kenya
- Women’s mass action for peace in Liberia
- The One in Nine Campaign in South Africa
- Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa

“Each generation out of relative obscurity must discover their mission, fulfill it, or betray it” - Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth
Movements were acknowledged to be about stories of courage, determination and focus, capable of crossing boundaries and being forces for change (e.g. in Liberia, Christian and Muslim women were usually divided, but the peace movement brought them together). The tensions in movements were recognised through TAC where the leadership is ‘different’ to the followers (male gay, mixed-race leading mostly black female heterosexuals). By becoming a formalised organisation, TAC also had to take on institutional burdens and politics, which lessened the momentum. ARVs are now available in South Africa, so in a way, TAC has achieved its initial goals; they have not dealt with the ‘then what?’ question of remaining relevant.

Discussions on the possible feminist movements within Zimbabwe focused on the formation of the Women’s Action Group in the 1980s, Kastwe Sistahood in the 2000s with its focus on sexual and reproductive health rights, and participants also discussed the ideology and tactics of another group that emerged in the 2000s, Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), which has won several international awards for its activism.

The issue of inter-sectionality grounded the discussion on WOZA as participants highlighted many issues of race, class, ethnicity and geographical location that are characteristics more specific to WOZA than other women’s organizations within the country. Questions around WOZA’s beginning also highlighted the need for the herstories of women’s organizations to be documented to pass on knowledge and accurate information that may be lost in memories.

Movements
Movements involve acts of resistance that open possibilities. As the WOZA discussion showed, feminist movements need to grasp the concept of intersectionality to be strategic and to ensure relevancy.

Intersectionality: there are many things that make us and contribute to my being and approaches to how I deal with patriarchy

Movements occur within a history and are grounded in a context. People’s movements come out of people’s issues – when people have something to contest and protest, when they want something
to change. Tactics and ideology are important and the two need to be balanced. A movement needs:

1. Political vision(what)/ideology (for what)/consciousness (protest, change)
2. People (who) - leadership, participation. The ethics of leadership.
3. Actions and strategy (how) - for the movement to stay alive, be open to strategy; stay awake and alive, be flexible, strategies of resistance. Often divided by politics, involving different people. Movements have to move, manage themselves, and remain vibrant. Time is essential – combination of events, actions, sustaining momentum.

2.3 Dreaming ZFF
This session looked into our visions and dreams of ZFF.

*What do we need/want ZFF to be*

1. Having a shared vision, therefore ZFF will be a resource to network and encourage the movement as we link up. Knowing each other will facilitate joint action, there will be no ‘sacred cows’ between us
2. Visible – a statement that feminists are here...but need to be careful and tactical about it
3. An action space: challenge ourselves towards **1 million feminist actions**
4. A source of energy, where we come to be inspired through celebration and solidarity whilst we look at relevant issues and take advantage of this space where we feel good and relate to each other constructively

Other suggestions included:
- A movement with paid up membership
- A clear ideology
- People who coordinate activities/actions – secretariat/space
- Loose structure
- Individuals or organisations who sign on to the charter

**Our Feminist Ethics through the AFF Charter**
The Charter was defined as a set of core values which define our common ground. Participants read the AFF Charter, made comments and expanded on it to make it relevant to the Zimbabwe context. Participants individually signed the Charter, committing themselves to the principles.
Ethical principles

- Embracing diversity of individual achievements of African feminists
  - Issues of diversity: sexual orientation, geography, class, ethnicity, disability/ability, sexual and reproductive health rights and choices, our barking madness
- Fostering learning and sharing between different generations and socio-economic communities
- Recognise that the energy for sustaining the ZFF comes from each individual’s commitment and passion
- Taking the courage and claiming the freedom to imagine creative solutions
- Celebrating African women as a political act of resistance
- Being accountable ourselves, to our communities, each other and the forum
- Taking moments of stillness to listen and reflect on what we are enabling
- Creating, sustaining and sharpening critical bodies of thought rooted in rigorous indigenous research
- To remain relevant at all levels of society, especially rural areas, through continuous learning, renewal, reviewing, retooling, re-strategising
- Creating and maintaining mutual solidarity for progressive feminist approaches
- Celebrating individual and collective resistance

