



## IN THIS ISSUE

- 1. INERELA+ Saddened by the passing of its Executive Director*
- 2. INERELA+ Board appoints new Acting Executive Director*
- 3. INERELA+ Announces new board members*
- 4. INERELA+ Appoints Communications Officer*
- 5. INERELA+ Attends Consultation on women's rights*
- 6. Regional Advocacy for comprehensive sexual education*
- 7. INERELA+ Attends symposium on early and forced child marriages*
- 8. UNAIDS grant to combat GBV, child marriages and harmful practices and teenage pregnancies*
- 9. Peer educators raise awareness on GBV, SRHR and COVID 19*
- 10. Bread for the World supports capacity building for INERELA+*
- 11. TANERELA + conducts dialogue to end HIV stigma*
- 12. MANERELA+ pushes back against forced marriages in Malawi*
- 13. Religious leaders improve access to HIV services in Kenya*

## INERELA+ SADDENED BY THE PASSING OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

INERELA+ mourns the passing of its Executive Director Reverend Rosemary Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela who passed away on the 5th of July 2021 due to COVID 19 complications.



*Rev, Phumzile Mabizela*

Reverend Rosemary Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela was born on 17 July 1964 in Emalangeneni, KZN to Joseph Forty Zondi and Busisiwe Ida Zondi, born Gasa. She was raised in Hammarsdale as the second-born of seven children. She started her primary education at the Roman Catholic Church in Hammarsdale and matriculated from Adam's College in Amanzimtoti in 1980. She was studying at the Salvation Army when she realised her calling to become a religious leader. She was ordained as a pastor under the Salvation Army and later worked there.

### INERELA +Secretariat:

Corner Rabie St & Fourth Ave North, Fontainebleau, Randburg, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2032.

Telephone +27 (0) 11 79 7029 • Fax +27 (0) 11 792 6533 • Email [info@inerele.org](mailto:info@inerele.org)

Reverend Zondi-Mabizela studied Theology at UKZN. She was an integral part of the university's School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, Ujamaa Centre and related programs. She remained a proud and active alumna following her graduation. She was ordained under the Presbyterian Church of Africa in the same year and later worked as part of the JL Zwane church in Gugulethu.

The Late Reverend has worked with non-profit and non-governmental organisations such as Youth for Christ (YFC), the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA), the KwaZulu Natal Council of Churches (KZNCC) We Will Speak Out South Africa, Norwegian Church Aid and Global Interfaith Network (GIN), just to name a few. At the time of her passing, she was a founding member, member of several boards and the Executive Director of INERELA+. May her soul rest in peace.

Phumzile was an ally of the LGBTIQ+ community as well as a womanist that advocated for women's rights and an end to gender-based violence. She was a "faithivist" that lived openly with her HIV status and used her voice to challenge issues faced by people living with HIV, particularly with regards to healthcare. She challenged social injustices with courage and unrelenting passion. She had a vision for a world in which all are not only tolerated, but loved and human dignity is awarded to all, especially marginalised communities.

#### **INERELA+ BOARD APPOINTS ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

The board of the International Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (INERELA+) is pleased to announce the appointment of Ms Munya Mandipaza as the Acting Executive Director effective 6 July 2021. Munya replaces the late Executive director- Rev Phumzile Mabizela.



***Munya Mandipaza***

Prior to this appointment, Ms. Munya Mandipaza was the Deputy Director- Programmes at the INERELA+ secretariat in Johannesburg-South Africa since September 2020 after having joined INERELA+ in April 2019 as the Programmes Manager. She will now act in the capacity of Acting Executive Director until a new Executive Director is appointed. INERELA+ wishes Ms. Mandipaza all the best as she commences her new role

### **INERELA+ ANNOUNCES NEW BOARD MEMBERS**

Following the successful elections during the INERELA+ virtual General Assembly meeting held on June 17, 2021, new board members occupying different positions were announced. The meeting had in attendance country coordinators and some country network board members. Presentations were made by the late Executive Director, Deputy Director and Finance Manager. They briefed attendees on progress made, challenges experienced and existing opportunities to be explored in the new normal context.

We wish all the board members a successful and rewarding tenure. A complete list of the new Board Members can be accessed on the INERELA+ website at <https://inerela.org/>



### **INERELA+ APPOINTS NEW COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER**

INERELA+ appointed Thato Phakela as its new communications officer. Thato joined the team in March 2021 and was officially confirmed in her position on the 1st of August after her three months' probation. Her Role purpose for this position among others is to help deliver communications strategies for projects which are regional in reach.

