



# “SOMETIMES I DON’T FEEL SAFE”

Sonke’s One Man Can Campaign uses PhotoVoice to Ensure that Children’s Needs are Heard. By Kristin Pallitza



**Sonke Gender  
Justice Network**  
HIV/AIDS, Gender Equality, Human Rights





# Sonke Gender Justice Network

HIV/AIDS, Gender Equality, Human Rights

**Johannesburg Office:**

Sable Centre, 16th Floor  
41 De Korte Street  
Braamfontein 2017  
T: +27 11 339 3589  
F: +27 11 339 6503

**Cape Town Office:**

Westminster House, 4th Floor  
122 Longmarket Street  
Cape Town 8001  
T: +27 21 423-7088 ext 209  
F: +27 21 424-5645

**Email address:**

[info@genderjustice.org.za](mailto:info@genderjustice.org.za)

**Web:**

[www.genderjustice.org.za](http://www.genderjustice.org.za)



I didn't know that girls can play soccer. I thought it was a sport only for boys," says Thulile Khanyile. After the 14-year-old participated in a photography and writing project facilitated by NGO Sonke Gender Justice, her perception on gender roles changed, and she helped to start a girl's soccer team at her high school in Nkandla, a rural area in the heart of Zululand.

"I wanted to show that even girls can play. When we started the girls' team, a lot of people thought it was not right because a girl must focus on her school work and help at home with the cooking, cleaning and washing. But we showed them that we can play soccer and also succeed in school," she says.

With support from United Nations children's fund UNICEF, Sonke launched its PhotoVoice project in June to make children's voices heard through photography and writing. The first four-day workshop took place with 20 children at Mphathesitha High School in Nkandla and created a space for boys and girls to talk about their experiences, hopes and dreams and to mobilise adults, especially men, to help them meet their needs.

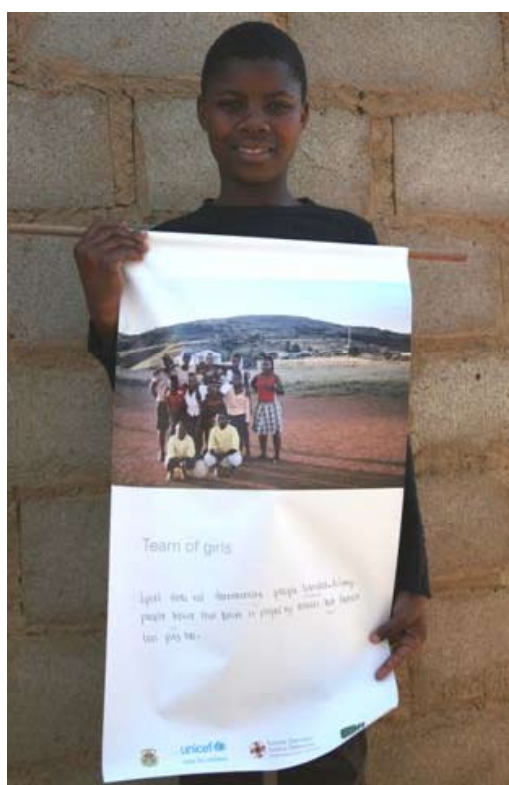
Children between the ages of 12 and 18 spoke about how they see themselves in their communities, their perceptions of adults, their understandings of gender and HIV/AIDS and their experiences with service delivery, with school and sometimes with illness, abuse and hunger.

"We want to build confidence and self-esteem by teaching new skills," says Nyanda Khanyile, Sonke PhotoVoice project manager. "Many children in rural communities experience social ills but they don't know how to express themselves." The discussions also taught children communication skills. "I am now more self-confident. I now know how to address a crowd," one boy said.

After the initial conversations, participants were trained in photography skills, writing and story development and ultimately transferred their stories into photography and writing.

To illustrate her new understanding of gender roles, Thulile took a photo of the girls' soccer team and wrote underneath the image: "Sport does not discriminate people's gender. Many people believe that soccer is played by males but females can play too." The photo and text have been printed on a poster and are part of a travelling exhibition.

The children were also encouraged to think about what assistance they would need to reach their dreams and who they would like to play a role in doing so – Thulile, for example, not only spoke about her wish to play soccer but made a plan to involve her school principal in setting up a girls' team.



“I LEARNT MANY THINGS,” SAYS 15-YEAR-OLD THULANE SHANGE. “I USED TO THINK BOYS AND GIRLS CAN’T DO THE SAME THINGS. I THOUGHT GIRLS HAVE TO CLEAN, COOK AND DO CHORES AROUND THE HOUSE, AND BOYS HAVE TO FETCH FIREWOOD AND HERD CATTLE.”