Alternative Vision

- A world where African women are full citizens of the world and able to realise their full potential regardless of race (blackness), class (poverty), gender, sexual orientation, ability/disability
  - Full citizen: access and control of resources that allows us to determine our agendas; full participation in all spaces; freedom of expression; access to all spaces; to be heard (voice); control over mind, body and soul
- A society where the economic system feeds the majority – economic and social justice are a priority
  - Majority: collective rather than individual; economic and social security
- A society that allows questioning and freedom of expression; questioning to bring critical consciousness; voices, dialogue, thinking
- Rewriting morality, religion and culture in the interest of gender justice
- A world where we celebrate women in their diversity as a political act so that we do not die sad or in distress
- Celebrate diversity in nationhood whilst promoting oneness
- Valuing all forms of formal and informal education and support the production of knowledge of African women’s lives that inspire us
  - Knowledge generation
  - Culture of reading where reading is feeding
  - Learning from history as we make and document history
- Offer hope through feminism
Roles
Questions guiding this discussion included:
- Why are we here— and why do we want to be/exist?
- What do we want to do together?
- Who do we want to be included in this space?
- What could slow/stop us – and how to prevent this?
   Anticipate challenges, to solve problems.

Inspiration and Questions
There were no burning questions so the participants chose to celebrate through song and dance their deliberations during the two days. Jessica Horn taught the group a Swahili song ‘tiende mbeli’, which we happily translated into Shona, ‘toenda mberi’ meaning ‘we are moving forward’. Other participants shared an empowering song emphasising our bodies as our own and of great value.

3. Reflecting on the Journey
- Grounding ourselves
- Moving the movement
- Commitments
- Embracing creativity

3.1 Grounding ourselves
Freedom Nyamubaya shared her liberation war experiences with us through a poem she wrote. She explained that it touched on the issues raised on Day Two of women being sexually (ab)used by men in positions of power.

Osibisa
I was told it’s a Chinese word:
I definitely know of one
A place of mental torture
Where women and children were dumped,
Cut off from life.
A mental prison for mothers in the war.

Mentally disconnected, but physically involved:
Of course, they received their share
Of bombs and firing – from security headquarters in Thornhill.

When it wrecks the human mind
It destroys the person in them

“I feel a sense of accomplishment”

“I feel hope for a real feminist movement in Zimbabwe, real sisterhood that is intergenerational”

“I was afraid when I came, but now I am more confident as a feminist”
Sweeping away the love in them
Corroding the confidence in them
Leaving only empty and vicious bodies.

I saw them battering each other
Jumping at each other’s throats
Witchhunting and rumour-mongering
Boiling jealous and burning hatred.
Osibisa, a hot camp of frustration.
That’s what happens
When the war wrecks off the mind.

They were all mothers
With the experience of labour pains
And bullet wounds on their buttocks
Fragments all over their bodies.
They were all fighters
They were all Zimbabwean
Yet they hated their womanhood.

Unknown by the world at large,
Forgotten by their male comrades
Who made them pregnant
Remembered by their distant parents,
The women still shouldered their burdens.

Fighters to defend their children
Mothers to provide child care
Mistresses to entertain the men:
Their minds sink in despair.

Osibisa, I remember very well
I know there will be many to come
For Namibia and Azania today and tomorrow.
It’s sexual, mental and physical harassment
For women, mothers, in the liberation wars.
3.2 Moving the movement
The following are participants’ description of the ZFF space.
Embracing creativity – ‘1 million feminist actions’
Creativity was confirmed as very important to ZFF. Below is the beginning of the list of ‘1 million feminist actions’ ZFF will take to remain creative, alive and relevant in Zimbabwe.