Thato Phakela has a professional background in Integrated Organisational Communication. Thato holds a bachelor's degree in Communications Science from the University of South Africa and other professional courses in Media and Journalism and

photography. She is a skilled young professional with over 5 years of experience working in the NGO sector and with civil society organisations.

Thato started her professional career in the NGO space in 2011 at an organisation that advocates for gender equality and inclusion of women in all spaces of life called Gender Links (GL). During her time at Gender Links, she worked under the Gender and Media Diversity Centre. Her focus areas ranging from advocacy for women and representation of women in and through media. She was part of the research team at GL that conducted regional gender and media research in 2020 which had a key focus on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) called Gender and Media Progress Study (GMPS). This research was in line with GL's Voice and Choice campaigns undertaken by GL and its partners in 15 Southern African countries.

She progressively became passionate about social change with great interest in gender equality, women empowerment, and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR). Because of her broad research experience, she was part of the team that conducted the recently launched African Women's Political Participation Barometer.

We warmly welcome Thato to our big family and wish her nothing short of the best while with us.

## **INERELA+ ATTENDS CONSULTATION ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES**

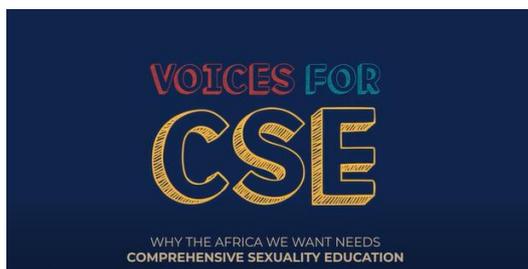
INERELA+ joins other faith-based organisation in Consultation on Women's Rights in Christian communities. The steering committee group members are Faith to Action Network, Bread for the World, Act UBAMBANO and Act Alliance.

The sessions will be spread over 7 weeks from 30 August 30th to 7 October 2021; the consultations seek to encourage and ensure that faith-based organizations advance women's rights and take concrete action in challenging gender discriminatory norms and practices within their spaces. Faith actors because of their position in the society play a very important role in contributing towards the promotion and acknowledgement of the rights of women.

Engagements and collaborations are in tandem with the vision and mission of INERELA+ as it strengthens our partnerships and collaborations with other faith-based organisations or groups. Furthermore, it offers opportunities for the empowerment of inter faith- religious leaders and organisations to understand, entrench, institutionalize and mainstream women's rights. INERELA+ is pleased to be part of this valuable intervention like this and will draw on learnings from the consultation to advance its advocacy activities about the rights of women.

## **REGIONAL ADVOCACY FOR COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL EDUCATION**

INERELA+ together with other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have come together to advocate for comprehensive sexual education CSE, which has been under threat in many African countries. Those against CSE argue that it encourages boys and girls to engage in sexual activities at an early age and that it accounts for why there is an increase in teenage pregnancies. Conversely, evidence exist and presents that CSE has provided comprehensive and accurate information for boys and girls and empowers them to take up well informed decisions about sex, sexual development, and sexuality.



CSE enables adolescents to explore their values and attitudes and build skills and knowledge thereby reducing their risk of contracting HIV, STIs, avoiding child marriages, unintended pregnancies, gender-based violence, and sexual abuse. CSE is crucial in the empowerment of boys and girls in African countries at large.

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To this end, INERELA+ collaborated with other CSOs led by SRHR Africa Trust (SAT) to document and present a video that responds to the consistent call to scrap CSE from the learning curriculum at schools. The advocacy video can be found [here](#).

### **INERELA+ ATTENDS A SYMPOSIUM ON EARLY AND FORCED CHILD MARRIAGES**

As a way of networking and capacity building INERELA+ staff endeavour to attend relevant forums, meetings, seminars, and conferences. On the 27th of August 2021, as part of commemorative activities for women's month, the AIDS foundation of South Africa (AFSA) held a virtual symposium on early and forced child marriages (EFCM).

The symposium brought different voices from across the African region to share knowledge and shift mindsets about EFCM to foster local and regional collaboration, raise the voices of children affected by EFCM and identify such trends that happen during humanitarian crises.

The meeting also discussed the impact of EFCM on young women and girls and worked collectively to find ways of eliminating these harmful practices across Africa. It was established that early and forced child marriage is a violation of human rights that affects women and girls, and that urgent actions and interventions are required to eliminate it.

A common and shared understanding of the drivers of early and forced child marriages were said to be gender inequalities, religion, culture, poverty, and inequitable education access. The society and the economy were also said to have a huge impact on the rising of EFCM among the African community.

