

Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL)

CO-CREATING CONSCIOUS LEARNING CULTURES Botswana Country Conversations Report

Botho Maruatona

National Program Organiser – Botswana

KP REACH Learning

Coalition of African Lesbians

Botho@cal.org.za

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this conversation was to deepen discussion and analysis around KPRL, as well as strengthen understanding and knowledge of the question of organising, status of our learning and knowledge creation to elaborate on pertinent conversations around road mapping, solidarity and collaboration in our organizing cultures and how they can strengthen our work, critical thinking and generating ideas and solutions that work in the context of access to health in Botswana. The space offered activists to meeting and connecting platform and produce our own lessons learned throughout the KP REACH project and how we envision the use and sustainability of our knowledge. We ensured that it be a safe space to come together to share experiences and lived realities, learn from each other and explore creative and a collaborative way to represent ourselves.

The proposed outcomes were:

- To explore how national organising mechanisms have worked and how these look-the role of civil society
- To collectively identify ways of working, i.e. values and practices that can/ have strengthen our organizing;

- To help generate a publication of best practices that is specific to Botswana's experiences and context
- To look into the future- what next?

The 2- day conversation was set up into 3 major themes or aspects,

- i) one being the look back or background of KPRL from its inception in 2016 to now,
- ii) the second being crafting our own best practice model and lastly;
- iii) rating our KPRL experience with regards to the major themes that resonated across the conversations and strongly through this closure session.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF KPRL IN BOTSWANA

Wellness has been played a great deal in the KPRL conversations in order to build a culture of self and community care. We had a daily 30 minute Qigong sessions- Qigong is an ancient technique used to coordinate body posture and movement, breathing and meditation for a healthier body. The introductory part of the conversation began with the participants introducing themselves using the "4 Corners" game. The aim of the game was for each of them to divide a piece of paper into 4 and write the following on each of the squares; *favourite saying, favourite food, organisation you represent and 1 item you had on/with you that you could give up on the spot.*

NPO Botswana facilitating the introduction process with an ice breaker termed 4 Corners.

As part of the background of the KP REACH and KPRL we highlighted the goals as per the intent and journey we have been a part of from June 2016, but more specifically, the guiding goals of KPRL which are;

- *To deepen consciousness and understanding with activists from 4 networks in 8 countries and at the regional level on what works in relation to access to the right to health, including health services in the context of HIV and AIDS*

- *To establish a culture and politics of knowledge that names, recognizes, affirms and builds capabilities for research that is led by marginalized groups and is rooted in their lived realities and able to inform stronger work on access to health, including health services in the context of HIV and AIDS*
- *To use social and mass media to expand the reach and engagement of activists, advocates and human rights defenders in Southern Africa on what works frameworks emerging in relation to strengthening access to health and health services for marginalized people in the context of HIV and AIDS*

The discussion stemming from this journey of learning started with the sharing of experiences of being part of the KPRL project in which some people spoke about how the case studies have been an opportunity for the various organisations to show case their work regionally and nationally. This highlighted the lack of reflection that CSOs and activists rarely do to ensure that they are on track with their mandates and that there is sharing of learnings that happens within and across movements. There was a reference also to the changing political landscape in terms of how organising has and an influence in this and how especially ownership of the movement and advocacy agendas; these were in relation to the LEGABBIO registration case and the 2 gender marker cases that took place between 2016 and 2017.

The group also reflected on the methodology used by KPRL, the use of conversations and not the usual “corporate” workshop set that is both intimidating and lecture kind. There was an appreciation of being able to hold the space by everyone in the group from when KPRL learning and the consistency on it and consistency of the group. However; there were concerns of whether or not this consistency will not be detrimental to how we organise and learn when we do not have other people coming into the space. One of the responses to this was that one of our principles in learning is that of accountability and the expectation is that the few within the group represent a segment of a particular group or movement and therefore bear the responsibility of taking the knowledge they helped create to those who are unable to be part of the spaces; that they form part of a key aspect of representation.

In addition to this journey, there were questions of the relation of KPRL to other arms of the KP REACH project such as the media aspect (M&C Saatchi stories of change) that many of the participants had been a part of in-country. Some of the feedback was that there had been some sort of “eraser of experiences.” Reason being that they context was not fully understood and the feedback that had been given was not always taken into consideration and those involved not getting feedback of the process. It was also noted that the participants felt as though there was a disconnect between KPRL and the media arm which made it seem as those these were two different projects.

