



BOND STREET THEATRE

peacebuilding, empowerment & healing through theatre

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Women and Girls Speak Out for Justice

Sustaining Grantee Interim Report and Country Change – July 2021

Project Summary:

BST proposed to conduct programming that serves the needs of women and girls in Afghanistan, Myanmar and Malaysia over three years, working with our local partners.

Two of our target countries have shifted due to current insecurity in Afghanistan and Myanmar, but our goals remain the same: to initiate practical, creative solutions to the entrenched problems affecting women, girls and youth in critical places, by applying our model program of theatre, advocacy and communication training, resulting in performances that bring rights-based information to a wide audience. Our plans in Malaysia to address the issue of trafficking and child marriage will continue as planned. In each of our target countries, conflict, displacement, and inequality inordinately affect women, girls and youth.

Please describe the progress you have made with this project in the last six months.

Our Sustained grant has us scheduled to continue programs in Afghanistan, Myanmar and Malaysia (with Rohingya refugees). As we accommodate new realities, we propose to shift our work in either Myanmar or Afghanistan to address **gender issues in South Africa**.

The security situation in **Afghanistan** is at its worst level in many years. Our local staff are on lockdown due to the rise in criminality, Taliban and ISIS attacks. They strongly recommend that we hold off on conducting our project there at this time. Foreigners are among the most vulnerable targets right now, especially women. If the security situation improves, we will consider resuming our program in the Herat prisons and shelters.

Myanmar is experiencing a shocking reversal. We began working there in 2009 while the country was under strict military rule, and watched its slow transition toward some semblance of democracy. We were proud to be part of that movement, working with women, children and youth in villages. Now, seeing the country return to strict military rule and vicious attacks on civilians is tragic. Our partners had begun to organize our program to counter trafficking with several strong women's groups, but now we are forced to pause our plans with little hope that stability will resume quickly.

We are proposing instead to work with **Rape Crisis Trust Cape Town (RCCTT) in South Africa**.

Violence against women and girls has been a huge issue in South Africa that is generally ignored by the police, especially in the townships, and the situation has escalated since the Covid lockdowns. RCCTT has requested our training for the young girls and boys (male allies) they serve in the Cape Town townships. Attached is a link to Training and Development Coordinator, [Rifqah Abrahams](#), speaking on the need for Bond Street Theatre's programming.

Project Summary:

Our plan is to train a group of **20 youth** (equal number of boys and girls) **between 13-18 years of age** from Athlone and Khayelitsha townships in Cape Town, plus 2 staff from RCCTT, in theatre-making, leadership, communication and advocacy skills. The **65-80 hours of training** will culminate in a **30-40 minute performance** that:

- presents essential information about all forms of GBV, myths surrounding the topic, and its detrimental effects on children, family and community life;
- illustrates the benefits of women's equal participation and leadership in the social, political, economic, and environmental life of the community;
- promotes positive social interactions between all members of South African society.

The performance will tour to at least 6 locations throughout the city of Cape Town and surrounding townships, reaching an estimated **1200 audience members**, and be scheduled to coincide and boost awareness of the *16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence*.

In addition, the youth will create a GBV **Arts Action Plan** that utilizes theatre as an effective component of a social and political advocacy campaign aimed at influencing citizens at community level and local government officials at provincial leadership levels.

BST trainers will also conduct **6 community workshops** at local organizations: Langa for Men, FAMSA, RCCTT, Scalabrini Centre for Refugees, and 2 women's shelters, offering **120-150 participants** a chance to heal, engage, speak out on the issues, learn new skills, and understand the value of the arts to relay important information and effect social change.

As a result of the project, the team (BST artist-educators, RCCTT staff, and the 20 youth participants) will create an **Arts for Activism Training Manual**, available in print and online, that includes exercises and sample scripts to serve as curricula for other youth groups and organizations to use and further develop.

Needs Assessment:

Gender-based violence remains a public health issue worldwide. South Africa's legacy of structural violence, which drives inequality, poverty, unemployment, substance abuse and HIV, also drives rates of sexual violence. It is estimated that 40% of South African women will be raped in their lifetime and only 8.6% of rape perpetrators are convicted¹. The consequences of sexual assault include both physical and psychological injury, as well as unwanted pregnancy. Victimization undermines school enrollment and progress, thus compromising women's future engagement in political, social and economic sectors.