Nyanda Khanyile: OMC Coordinator

Gender equality was a new concept to all participating children who grew up with the understanding that men and women have their own, separate roles to play in society. “In rural communities boys are encouraged to be superior, strong and sexually active, so at first, neither boys nor girls understood what gender equality is,” says Nyanda Khanyile. “They think it’s about giving privileges to girls.”

Now, some of the boys who participated in the project walk through the streets of their village, proudly announcing “I am a gender equitable”, he says.

“I learnt many things,” says 15-year-old Thulane Shange. “I used to think boys and girls can’t do the same things. I thought girls have to clean, cook and do chores around the house, and boys have to fetch firewood and herd cattle.” He says he now understands that women can also be heads of households and should be given the same rights and responsibilities as men.

Thulane took a photo of a water tap and wrote: “At our school we have one tap but we have many learners. Girls must have the tap and boys must have there tap [sic]. Because when the boy wants to drink and there is a girl at the tap he just push the girl [sic].”

Apart from gender, children raised a wide range of issues through their PhotoVoice work, including the power dynamics of virginity testing, lack of sanitation, hunger, child-headed households, crime and HIV. One boy complained about the dusty roads he has to travel every day that cause him chest infections and asthma. Another boy spoke about the need for public transport because it takes him an hour to walk to school, sunshine or rain.

Other children asked for running water and electricity, because each day after school, they have to collect firewood and walk down to the river to fetch water. “If I had less chores to do, I would have more time to do my homework and study for school,” one girl said.

Khanyile says he was particularly impressed by the fact that, when thinking about hopes and dreams, the children identified issues that could benefit the community as a whole, not only them: “I was amazed that the children chose far-reaching issues that affect everybody in their communities and their childhood development. None of them spoke about personal gain.”

As part of the project, each child had to prepare a photo journal in which they wrote their motivation for taking a particular picture, their reflections on that picture and the technical information for each photograph they were planning to take. One girl spoke in her journal about the need for electricity and noted down ways of approaching the local councillor so that everyone in the community would get connected to the grid.





*2 GIRLS: "Before you cook first you are forced to fetch water in the river. At home they say it's a job of girls to fetch water. When I carry water I feel bad because at home there is no tap but other families have taps. I feel bad when I fetch water it us heavy and I have a headache".*

Another participant, 16-year-old Khayeletu Zondi, raised concerns around child safety and high levels of crime in his community and took a photo of signs outside of his school that prohibit firearms and other weapons. Next to the photo he wrote: "If am [sic] inside the school I feel safe because there are things that are not allowed to be inside. So we are all protected from bad things from out side [sic]."

Khayeletu knows his school is a safe environment for children, but he says he often feels vulnerable when walking the streets: "Sometimes I don't feel safe because there are people that get drunk and get violent."

A key focus of the project was the roles men play in children's lives, including whether men - their fathers, uncles, teachers, religious and traditional leaders and government officials - are involved in caring and supporting them, particularly in the context of gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS.

It became apparent that most children have distanced relationships with their fathers, many of whom, due to high unemployment rates in the area, work in cities far away from Nkandla – Durban, Pietermaritzburg or Johannesburg – and return home only a few times a year.

"Fathers are largely absent in the children's lives and are seen as fearful figures who earn the money and lay the law," explains Nyanda Khanyile. "Children have a closer relationship to their mothers and gogos who care for them, feed them and teach them values."

In their PhotoVoice stories, some children said they wished their fathers were more involved in their lives and play a role, other than financial, in taking care of them. Others pointed out positive, male role models they knew in their community.



## “WE WANT TO ENCOURAGE OWNERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION AND PERSUADE ADULTS TO RESPOND WITH ACTION TO CHILDREN’S VOICES,”



16-year-old Nompumelelo Masikane, for example, took a photo of the chairman of her school, whom she looks up to. Underneath the picture, she writes: “He always encourage the youth to think about their future. [...] He inspires me to focus on my school work and forget about useless things like drinking alcohol and dating.”

Nompumelelo’s mother, Nonhlanhla Masikane, says she has observed a remarkable positive change in her daughter’s behaviour since she participated in the PhotoVoice project: “I am noticing great change. She is now the one who is teaching me. She told me how to protect myself from HIV transmission and that men and women are actually the same. The rest is social classification.”

At the end of the project, Sonke exhibited the children’s PhotoVoice posters in the Nkandla community hall. More than 600 people came to see the works, including representatives from both municipality and traditional leadership.