Our process of collating lessons learned, there were participants that felt as though language within the conversation space was not relatable in terms of the context and content. There was a sense that there is an assumed stance that feminist jargon is fully understood by those that become part of these spaces but what can remedy this is having a glossary of sorts that can be shared prior to conversations being held or when projects such as these are introduced. This was to highlight that there were varying understanding of a lot of feminist ideologies applied in our work and in order for it to benefit us all as creators of It, it must be inclusive. An important statement that resonated with the participants was that “if language becomes a barrier, then our narratives are essentially being erased.”

In closing of our reflective process there was a sense of internalised processes of having a forum that allows for real conscious conversations about the things that work for us as CSOs and activists working in Botswana especially with having had the opportunity to engage with varying ways of working that in many instances have led to working in silos and capitalising on social capital that some activists and CSOs have that can be detrimental to advocacy in general and more specifically, access to health and movement building in Botswana. It was also highlighted that the role of CSOs and activists is not to take on the responsibilities of our government but rather expose the gaps and have governments account to the lack in those areas and use CSOs and activists as resources for programming and reaching out to KPs. However, this role has not been successfully affirmed in that regard.

Participants sharing their experience with the KPRL project from 2016 to 2018.

1.2 CRAFTING OUR BEST PRACTISE MODEL

With the last conversation, a lot of issues emerged during individual consultations with various activists and how these have been emphasized by the other themes in the 5 other conversations. One of the most pertinent issues was around our changing context, which in turn changes or alters the way in which we organise as CSOs and activists. This was particularly an imported note for documenting best practise models; to keep a close and constant eye on the ways our contexts shift.

a) CHANGING CONTEXT

We spoke about what KPRL has brought in terms of feeding to an already changing context, some of the guiding parts of this particular discussion were to look at what these particular *contextual changes were* in relation to access to health and establish; *what influences* these changes as well as the *risks and opportunities* that may arise from these changes. This was a group process to allow for smaller group discussion and feedback to the bigger group about their thoughts.

With particular focus on the change itself, some of the participants felt that there has been change in health service provisions that CSOs and government have contributed to in relation to female sex workers. The establishment of KP inclusive health posts has reduced stigma and discrimination and some amendments such as the change in line of collecting medical history and consultation have become less invasive, an issue that activists have long been demanding to protect dignity of KPs. This is also in addition to multi-stakeholder engagement in the development of policies and national frameworks, studies as well as other action plans to speak to the needs and narratives of KPs and these spaces have become more inclusive of KPs to allow for further collaborations.

Apart from service delivery, there has also been a shift in the political landscape in that there has been several cases in which the existing legal statutes have been questioned and demands made to relook and realign to the work that CSOs and activists are doing. Some of these include the stride by the Gaborone City Council to demand the decriminalisation of same-sex sexual activities to help curb HIV infections, the gender marker cases, the engagement of CSOs in the UPR process that was consultative and even allowed for a re-read of CSO demands in Parliament post Botswana's assessment at the United Nations, resulting in an increase of recognition of Human Rights of KPs.

However, there has been an increase of cases of Violence against Womxn (VAW) & Gender Based Violence (GBV) which are also a factor in new infections of HIV. The discourse around VAW & GBV in Botswana is still very surface bound and does not thoroughly unearth intricacies of patriarchy, policing of womxn's bodies and the analysis that is currently portrayed by those who speak against VAW and GBV.

b) INFLUENCING FACTORS

In reflection to the changing context, we had agreed that there were contributing factors that the participants had brought to the discussion. Some of these include the fact that there has been political shift in relation to KPs that influences attitudes of health service providers. In addition to that; there is a role that donor funding plays in how services and inclusion looks which has benefitted KPs (with its problematic conditions and agendas of course).

The assertion of KPs themselves in holding the government and other stakeholders to account has also served as a factor because now CSOs, collectives and activists have worked to substantiate the need for inclusion and are driving the conversation to ensure access to health services for KPs. It has also strengthened the use of feminist principles in organising to ensure that movements do not scratch the same surface as government in addressing issues affecting KPs.

Furthermore, there has been great strategizing and collaborative work within movements that has enforced the voice of KPs in various forms such as Strategic Litigation, formation of KP Coalitions to address Parliament and other bodies responsible for ensuring change occurs with regards to the needs and demands of KPs. The KP movement has over the years worked towards building solidarity and a cathartic way of working.

c) RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The discussion also led to checking what the risks and opportunities arise from a changing context and how we as a movement see these as they come or how they may hinder or progress the work we do. The risks that were identified were that there is a changing political climate; while we face an end to an era of militarisation from the former President, we still have uncertainty of the politics of the current President who has in the past made remarks to KPs as groups that do not need support from the government as their predecessors had not offered any. It is with such notions that in our work and asserting the rights of KPs we are also conscious of the overhaul that could come with a new political refurbishment.