- Create spaces for feminist friendship, learning, creativity and strategising consciousness
- Have study circles, starting with our current reader
- Celebration through reading and writing herstories
- Indigenous research, what’s going on around country
- Use of the arts, e.g. Vagina Monologues
- Embrace food, share food, gather around food
- Create a face/home for ZFF, link ZFF to others through blogging
- Use the WASN mobile clinic to reach out to rural women, write their stories
- Use sport as a tool
- Short films, docu-dramas
- Utilise virtual space – internet
- Organise a talk series – similar to ‘TED Talks’
- Organise house/home parties (potluck) – we do not need police clearance for that, then hold discussions and film screenings
- Reach out to young people in schools and colleges – show them movies/films about what it means to movement build, the lives women go through (For Coloured Girls Only; I want a wedding dress)
- Make use of things occurring in popular culture then discuss them
- Use available spaces: revive ZWRCN ‘secret garden’, Book Cafe – sistaz open mic
- Collect resources for our own African feminist library and resource space
- Give our physical space character and colour – paint, decorate
- Create email list restricted to members to be used for sharing information, discussions, planning events
- Create a closed Facebook group to share information
- Have an sms contacts list for alerts and reminders
- Documentation of stories through indigenous research

“There’s no feminism without fire and energy”

For me, feminism started at home, with my mother and grandmother. But on the journey, I’ve met sisters who’ve made it make sense. This is where my heart gets broken and mends”

“We came into this space just as we are and have accepted each other”
3.3 Commitments and Actions - Our TO DO List

“They shall know us by our actions”

Who will become members of ZFF?
- Paid up members who sign on to the ZFF Charter, starting with those attending the December 2011 forum, and those who could not attend and who will sign the ZFF Charter
- Consider non-Zimbabwean African women living and working in Zimbabwe who are feminist (not as full members, but for sisterhood and sharing ideas and information)
- Attract new members by ‘deeds’: open to women/girls; new members to sign to ZFF charter; fill in form with biography; allow members to recommend new members;

How to sustain ZFF?
- Membership fees- The suggested membership fee is US$25 a year
- Have a physical space:
  - ZWRCN secret garden and space for feminist resources – needs refurbishment
  - Women’s Law: we can ask to use the library, garden, seminar rooms
  - Hope Chigudu’s office for small events
- Documentation
  - Audio and visual recordings of events
  - History of the creation and first ZFF
  - Encourage self-documentation – ‘I-stories’
- Participation
  - Active
  - Interactive

Management of the ZFF space
- Loose structure
- Membership core group to make important decisions (e.g. on new membership)
- Katswe Sistahood to be the logistical host
- Financial: membership fees, contributions

Actions and Events (Committees)
1. Reading circles at ZWRCN (from February 2012)
   - Pat Made
   - Amy Tsanga
   - Chiedza Chagutah
2. (Tea) Parties at ZWRCN secret garden
   - Tsitsi Dangarembwa
   - Ropafadzo Gutu
   - Naome Chimbetete
   - Chipiwa Chifamba
   - Lindiwe Ngwenya
   - Freedom Nyamubaya
3. Refurbishing secret garden and available ZWRCN space (in a creative way, personal way)
Feminists (Re)Building Zimbabwe

- Chipiwa Chifamba
- Kudzai Makombe
- Rudo Chigudu
- Tsitsi Dangarembwa to bring in set designers
- Naome Chimbetete to make it official with the board

4. **Continue creative strategies through our ‘arty-farties’ – the creators**
   - Regina Matengo
   - Rudo Chigudu
   - Memory Zonde-Kachambwa
   - Tsitsi Dangarembwa—linking to WFOZ film screenings, linking to TED-ex
   - Lindiwe Ngwenya
   - Ropafadzo Gutu

