

Tough and determined

survey, you must be given counselling before and after your test, and your results must be confidential. No one, including medical staff and any manager who comes to know your HIV status, may disclose this information to anyone else without your permission.

Some people at my work are afraid of getting HIV/AIDS from other workers. Is there anything we can do to stop their fears?

Yes you can make your work environment safer. The only possible HIV transmission risk at work is through accidental direct exposure to blood, semen, vaginal fluid or breast milk; or an incident involving rape or sex at work. Employers should provide a first aid box containing disposable gloves for treating any cut or injury at work. Also workers living with HIV are vulnerable to contracting tuberculosis (TB) or opportunistic infections like pneumonia at work. Employers should take reasonable steps to guard against the employee getting sick in this way and at the same time the employer will be protecting other workers against getting sick.

If a worker does contract HIV at work (which is very rare), for example, a health worker with a needle-stick injury, he or she can claim compensation under the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (COIDA). You must report this accident or incident to your supervisor if you want to claim.

Employers should provide post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for workers who are exposed to HIV at work. This is a short course of anti-retroviral medicines, which will reduce the risk of HIV infection if they are taken within 72 hours of the accident. Employers should also help workers to get counselling and support.

If you are raped at work or anywhere else, you can get PEP from your nearest hospital.

I am a shop steward and one of the workers told me he is afraid to tell the employer that he is HIV positive because he thinks he may lose his benefits. Is this possible?

An employer can't unfairly deny workers living with HIV access to any employee benefits. Insurance industry associations have recently taken a policy decision not to test applicants, and group life policies which do not discriminate against people living with HIV are available. Medical aid schemes also cannot discriminate against members on the basis of their health status, and must provide the prescribed minimum benefits to workers living with HIV, including anti-retroviral treatment and treatment for opportunistic infections such as TB. LB

Women of Zimbabwe Arise

As Zimbabwe's economy and governance collapse, some stay silent but others make their voices heard in the call for social justice. **Mary Ndlovu** of *Women of Zimbabwe Arise* charts the formation and progress of this vibrant and brave organisation.

Women in Zimbabwe are suffering. Few are employed but all are working. They work in their homes to cook, wash, clean and care for children, and they work outside their homes to raise money for daily living. In rural areas they carry water, they fetch firewood and they work in fields. Some have the assistance of husbands, fathers, brothers, sons but the majority do not.

In Zimbabwe in 2007 this means they lead a difficult life. They eke out a living, finding opportunities through luck, connections, or sheer perseverance, not infrequently engaging in illegal activities. In a collapsed economy and a corrupt political environment where the strong prey on the weak it takes all their energies to survive from one day to the next. Children are excluded from school if fees are not paid, health care is unavailable or unaffordable, food is short, and motorised transport is replaced by "footing". But we are prohibited by law from voicing our concerns, our fears, and our anger over what our government has done to our country. Repressive legislation makes it illegal to gather to protest, unless the police approve, which they never do. It makes it illegal to publish material



Woza members under arrest in Bulawayo on Valentine's Day last year – 181 women and 14 babies were arrested and held for a night

critical of the government and a crime to “undermine the authority” of the president or police.

The women were in a hopeless position, until Women of Zimbabwe Arise (Woza) was formed in 2003 to give us a voice.

Take Esther. She is 17 years old, forced to leave school last year without a certificate because her family could not afford the exam fees. Her prospect of employment is nil unless she becomes very lucky. If she is unaware of the dangers, she may become a victim of human trafficking, when she responds to an offer of a “waitressing” job in Johannesburg. But the boredom of sitting at home, hanging out at local shops, waiting for who knows what to change their hopeless lives, frequently leads young girls like Esther to tempt fate. Esther is frustrated, depressed and angry that some people have all the wealth and keep amassing more, leaving girls like her to a miserable fate.

