



**YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENT TRUST
NAMIBIA**

[YFEM] FEMINIST NETWORKING SESSIONS

OKAHANDJA



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Facilitator

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INTRODUCTION

The first Young Feminist Movement (YFEM) networking sessions with adolescent high school girls in Okahandja came after one of the participants, Divonia, reached out to YFEM for an opportunity to volunteer with the organisation to fulfil the requirements of an assignment. It served as an opportunity for the organisation to network with young women in high school in the area and help mould young leaders within the community. The feminist grassroots activism movement is developing gradually and has proven to increase the number of young female leaders in the community.

The session incorporated an introductory discussion on feminism, mainly a few important subjects that are central to the African feminist movement. There were three key themes that guide the discussion namely; mental health, empathy and Intersectionalism and its contexts. It was an exciting opportunity to see how far the feminist movement had grown



Figure 1 Introducing the session and discussing Feminism

Namibia and perspectives surrounding that.

The event was facilitated by Vimbainashe Clara Makanza an advocacy intern for YFEM who is passionate about mental health and human rights advocacy work. The meeting ended with a casual discussion and meal shared among the young women and a general review of the meeting and experience.

OPENING SESSION

The opening session began with an introduction to what YFEM is and the general goals and vision of the organisation. It was particularly intriguing to the participants that the organization had key initiatives available to help them **realize their goals**, learn **leadership skills**, cultivate healthy habits that protect their **autonomy** and **critically analyze and address issues** that they are concerned about.

In order to establish the general style of interaction for the event as well as to ease nerves of the participants as well as to increase focus, the gathering began with an activity.

ACTIVITY ONE: Count To Ten

The goal is to successfully count from one to ten as a group. Each individual says a number and only one person speaks at a time, the group has to begin again from one if two or more people speak at the same time.

The objective of the game is to actively practice listening and to be respectfully observant of one's environment and it is particularly useful to avoid the habit of interrupting when engaged in conversation.

RESULT:

The group did very well after two tries and the skills were successfully practiced during the course of the meeting.

ACTIVITY TWO: Two truths, one lie

Each participant says three statements; two of them are truthful while one is a lie. The rest of the group then deliberates and decides on what they think is a lie.

The objective of the game is to build a method of deliberation that suits all of them while actively practicing the skills of active listening, being considerate, empathetic, respectful, observant and decisive as young leaders. It was also a playfully fun way to bond and find out more about each other.

WHAT IS FEMINISM?

This was an introduction into understanding the concept of feminism. All of the participants said they were not certain of what it was while three of them showed a vague understanding of what it was, giving the following descriptions;

¹ Term coined for the purposes of this report to mean paying attention to cues regarding one's command of the environment, that is to say making sure they play their part to make sure that the space is welcoming for everyone there. This would, for example mean; not jeering at or mocking contributions as well as not pressuring peers to participate (or not participate) in any way.

- "I think feminism is just accepting who you are"
- "I think it's how you present yourself as a woman"
- "It's just about women"
- "Saying you don't want to change yourself like, feminists don't wear bras, I don't wear bras because I love myself; it's all about loving who you are."



Figure 1 Discussing power dynamics

We built upon the idea of, 'loving, who you are' and the importance of cultivating healthy self-love and existing in a world that fully allows and encourages this. This discussion led to a core topic within the feminist movement which is Intersectionalism. We listed how different groups are affected by **the patriarchy** and the girls began to identify how although feminism is a woman led movement, it is concerned with identifying how each group is disadvantaged and how these disadvantages can be mitigated, through equity, empowerment and accountability to eventually have a more balanced and inclusive world.

Two groups identified and how they are affected:

MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH: Essentially trained to adopt an unhealthy relationship with mental health, wherein expressing any amount of vulnerability or feelings and emotions related to one is seen as being a weak and feminine (therefore inferior) trait.

DARKER SKINNED INDIVIDUAL AND COLOURISM:

Conditioned, along with the rest of the world, into accepting the idea that 'that the lighter the complexion, the more attractive the individual' as a fact and that the opposite was true.



Figure 2 Discussing dynamics in colourism and the need to undo and unlearn unhealthy practices.