5. **Documentation and indigenous research**
   - Farai Samhungu
   - Mary Sandasi—access to WASN mobile clinic
   - Tsitsi Dangarembwa
   - Chiedza Chagutah
   - Pat Made
   - Naome Chimbetete
   - Bella Matambanadzo – begin with ZFF report and creative products
   - Tomu Maphosa – begin with ZFF report and creative products

6. **Virtual spaces**
   - Rudo Chigudu – email list of ZFF members
   - Grace Chirenje – Facebook group
   - Kudzai Makombe – Facebook group

“I’m grateful for the friendships formed and the trust among us”

“Nothing should break a woman”
The politicisation of personal experience has been a key strategy of women’s movements all over the world. As a result of the accumulated experience generated by the democratic praxis of women’s movements, feminist theory has developed a sophisticated understanding of power that can usefully be brought to bear on considerations of identity, an understanding that highlights the workings of power from the bedroom to the boardroom².

² Amina Mama (2001) pg. 68
# ANNEX 1. PROGRAMME

## Feminist (re)building Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe Feminists Forum :: 7-9 December 2011

For Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Person/people leading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arrivals/ check in at Amzani Lodge</td>
<td>Rudo Chigudu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wednesday 7 December</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9- 10.30 am</td>
<td><strong>Grounding ourselves - bodies, spirits- whole selves</strong></td>
<td>Jessica Horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Meditation and introducing ourselves in the space and to each other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• History of AFF – how it all connects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reviewing the agenda and what we want most out of the space individually and collectively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30-11.00am</td>
<td><strong>Break</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00am-1.00pm</td>
<td><strong>Feminism, Nationalism and the State – Session 1</strong></td>
<td>Dr Elaine Salo, Institute of Gender Studies, University of Pretoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Led by Dr Elaine Salo, Institute of Gender Studies, University of Pretoria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00-2.00pm</td>
<td><strong>Lunch</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00- 3.30pm</td>
<td><strong>Feminism, Nationalism and the State – Session 2</strong></td>
<td>Dr Elaine Salo, Institute of Gender Studies, University of Pretoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.30pm- 4.45pm</td>
<td><strong>Feminism, Nationalism and the State – Session 3</strong></td>
<td>Dr Elaine Salo, Institute of Gender Studies, University of Pretoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Location</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.45-5.00pm</td>
<td><strong>Check in- inspirations and burning/uncomfortable questions</strong></td>
<td>Jessica Horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.30-6.30pm</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6.30-8.00pm</td>
<td><strong>Performance- Vagina Monologues</strong></td>
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**Thursday 8 December**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9- 9.30 am</td>
<td><strong>Grounding- Meditation and check in on day 2 agenda</strong></td>
<td>Jessica Horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30-11.00am</td>
<td>Feminist platforms and feminist movements- what are they and how can they nourish us and our political visions?</td>
<td>Jessica with participant input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00-11.30am</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00am-1.00pm</td>
<td><strong>Dreaming ZFF- what it could be and how it would serve our visions of change</strong></td>
<td>Jessica Horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00-2.00pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00- 3.30pm</td>
<td><strong>Our Feminist ethics- the AFF Charter and the principles for grounding a ZFF</strong></td>
<td>Jessica Horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.30-4.00pm</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00-5.15 pm</td>
<td><strong>The roles we will play- Steps to building the ZFF</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5.15-5.30pm</td>
<td><strong>Check in- inspirations and burning/uncomfortable questions</strong></td>
<td>Jessica Horn</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Friday 9 December**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.00-9.30am</td>
<td><strong>Grounding- Meditation and check in on day 2 agenda</strong></td>
<td>Jessica Horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30-10.30am</td>
<td><strong>Move...don’t move....What could make this work? What could make this fail? How we are going to make sure it ‘moves’?</strong></td>
<td>Jessica Horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30am-11.00am</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00 am - 12.00pm</td>
<td>Reviewing commitments, next steps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00-1.30 pm</td>
<td>Closing process</td>
<td>Jessica and &amp; friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.30pm -2.30pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.30pm- 6.00pm</td>
<td>Embracing creativity:: Women artists/craftspeople &amp; jazz musicians</td>
<td>Rudo Chigudu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 6.00pm</td>
