



APRIL 2025 Newsletter

BUILDING GRASSROOT POWER TO FIGHT GBV



In April 2025, Emthonjeni Women's Forum trained ward-based GBV response and prevention committees in Ward 14 and 19 of Umzingwane District, as well as St Peters and Mazwi (on the outskirts of Bulawayo.)

The initiative aims to strengthen grassroots efforts to fight gender-based violence (GBV) by equipping locally rooted committees with practical tools and knowledge. These committees will now act as first responders within their communities ensuring GBV cases are not ignored, survivors are supported, and prevention remains a shared priority.

At the core of this work is our belief that change is most sustainable when it comes from within the community. That's why this training brought together not just committee members, but also local leadership village heads, councillors, male champions, peer educators, child protection committees, and community-based counsellors. Their participation reflects our inclusive, community-led approach to social justice and survivor support.

"Communities are best positioned to lead the response against GBV because they understand the dynamics, challenges, and needs specific to their context," said Shirley Mabuto, EWF Programmes Officer.

EWF remains committed to building resilient, safe communities by placing power and knowledge directly in the hands of those who live, work, and lead within the communities. This initiative is another proud step toward that vision.



THE STRENGTH OF SELF HELP GROUPS

Self Help Groups (SHGs) continue to prove their strength as powerful platforms for economic empowerment, confidence building, and community solidarity among women. The story of Sibongile Mathwasa from Ward 20 in Umzingwane is a testament to how even the smallest financial opportunity when paired with peer support and determination can lead to transformative change. My name is Sibongile Mathwasa from Ward 20 in Umzingwane. I joined our Self Help Group (SHG) in November 2024, and that decision changed my life. When I first joined, I took a small loan of USD \$12. I used it to order *umnyi* for resale. The profit was low, but I was grateful to be able to return the money with interest. That small step gave me confidence.

In February, I took a second loan of USD \$50. With that, I bought *umnyi* again, some biscuits, and I also started making and selling samoosas. This time, my profit was better I managed to repay the loan, restock my goods, and I was left with an extra \$13. Out of that \$13, I cleared an outstanding balance of \$7 in school fees and used the remaining \$6 to buy a new school uniform from a local tailor. This term, they finished school without being sent home and that alone is a huge success for me as a mother.

Now, I'm working hard to grow my business even more. My dream is to get better returns so I can extend my homestead and build better rooms for my family. Joining the SHG gave me the start I needed, and I now believe in my ability to stand on my own and build a better future for my children.

To any woman out there who is doubting herself start small, but start. There is power in working together and believing in yourself.



FROM SILENCE TO STRENGTH: MAVERLOUS SIBANDA'S RISE IN LEADERSHIP



Women in leadership have made remarkable strides following their engagement with Emthonjeni Women's Forum (EWF), as seen in the inspiring journey of Maverlous Sibanda (*not her real name*). Sibanda, a 46-year-old woman from the United Apostolic Church in Zimbabwe, once served as a secretary for her village line. Though active in her community, Maverlous had never fully grasped the weight of the silent struggles she carried until she encountered Emthonjeni Women's Forum (EWF).

"I used to hear about the Community Activists (CAs) sessions held in my church in Ward 2, Insiza," Mavis recalls. "But it wasn't until I was invited to a training session in 2024 that things began to change for me."

During the EWF training, Mavis and other women were equipped with knowledge on leadership, the importance of women occupying meaningful roles in society, and understanding Gender-Based Violence (GBV). *"For the first time, I realised what I had endured wasn't just hardship, it was abuse,"* she says.

In her own home, Maverlous had suffered in silence. Her ex-husband's emotional and psychological abuse left scars that went unseen. He alienated her from friends and family, forbade her from greeting neighbours, and constantly rebuked her. One of the things he said was, *"You cannot think. You can't do anything right. You even gave birth to a deformed child."*

For years, Maverlous believed that bearing abuse was part of marriage but through EWF's sessions, she found the voice, and the courage to reclaim her life. After separating from her husband, Mavis described a newfound sense of freedom and confidence.

"I began to participate in other activities," she says proudly. *"I became a Sunday school teacher, joined the burial committee, and even the security team. These opportunities reminded me of my worth."*

"With GBV cases rising, it is important to extend such programs beyond faith spaces so more women can access support, learn their rights, and step into leadership with confidence," she says.

HIGHLIGHTS OF UMZINGWANE IWD CELEBRATIONS IN WARD 14

