

MAKING ACCESS REAL

Self-care as political warfare

The Project





Title: Self-care as political warfare
Organisation: The Project
Country: Lesotho
Date: December 2017

Who are we?

The Project is a feminist, activist and human rights collective in Lesotho. It was established in 2017 with the main objective of creating spaces and platforms for women to engage in ways rooted in self-preservation. We intend to use dialogue to cultivate collective action, and to mobilise young Basotho girls and young women, including those who identify as lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender (LBT). We seek to bridge differences using methods that are informed by intersectional feminism, which we hope will lead to the creation of a politic that reflects the needs of our target groups.

What was the issue?

Women in Lesotho are, by tradition and culture, taught toxic selflessness, which causes them to neglect their own wellbeing. Systems such as patriarchy, capitalism and homophobia reinforce this, as women are groomed to become silent receptors of micro and macro aggressions in the belief that it makes them "strong" and "good" women. Girls in Lesotho are generally raised with dreadful notions of what femininity, strength and womanhood are, and what they look like. These toxic notions are paired with respectability politics to create a culture of silence and shame which results in a disempowered and – emotionally, financially and mentally – disenfranchised social group.

Additionally, the organising or activism that happens in Lesotho is not generally rooted in a love and joy model, and so does not prioritise love, joy and community as tools that can be used to dismantle oppressive systems. There was therefore an urgent need to create spaces that embrace, and advocate for, self-care and self-preservation as weapons of political warfare.

What was the change we wanted to see?

Our need is the creation of a politic that is participant-centric and caters to the needs of all women, across the board, in Lesotho. We want to facilitate safe spaces for dialogue that we will use to break the culture of silence about, and tolerance of, abuse.

In place of silence, we want a culture of conversation and voicing out, even in uncomfortable spaces.

What did we do?

Our work is centred around three pillars: activism, education and the arts. All our activities are rooted in these three pillars, and will vary according to need environment.

Our inaugural event was dubbed "Pizza and Conversations", and was a space created to unpack what feminism is, and what it means to the participants. Attendees were given the freedom to deconstruct feminist theories, and talk about how they implement them in their daily lives. We chose this point of discussion because we sought to contextualize feminism for Basotho women through their lived and observed experiences.

Other activities included: “Self-Care Shenanigans”; #BlackMonday, a silent protest – that we opened to the public – to highlight the increase in cases of femicide, rape, and other crimes against the bodies of women in Lesotho; and the Artists’ Forum, intended to develop a network of people who use art to engage with different issues for purposes of transformation.

What did we achieve?

- Creation of safe spaces for our target groups
- Increased dialogue about, and visibility of, the issues that are important to us
- The first few, tentative steps towards building a movement

What were the key lessons learned?

Accountability: For us, as a recently established collective, accountability and sustainability have been issues; but through organising and facilitating, we learned the importance of accountability, and of creating a sustainable

structure that constituencies can trust with their issues.

Solidarity: Solidarity and collective action are a prerequisite for advancing the work that we do. There is power in the masses and this power can be used to achieve our vision.

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