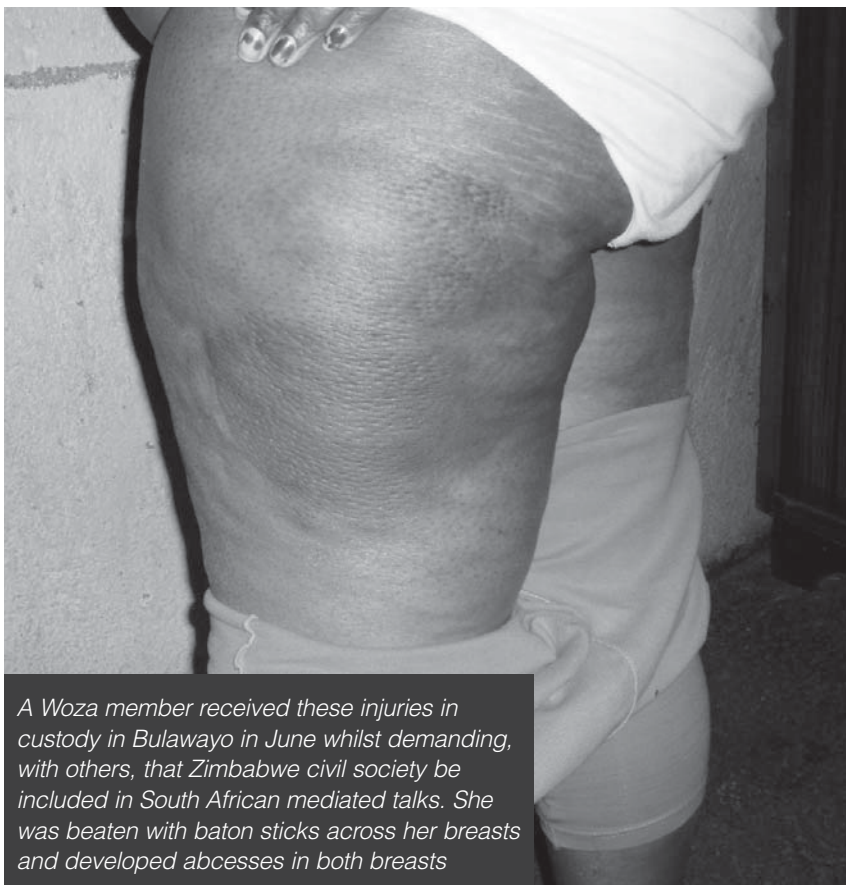
Then we have MaNkomo. She is a mother of three, widowed, HIV positive, and trying desperately to stay alive long enough to raise her

children, aged 8, 10 and 14. She grows food but this year there was a drought and nothing was harvested. Occasionally she makes a trip to South Africa to sell doilies and buy soap to sell to raise school fees, but her passport has expired, and she will never raise the money for the bribe to get a new one. The children have now dropped out of school and she has no money to buy food. The last time there was drought she was refused donor food because she didn't have a ZANU PF card. She does not know where to turn, where to look to put pressure on the government to develop the economy instead of destroying it.

And there is also Chipu MaMpfu, an elderly grandmother. She retired as a clerk with government five years ago. The pension she receives does not even buy two loaves of bread. Her husband also has a meaningless pension. She is looking after two orphans left by her daughter who died four years ago. She survives by selling sugar and sometimes cooking oil on the black market. Her connection with a relative who works in O.K. ensures a

supply of goods when they are available. She divides them into small measures and sells at a considerable profit. But the amounts of cash she has to buy are small, and she is always behind in paying the rent for the two rooms they share with another family. Sometimes her son sends groceries from South Africa, and these keep them going. She cannot believe that her family have sunk so low that they scabble for food money. In the 1990s she and her husband had comfortable jobs and looked forward to peaceful retirement. She is angry at the politicians who have caused this disaster, but is afraid to say anything publicly.

And then we have Stanley, up-and-coming young man with nowhere to go. He passed O levels, but his family couldn't afford to send him for another course. He tried to get fees by working as a welder with a friend. But in 2005 their equipment was destroyed by the police and he was beaten trying to run away. He wonders how he will ever get settled enough to find a wife and have a family when there is no hope



A Woza member received these injuries in custody in Bulawayo in June whilst demanding, with others, that Zimbabwe civil society be included in South African mediated talks. She was beaten with baton sticks across her breasts and developed abscesses in both breasts

of a job or a qualification.

WOZA'S FORMATION

Woza was formed to give a voice to people such as these. Our first principle was to promote freedom of expression, to encourage women to speak out about problems and fears and to tell them to the public and the government. But since speaking out is a crime in Zimbabwe, Woza had to embark on a programme of non-violent strategic civil disobedience to make their voices heard. This meant deliberately breaking the law where it deprives us of our rights, and bearing the consequences.