In the groups analysis, intersectionality became both a risk and an opportunity in the sense that organising in this way serves as a way to ensure representation and participation of various groups of people which reduces the risk of working in silos and duplication of efforts and in the same breath; there is a risk of "losing focus and specialisation benefits" - in a sense having priorities mixed and not a clear value analysis. There is also a presented opportunity by this concept in that it increases chances of work (with media as well) and possible funding from our government and other funders or means of fundraising.

Another opportunity that was cited was that our ways of working as afforded a chance to build a strong movement with hands in various pots thereby allowing for cross learning and cross understanding of values and politics making it easier to negotiate space and representation.

Group work during the Conversation

Group work during the Conversation

1.3 WHERE WE ARE NOW

So in the different conversations that the group had been a part of and even this year's conversation; there were some recurring themes that ran across all discussions. With that in mind we wanted to score ourselves under these particular themes to add to how we have seen our best practice model to have come together. The identified themes were agreed upon and we wanted to "rate" ourselves during the course of KPRL on these themes and explain what they are and what we've derived from them. We created a colour scheme ranging from red, yellow and green. **Red** represented no effort, **yellow**- minimal effort while **green** represented great effort and confidence in the theme.

Themes:

- **Solidarity:** was noted as an important aspect of movement building- in terms of inclusivity, representation and sustaining participation. It also had an emergent sub-theme of language which is an integral part of carrying conversation and lessons therefore encouraging use of local languages to enhance engagement and gauge understanding of participants. KPRL has also assisted in initiating similar spaces outside of it to help curb the partial ownership by the movement that is mostly based on social capital and the isolated ownership of issues. There was a caution to be look out for a "co-opt" and not "co-creation" of knowledge. Solidarity however has been shown in how we organise, with the mushrooming of social justice movements, LBQ feminists movements and other intersectional collectives that have used current national issues to create voice to demand their rights.
- **(Access to) Resources- funds, people, knowledge:** There was an emphasis on the fact that there is a major existence of donor driven agendas that rigid our work. Additionally, there is a lack of trickling down of resources to national organisations or activists when regional resources are availed and there is a need to strengthen crowd funding in country for sustainability and driving agendas. There was also a lingering question of do we own the knowledge, is the ownership enough and if not how do we claim this ownership?
- **Wellness:** The different ways in which wellness has been incorporated into our work has been through spaces created like the conversations, without a clear vision of wellness within the movement and creating a culture of holding each other, cutting down on unhealthy coping mechanisms as well as mental health being a side note of sorts and not a foundation of how we can work with and around its issues.
- **Documentation:** The KPRL project and its lessons learned has had a great track of documentation with reports being shared and also having the learnings available on

the internet has been a way of being able to be reflective and recommend the methodologies used.

THEME	COLOUR
Solidarity	green
Resources	red
Documentation	green
Wellness	red

2. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The conversation started with a process of registration of participants on a daily basis to ensure we had everyone in attendance's contacts for our records. We also issued consent forms to the participants for the record (pictures, audio and other forms of media). The conversation was attended by a total of 14 participants, with 3 of them being CAL Secretariat, meaning that a total of 11 people took part in the evaluation of the process. The data analysis of the Botswana Conversation is annexed.

We had 3 participants between ages of 18-25, 6 between the ages of 26-35 and 2 between the ages of 36-45.

3. CONCLUSION

I think the conversation went well, 2 days of engaging people can be challenging in that it is easy for people to lose focus or maintain a certain narrative or approach to the space. It was a very participatory space and allowed for people to take others back in thought to remind us of the work and stride we have put it. It takes retracing steps to come up with a way forward and I believe there is always a sense of loss when projects come to an end but with commitment even outside the 4 walls to continue the solidarity was great to watch. There was an observation that the Women Living with HIV movement was slightly disconnected from the LGBTI/MSM/WSW, queer and sex work movement. With an understanding of course that the representation from them has not been as consistent as that of the other groups. I also believe that the documentation of this journey is critical in order to show the commitment of CAL to encourage ownership and emphasise the element of co-creating learning in Botswana.

The publication for the KPRL journey is under construction, this is a digital format that will allow for the findings of KPRL in Botswana to be shared widely and be used by those who have been part of the project for their own reference and resourcing.

PICTURES...

In Conversation with Botswana CSOs and activists

M&E Manager doing a recap of Day 1 with participants

Social media updates by The Afrolutionist during the Conversation