Duty bearers and policy holders were also identified to have fallen short of expectations as they have not implemented robust policies that ensure the full realisation of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for young girls and women. When access to some of these SRHR services are denied or not available, young girls are left with no alternatives than to either keep the unplanned pregnancy or forced into marriages to avoid shame and discrimination.

### **NEW UNAIDS GRANT TO COMBAT GENDER BASED VIOLENCE, CHILD MARRIAGES, HARMFUL PRACTICES AND TEENAGE PREGNANCIES**

GBV and harmful practices are rooted in power imbalances between the sexes and are fuelled by multiple factors, including social and cultural norms, social acceptance of harmful practices, and insufficient legal protection. Harmful practices and GBV disproportionately impact girls and women the world over.

GBV manifests in several ways and is sometimes justified as a traditional practice and culturally grounded. Harmful cultural practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and child, early, and forced marriage, are discriminatory practices committed regularly over such long periods of time that communities and societies begin to consider them acceptable.



The consequences of GBV and harmful practices are vast, including physical injury, depression, chronic pain, sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancy, and increased risk of HIV infection. They also impede the participation of girls and women in society and perpetuate inequality. According to available data, younger women (15- 24 yrs.) in Africa are more likely to experience physical or sexual violence than older women are, generally from an intimate partner. More than two thirds of newly infected 15- to 19-year-olds in Sub Sahara Africa are female. A UNFPA report of 10 March 2021 has flagged high levels of gender-based violence by an intimate partner.

In an effort to amplify the campaign against GBV, INERELA+ signed an agreement in September 2021 for a project which intends to address existing challenges, SRHR, GBV and harmful social cultural practices through an interfaith lens. The Project will be implemented in Malawi and Kenya as well as at the regional level. By positioning religious leaders and the faith community as champions of ending GBV and harmful social cultural practices the project will contribute to the improvement of SRHR outcomes amongst young people particularly adolescent girls and young women within communities.

The project will enhance the capacity of Religious Leaders through a three-pronged approach that focuses on three key areas namely Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Strengthening Community Structures and Advocacy. The goal of the project is to contribute to the improvement of the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes of young people in the region ultimately leading to healthy, productive and empowered adolescents and youth. This Project is very crucial for INERELA+ as it will contribute towards the achievement of SDGs 3 and 5.

#### **PEER EDUCATORS RAISE AWARENESS OF SRHR, GBV, HIV/AIDS AND COVID 19**

On 21 May 2021 INERELA+ Sierra Leone conducted a house-to-house campaign for Kowama community to raise awareness on issues about Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Gender-Based Violence (GBV), HIV/AIDS, and Covid 19 prevention. This campaign was themed “My body, My right Do not touch without my permission”

The campaign was run by ten Peer educators who had been trained by INERELA +SL on issues about SRHR, GBV, COVID 19, and HIV/AIDS prevention. The peer educators were able to engage with at least 30 households and conducted a comprehensive dialogue with men, women, and adolescents reaching at least 420 people in Kowama village.

The campaign brought about a change of attitudes and behaviour to community members towards the issues discussed. About 150 people who had never tested for HIV and did not see the importance of knowing their status before this dialogue, then promised to visit their local hospitals to get tested. The men from Kowana village committed to getting involved and encourage other men to end GBV while young women and girls learned the importance of being mindful about their sexual lives.

## **BREAD FOR THE WORLD SUPPORTS CAPACITY BUILDING FOR INERELA+**

As part of capacity building, INERELA+ secretariat programs team members were taken through a 3-day Monitoring and Evaluation training workshop conducted by Southern Hemisphere. The training workshop took place between April and August 2021.

The learning initiative was made possible through the support received from one of our funders Bread for the World who had contracted Southern Hemisphere to provide M&E technical support to grantees being funded by them. The training covered the basics of Monitoring and Evaluation, the review and amendment of the existing INERELA+ M&E strategy. The support from Southern Hemisphere will be on an ongoing basis and will be extended to INERELA+ country networks at the INERELA+ learning forum to be held in October 2021. More information about Southern Hemisphere can be found [here](#).

## **TANERELA + CONDUCTS A DIALOGUE TO END HIV STIGMA**

TANERELA + conducted a dialogue meeting with national religious leaders from four main religious denominations in Tanzania as well as with people living with HIV from the 26 to 27 of August 2021. The two-day dialogue meeting was meant to raise discussion about the stigma faced by PLHIV in Tanzania and ways of eliminating the stigma. Christian organizations represented at the dialogue meeting included the National Council of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NACOPHA) Christian Council of Tanzania networks, (CCT) Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC), and Tanzanian Muslim Council (BAWATA).