To engage community members emotionally and intellectually, exhibition guests were asked to write personal commitments on pieces of paper, stating how they will contribute to improving the lives of children in response to the issues raised. They also noted down questions, comments and suggestions on postcards addressed to the local municipality to make policy makers aware of children’s needs.

“We want to encourage ownership and participation and persuade adults to respond with action to children’s voices,” explains Khanyile.

Nkandla municipality strategic planning and implementation manager, Mbongiseni Ndledla, says the municipality supports the PhotoVoice project as part of a broader strategy of caring and nurturing children: “We realised that if we don’t invest in our children, we don’t have a future. So we decided to make children a central part of municipal development planning.”

Ndledla promises the children’s requests will be considered in the municipality’s Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and thereby directly influence local policy-making. “Normally, the leadership only consults adults during annual imbizos [traditional gatherings] and children’s needs are sometimes overlooked. Through interacting directly with children, IDPs will be informed by the children not only talk about them,” he says.

“The Nkandla municipality is very vocal around child protection, gender issues and male involvement,” says Khanyile. “The close cooperation between local political and traditional leadership has helped tremendously to make the project a success.”

More exhibits will be held in Nkandla in both schools and municipal offices. Sonke also plans to show the works in provincial and national government offices and departments as well as at national and



**GRANDMOTHER PAINTING:** *“My grandmother is my best role model because she always teaching me many jobs that I can do she always teach me to paint the house inside and outside. My grandmother is my light. If I done something wrong she come and sit with me and talk to me If it was my fault she tells me to stop doing that thing”.*

international conferences including the Commission on the Status of Women in New York in 2009.

To make the project sustainable and reach as many children in and around Nkandla as possible, the workshop participants have been trained as peer educators. “To pass on some of the learning and skills, we invited the participants to become peer educators at their school, the neighbouring primary school, their community,” says Khanyile. “All 20 of them agreed. They are proud of what they have learnt.”

As another form of creating sustainability, eight of the PhotoVoice participants were chosen to take part in a digital storytelling workshop in September to further chronicle their lives. Digital storytelling is a participatory media production process that allows children to create short videos about personal life experiences.

“All the children wanted to be part of this project and competed through their photos and writing to be chosen, but unfortunately we only had funds to select eight participants,” explains Khanyile.

When planning their digital stories, the children first share experiences in



**DANCE CHILDREN:** *“These children are doing a Zulu dance. It is important to do our own culture and I wish to tell people that they have to know where do we come from.”*

a story circle, then write scripts, give each other feedback and record a voice-over narration. Later, they develop a storyboard and learn basic usage of photo and video editing software.

“Similar to the PhotoVoice project, the stories are about growing up, what young people think are issues in their communities, what difficulties they have overcome and who have been mentors in their lives,” explains Amy Hill, community projects director at the Centre for Digital Storytelling, which collaborates with Sonke on the project.

The digital stories will be used, in addition to the PhotoVoice posters, as educational media and as starting points for discussions in communities. They will be shown in the communities they were produced in and will also be distributed by media NGO Mindset to schools and public health facilities throughout the country. Sonke will also show the videos to policy makers, including officials of the provincial government in KwaZulu-Natal.

“Digital stories are a chance for children to have their voices heard,” says Hill. “It is a tool to talk to their peers, parents, community members and politicians about issues that are important to them.”



# My Father

UTATAWAM

UTATAUMINYAKAYI 50

UTATAAKAPHANGELI UTATAWAM

LEPHOTOIBONISA INDELELO ATHIASEBERZE NGAZO  
IMIHLANGEMIHLA

KUBA KULEGADI SITHI SIFUMANE UKUTYA

KUBA SITHI SIKWAZI UKUBA SEMANDLENI

SIXOTHEIKATJEZIKO

NDIYAMTHANDA UTATAWAM NANGONA ENG  
NAMALI

My father is 50 years old. He is not working. This picture shows how he works around everyday. From this garden we get food which keeps us healthy and well fed. I love my father even if he has no money.



**Sonke Gender  
Justice Network**  
HIV/AIDS, Gender Equality, Human Rights



**unicef**   
unite for children

## Johannesburg Office

Sable Centre, 41 De Korte Street, 16th Floor  
PO Box 31166, Braamfontein 2017  
Tel +27 11 339 3589, Fax +27 11 339 6503,  
Email [info@genderjustice.org.za](mailto:info@genderjustice.org.za)

## Cape Town Office

Westminster House, 4th Floor  
122 Longmarket Street, Cape Town 8001  
Tel +27 21 423 7088, Fax +27 21 424 5645  
Web [www.genderjustice.org.za](http://www.genderjustice.org.za)