In 2003 the first demonstration was held, and broken up by the police, resulting in the arrest of several women. Since then Woza has never stopped, and there have been more than 50 public protests, in at least six centres around the country. Each protest has been accompanied by the distribution of a flier to inform the public what our complaints are. Most protests have resulted in arrests and detentions in filthy police cells. Some have provoked serious assaults and

torture by police, causing broken bones and periods of hospitalisation. Nevertheless, Woza has grown at an astonishing rate, with over 40 000 members – women who are brave enough to stand up, to shout their concerns, to present their demands to government.

Woza is not a political party nor does it support one. Its vision is to be a social movement which fights for the rights of people to experience social justice, to enjoy the long-awaited fruits of the liberation war.

Our hopes for a better life have been shattered by an incompetent, selfish, corrupt and criminal ruling party which clings to power in order to exploit what little wealth remains in our country. We claim our right to hold our government accountable, to assist in bringing to power leaders who place the interests of the people above personal gain. In doing this we have created a powerful sisterhood of care and concern for each other with the courage and commitment to stand up and shout until we are heard, regardless of the

consequences. Our actions have been seen by young men who share our goals, and they have insisted on joining us and forming Moza – Men of Zimbabwe Arise.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Woza works through structures in each community, elected by the members. Women and men from all over the country meet annually to elect the national leadership, called Mother Woza. Those who qualify to be elected will be leaders who have been brave enough to demonstrate in the streets their conviction that a better Zimbabwe is possible. Those who have not borne the torch over the previous year are voted out of office.

Over the years, a culture of accountability has developed within Woza structures. Women learn to accept that they can be defeated in an election, that positions must be shared not hoarded, that everyone needs a turn to experience the responsibilities of leadership and learn to be accountable. Woza women are developing skills of administration, of handling and accounting for money, of thinking and planning strategically, of mobilising and organising support for actions. Woza is a living laboratory for the growth of a culture of democracy.

Each street action is planned through community meetings conducted by community leadership. The theme of the action comes from the members, and the mobilisation is undertaken by them. When some are arrested, others act as a support team to bring food, medicines and lawyers to those in the cells, to take the injured for medical treatment and the traumatised for counselling. After each action, meetings are held to assess the effectiveness of the protest, to analyse successes and failures, to learn from mistakes and



Woza demonstrating in Harare on Valentine's Day this year

lay the basis for improved planning.

Over the years Woza women have forged strong bonds with each other and have gained a wealth of experience. We are still learning more with each month that passes. During 2006 Woza women visited every corner of Zimbabwe to hear the dreams of the citizens for social justice. The dreams were combined to form a Peoples Charter, embodying Zimbabwean demands for socially just and accountable politicians.

WOZA'S WAY OF OPERATING

We believe in non-violent action, in civil disobedience to make ourselves heard. The arrests that follow are the consequence of our actions, not to be feared but to be accepted as part of our struggle. Our presence in the police stations unnerves the police, who only know how to respond to non-violence by violence. As we keep returning to the streets in the face of assaults, they become confused, unsure of how to respond.

When they take us to court, charging us under clearly unconstitutional statutes, they find the going tough. Prosecutors point

out to them that they will not be able to make the charges stick. The few cases that have gone to trial have resulted in acquittals as magistrates bravely refuse to twist the law to secure convictions. In six years, in spite of many charges, not a single conviction has been secured against Woza women. And so some police become more vicious, promising to punish us ourselves if the courts will not. We now experience excessively violent attacks, especially from the riot police, and torture and perverted behaviour from some officers. We respond with "tough love" showing the police that although they may injure our bodies, our spirits will not be broken, caring for each other and even for them. While some individuals may lose courage, others will take their places, and the struggle will go on.

But Woza is now developing beyond this freedom of expression emphasis. While maintaining street actions, we have realised that it is necessary for women to develop in all sorts of areas. We have embarked on a variety of training programmes: peer education on HIV/AIDS, counselling sessions, income

generating projects and even sports competitions. These we hope will help to address the economic and social problems we face, and begin to lay the foundation for a different life for Zimbabweans.

Woza is very aware of the devastating damage done to Zimbabwean society by the present regime. We know that building a functioning democracy will not be achieved simply by replacing this government. Hence we work to develop a new political culture, one in which leaders respond to the will of the people they represent, who are the servants not the masters of their constituents, who share our dream of a Zimbabwe of social justice where all can pursue opportunities to build a better life.

Woza was the brain-child of two women who met by chance in 2002 – Jenni Williams and Sheba Dube. Jenni has carried the work forward, demonstrating a new style of leadership, setting an example of integrity, commitment, concern and courage, inspiring women and men to dream and work for the social justice which we believe is our right. LB