This was the first meeting of its kind in Tanzania where religious leaders had a direct engagement with people living with HIV. During the meeting, PLHIV got a chance to share their testimonies with religious leaders showing the stigma and discrimination they are faced with daily. The dialogue was graced by 22 participants from Tanzania mainland 9 females and 13 males.

TANERELA'+ Coordinator, Mossy Ismail said they are pleased to bring the two parties together and enable religious leaders to learn from the evidence presented about the intensity of stigma experienced by PLHIV, to coordinate further dialogue and collaboration between religious leaders and PLHIV, and to reaffirm trust between PLHIV and religious leaders.

Tanzania Commission for AIDS (TACAIDS) representative presented the stigma index study done in 2013 by the government of Tanzania. He said though many faith-based organizations are involved in eradicating the stigma in their communities more still needs to be done. In his presentation, he acknowledges that stigma is still a huge problem hindering the achievement of the 95-95-95 goals set by UNAIDS which promotes zero discrimination on PLHIV and also states that 95% of people living with HIV know their HIV status; 95% of people who know their status are on treatment, and 95% of people on treatment with suppressed viral loads. He mentioned that the participation of religious leaders in eliminating the stigma is critical. He noted that the 2013 stigma index study gives evidence of major forms of stigma and discrimination experienced by PLHIV that include being verbally insulted, excluded from social, family as well as religious activities.

Evidence shared by PLHIV and the stigma index study established the need to urgently engage religious leaders to take more concrete action and eradicate all forms of stigma that exists in their communities and within their congregations.

### **MANERELA+ PUSHES BACK AGAINST FORCED MARRIAGES IN MALAWI**

MANERELA+ in collaboration with other civil society organisations, traditional leaders and religious leaders have embarked on a project aimed at eliminating early forced marriages in Denza district in Malawi. This project has evidence of rescuing at least 23 girls from forced marriages. This one-year initiative targets the young adolescent girls affected by forced marriages.

The project is also intended to eliminate Gender-Based Violence and promote Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) for adolescent girls. To date, the project has approximately prevented 103 girls from getting into forced and unwanted marriages since the inception of the project. MANERELA + has trained a group of mothers who are contributing to the increase of the number of girls being reached by the project. The group of mothers also provide educational activities on social issues that include GBV and SRHR for young women and girls. The group of mothers use several mechanisms to train the adolescent girls, training activities are held through awareness campaigns in places of worship, focus group discussions, and dialogue meetings.

To reach out to a wider number of targeted audiences MANERELA+ has also collaborated with several structures in the district such as child protection committees, community policing and victim support, health workers and school committees, all these structures work hand in hand in addressing issues that affect young women and girls that include early and forced child marriages.

Despite these, young women and girls are still faced with a lot of challenges that force them to get into forced early marriages including poverty. The project has managed to encourage behaviour change most especially among the faith communities; we also received assurance from Muslim leaders that they will make efforts to stop officiating marriages for girls below the age of 18.

### **RELIGIOUS LEADERS IMPROVE ACCESS TO HIV SERVICES IN KENYA**

INERELA+ Kenya started a new project aimed at improving access to HIV services for men and women and children affected by HIV and to participate in the fight against sexual violence against children. This initiative was implemented through religious leaders' champions who were trained to effectively respond to the HIV and SVAC issues.

The project has supported approximately 60 religious leaders and had at least 14 HIV Testing Service counsellors in the sub-counties of Kenya; these include Kasarani, Kamukunji, Embakasi East, Embakasi West, Ruaka, Westlands, Starehe, Dagoretti North, and Dagoretti South in Nairobi County. The religious leaders sensitized the community at large on creating HIV awareness and how to use the Self-testing kits.

As a result of the COVID-19 related lockdowns, challenges were experienced with implementation and reaching the targeted audience. INERELA + Kenya together with religious leaders and other stakeholders involved in the project were forced to find safer and more effective means such as social media and radio platforms to reach the targeted audience and ensure that implementation continued as planned. At least 60% of the targeted audience were reached via social media platforms such as, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. All engagements on these platforms were interactive and through these the project was able to reach a wider scope of people across the country. INERELA+ Kenya also supported champions to disseminate and engage with different audiences through these platforms biweekly-this ensured that there was constant and consistent interaction with people.

During the period of project implementation, INERELA+ Kenya was able to reach an estimated number of over 150,000 people with key HIV messages as well as the messages of hope and 6582 people were reached with HIV testing services. Those who tested positive were linked to care and treatment centres and linked to congregational psychosocial support groups for counselling.

