Let’s Talk about Power

By Maureen Kangere, Jean Kemitare and Lori Michau

We seldom talk about personal power—how we use it or how it’s used against us. Could it be because doing so makes us feel more accountable to ourselves and others and more aware of the negative power that lurks in our very own lives? Is power an unsexy topic that pushes us out of our comfort zone, making it easier to stay in the safe nest of the status quo? This avoidance has come to the attention of a growing number of international development activists who now believe that a key step in changing toxic social norms is catalyzing conversations about power.

The Gender Based Violence Prevention Network—a community of 800 members from 18 countries of the East, Horn and Southern Africa is dedicated to exploring how our uses of power as women and men are both the root and solution when it comes to violence against women worldwide. This trending topic was highlighted through their social media campaign called Let’s Talk about Power, with over 70,000 people from around the world uniting their voices on twitter via #Power101. People of all backgrounds talked about how power lives within us and all around us; how it fuels our courage to live authentically as well as our fear-driven need to marginalize others; how it’s a universal and ever-present force, both positive and negative, at the heart of our relationships and human rights.

One of the greatest consequences of power imbalances in our societies is violence against women. Historically and still today, most societies continue to place more value on men than women, thus giving men more power. The socialization that men by nature are more powerful than women makes some men feel justified in using violence to maintain that power over women. Despite the progress of various women’s and human rights’ movements, there is still a silence in most communities about violence against women, and a certain acceptance of such violence as normal.

But is it really normal? How can we achieve more balanced power? Many activists believe that it starts with first looking at ourselves—at how each of us probably uses our power over others in some negative way and how modeling positive uses of power begins with women and men alike.

As the Let’s Talk About Power campaign came alive across Facebook and Twitter, it became itself an act of positive power—exposing the silence that surrounds related social justice issues and shattering that silence with a viral outpouring of voices.
During the campaign, Twitter chats with renown African women’s rights activists Minna Salami and Saida Ali emphasized that power affects all of us, positively and negatively, and that inner manifestations of positive power can motivate us to change our lives—and the lives of others.

If we want to shift social norms, the conversation must go on. Raising Voices and 20 other organizations in Southern Africa took the conversation further when they convened in Zimbabwe to talk about infusing a gender power analysis into programs that prevent and respond to violence against women.

Meanwhile, social media will continue to be an asset for ensuring each conversation has greater reach and influence. For the Gender Based Violence Prevention Network, the Let’s Talk about Power campaign was the beginning of a new social media strategy to share a rights based analysis of violence against women. Connect with them on Facebook – GBV Prevention Network or Twitter - @GBVnet to learn about what will be next.

Voices from the campaign

**Strength of a Woman @HOLAAfrica · Oct 7**
Positive power can be used to uplift to create a space for others. Idea of standing on the shoulders of giants. #Power101

**Minna Salami @MsAfropolitan · Oct 8**
Love and power are one. When we love ourselves we give ourselves the right to power. When we love another we do the same @GBVnet #power101

**Afri-Dev.Info @AfriDevInfo · Oct 8**
@MsAfropolitan @GBVnet Agreed. People that abuse power are insecure. E.g. Insecure men ‘marry’ girl children #Power101

**Celeste Louw @CelesteOptimyst · Oct 7**
Together we can use our power to protect human rights and justice for all #power101 @GBVnet fb.me/2Xod0uobu