<td>Departures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## ANNEX 2. List of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Surname</th>
<th>Email Address</th>
<th>Phone Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Amy Tsanga</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tsanga@law.uz.zc.zw">tsanga@law.uz.zc.zw</a></td>
<td>0712732330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bella Matambanadzo</td>
<td><a href="mailto:zvinemazuva@yahoo.com">zvinemazuva@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>0772345526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mary Sandasi</td>
<td><a href="mailto:msandasi@gmail.com">msandasi@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>0772376383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tomupeishe Maphosa</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tomupeishe@gmail.com">tomupeishe@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>0733786515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Freedom Nyamubaya</td>
<td><a href="mailto:motsruduk@yahoo.com">motsruduk@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>0772246473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Elaine Salo</td>
<td><a href="mailto:elaine.salo@up.ac.za">elaine.salo@up.ac.za</a></td>
<td>+27 741295996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Chiedza Chagutah</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cchagutah@gmail.com">cchagutah@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>+27 716141773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Chipiwa Chifamba</td>
<td><a href="mailto:chipiwac@zwrcn.org.zw">chipiwac@zwrcn.org.zw</a></td>
<td>0774733584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Patience Mandishona</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pmandishona@gmail.com">pmandishona@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>0772444584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Miles Tanhira</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sokomylz@gmail.com">sokomylz@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>0772942421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Grace Chirenje</td>
<td><a href="mailto:graceruvimbo@gmail.com">graceruvimbo@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>0772719650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Tsitsi Dangarembwa</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tsitsi@nyerafilms.com">tsitsi@nyerafilms.com</a></td>
<td>0714401104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Dudziro Nhengu</td>
<td><a href="mailto:muzuva34@yahoo.co.uk">muzuva34@yahoo.co.uk</a></td>
<td>0734020694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Regina Matengo</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rmatengo@gmail.com">rmatengo@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>0772884009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Farai Samhungu</td>
<td><a href="mailto:farai.samhungu@mac.com">farai.samhungu@mac.com</a></td>
<td>0772426705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Everjoice Win</td>
<td><a href="mailto:everjoicew@gmail.com">everjoicew@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>0772262081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Pat Made</td>
<td><a href="mailto:chisamisom@gmail.com">chisamisom@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>0712875795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Rudo Chigudu</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rudoyowli@yahoo.com">rudoyowli@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>0773588234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Theresa Matsvai</td>
<td><a href="mailto:hmsivai@gmail.com">hmsivai@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>0773485530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Naome Chimbetete</td>
<td><a href="mailto:naome@zwrcn.org.zw">naome@zwrcn.org.zw</a></td>
<td>0772265184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Ropafadzo Gutu</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Auxilliagutu@yahoo.com">Auxilliagutu@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>0774007515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Chiko Mufuriranwa</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cnmufuriranwa@gmail.com">cnmufuriranwa@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>0772913274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Lindiwe Ngwenya</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lindiwen@zwrcn.org.zw">lindiwen@zwrcn.org.zw</a></td>
<td>0773064525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Hope Chigudu</td>
<td><a href="mailto:hopechigudu@yahoo.com">hopechigudu@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>0772309058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Jessica Horn</td>
<td><a href="mailto:akiikijessica@gmail.com">akiikijessica@gmail.com</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Lucy Mazingi</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lucym@yet.org.zw">lucym@yet.org.zw</a></td>
<td>0772345308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Memory Zonde-Kachambwa</td>
<td><a href="mailto:memory.zonde-kachambwa@unwomen.org">memory.zonde-kachambwa@unwomen.org</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Kudzai Makombe</td>
<td><a href="mailto:klkomakome@gmail.com">klkomakome@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>0712005606</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANNEX 3. REFERENCES

Nyamubaya, F (1986) On the Road Again, ZPH, Harare