The young women, identified that in both phenomenon, there was an unfair power dynamic created by an unsubstantiated hierarchy. From this, the young ladies

² A male dominant, oppressive system that has led to the establishment of a social hierarchy determined by race and gender.

learnt the idea of understanding different contexts when providing aid. The main element to seek to find out what each group needs, and thereafter work towards meeting specific and unique needs rather than creating a blanket system for every disadvantaged group. Additionally, the need for safe spaces for each group was identified and pointed out that YFEM's specific aim is to create safe spaces for young women, that these spaces are essential for allowing healing and innovation as well as creating bonds, therefore empowers young women while supporting and endorsing the movement for intersectionally oppressed groups.

ACTIVITY THREE: FREEZE

The group comes up with a theme and issue, two participants begin to have a conversation based on this theme. Two girls began with the theme of 'conflict with friendship.' They wanted to practice both the skills of creating boundaries and active listening. At any point during the conversation one girl outside of this dialogue would 'freeze!' and take on one of the two roles and they continue. This continues until a resolution to the issue is found.

RESULT:

The girls did well and managed to find a compromise that worked for the characters. When the activity was repeated twice with two different scenarios, the girls did an excellent job at tackling the issues and making use of skills they had learnt.

CREATING BOUNDARIES

The next factor was the need to discuss the concept of creating boundaries. The need to protect mental health is an important factor in the movement in caring for one's mental health. A developed command of one's space is important.



The group discussed how it is essential for one to have control of their autonomy and protecting this by ensuring any violations to this are mitigated. The need to respect parents and

Figure 3; Exploring the need to create boundaries to become autonomous

figures was also discussed, pointing out that as young individuals we must mitigate violations of individual rights by reporting to the appropriate authorities and adults around us.

UNFAIR BIASES and SOCIETAL GAPS

The societal impact of unfair biases and prejudices was another factor we discussed. The group successfully discussed how feminism has mitigated these biases. They listed the following ways in which unfair biases cause societal gaps in their lives;

- Racism; the girls discussed how they feel they've been held back because school teachers often show favouritism to white students.
- Gender divides; they discussed how although they had been told they were equal to boys/men, they did not feel like it was necessarily implemented in cultural settings as well as



Figure 4 Divonia giving her presentation on teenage pregnancy

- Information divides; mainly with regards to the lack of school led programs or youth programs that teach the youth on the actual laws.

The ensuing discussion was on how to confront these situations. The participants recognized and discussed how language plays a big role in maintaining the existence of these disparities. They stated that they have found this to be true in their context particularly with regards to colourism, knowledge on teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS, the community as well as mental health issues. We discussed how one should be conscious of the language they use and how it is alright to disallow the use of this language on oneself while creating boundaries. We further discussed how to give constructive criticism and have discussions with loved ones surrounding these issues.

This was followed by a presentation made by Divonia Nongeni on Teenage Pregnancy wherein we discussed individual rights surrounding this, stigmas surrounding this

³ 'Societal Gaps' in this case refers to any imbalances in society that result in certain groups being restricted by structural barriers, biological barriers, financial and economic injustice, etc...

phenomenon in which one does not think it could happen to them, and the importance of initiatives and programs around this.

ACTIVITIES

The session ended with two activities. In the first, which the participants write a letter to a fictional German pen-pal who, in their last letter, told



that they had just found out they were HIV positive. **Figure 5 Participants writing letters to their fictional German friend.**

The object of the activity was to show how they can be a supportive friend while showing the aspects of supportiveness that are present in feminism, such as empathy and the use of kind language. The participants did the exercise well identifying areas of key importance such as one instance where.

The last activity was to write and send the facilitator a creative piece on teenage pregnancy. This was intended to see whether or not the participants grasped the concept of advocacy and the need for it.

Feedback

At the end of the session, the young ladies expressed how they felt about the event, stating that it was very informative and educational. Some of the young ladies have expressed



Figure 6 YFEM Okahandja team

a desire to be part of YFEM and to make use of the organisation's desire to mould leaders by starting their own advocacy projects.

Below are comments made by two participants;

"It was very informative and I look forward to having more."

"Thank you so much this was such a great opportunity, I learnt a lot and would like to be part of this."

Conclusion

The **YFEM NETWORKING SESSION** in Okahandja was a success and we look forward to having more of these networking sessions with this group of young ladies. It was a fantastic meeting which gave the young ladies an introduction to feminism, bodily autonomy, leadership, empowerment and advocacy. We look forward to continuing to work with the young ladies as they become leaders in their own communities.