Most people believe rape only occurs in dark alleyways by strangers. However, Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust's 2019 research, reveals that the truth is a lot closer to home: 68% of rape survivors know their rapist and have had their trust betrayed. GBV and femicide have been described as the shadow pandemic in South Africa with more than 2,700 women killed last year and violence against women continuing to increase due to the National COVID-19 Lockdown².

Including men as allies in efforts to eradicate gender inequality is essential, specifically in combating aggressive perceptions of masculinity, and working towards equitable dialogue between members of a community. BST and RCCTT recognize the need for arts projects that engage SA youth, male and female, as advocates for gender equality and social change.

¹ https://rapecrisis.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/RC-AR-18-19_Digital-compressed.pdf

² Udo, Fidelis. "COVID-19 Lockdown: South Africa Battles the Deadly Epidemic of Gender-Based Violence", IAWL. 6 June 2020. <https://www.africanwomeninlaw.com/post/covid-19-lockdown-south-africa-battles-the-deadly-epidemic-of-gender-based-violence>

Project Goals:

- To engage South African youth as advocates against GBV, equipped with the leadership, advocacy, and communication skills to effect social change;
- To promote the value of gender equality and inclusive societies among South Africans;
- To provide South African youth with the opportunity to exchange methodologies and best practices towards Arts Activism.

Outcomes and Impact:

1. 20 underserved youth from the townships will gain skills in creative self-expression, leadership, and advocacy, and the self-confidence and social awareness to use these skills.
2. The performance tour to key areas in Cape Town City will bring audiences from a variety of backgrounds (students, local law enforcement, community leaders) a deeper understanding of the issues that affect community stability and progress.
3. Post-show feedback sessions promote audience buy-in and ownership, by allowing audience members to role-play alternative solutions to the issues presented in the play.
4. The community workshops will promote dialogue in the community around GBV and related issues that have been deemed too sensitive or silenced.
5. The Arts Action Plan to be implemented during *UN's 16 Days of Activism against GBV* in Nov-Dec 2021 will publicize the root causes of violence, issues of gender identification, toxic masculinity, racial biases, and include plans to continue activities.
6. Short video segments of the training sessions, interviews with the participants and trainers, and the performances will be created for the media and educational environments to ensure sustainability and maximize project reach and impact.
7. The Arts for Activism Training Manual will be widely available as a workbook for future GBV programs for artists, activists and all types of organizations.

Project Partner:

Established in 1976, **Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust** is the most experienced organization in South Africa working in the area of rape and sexual violence. RCCTT envisions a SA in which women are safe in their communities, and where the criminal justice system supports survivors of rape and other sexual offenses, and acts as a deterrent to perpetrators of crime. Their mission is to promote community safety, reduce the trauma experienced by rape survivors, encourage the reporting of rape, and address flaws in legislation. Their staff and volunteers are drawn from the communities where they work so the most appropriate issues are addressed.

Please describe challenges or setbacks you experienced with this project during the last six months.

The first setback was the **pandemic**, which brought many programs and all travel to a halt. Covid-19 hit Afghanistan in the Spring of 2020 as migrants in Iran returned to Afghanistan to avoid the surge in cases in Iran. By the time the border was closed, Herat, where our project in the women's prison and shelters was to take place, had become the epicenter of the virus.

We considered working instead with Anna's Education Center (AEC) in Kabul, which has educational programs for widows, orphans, homeless women and street-working children. We have a long and successful relationship with AEC: they hosted the first performances of our all-women's theatre troupes in Kabul.

Unfortunately, the virus quickly spread across Afghanistan, concurrent with a rise in violent attacks by the Taliban, despite US and international attempts at negotiations.

Currently, the **Taliban** have taken over much of the country, and both security and optimism are at a low. We remain in constant contact with our partners in each city and with our

local staff who strongly recommend that we hold off on conducting projects at this time. If the health and security situation improves, we can consider resuming our programs for women and girls in Afghanistan.

At the same time, in **Myanmar**, where we had proposed a program to counter the trafficking of women and girls, the government has imposed strict military rule with violent crackdowns on all forms of protest. Our decade-long partners in Myanmar, Thukhuma Khayeethe (Art Travelers), had been organizing our program with two strong local women's groups. We had been planning to start the project as soon as the pandemic eased. We hope that stability will resume quickly, but the reality on the ground points to continued civil unrest.

What progress and challenges do you expect in the next six months?

The only foreseeable challenges to our current plans to collaborate with Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust in South Africa would be fluctuations in the rates of Covid. As the availability of vaccines increases, and summer months approach in the Southern hemisphere, we anticipate that their third wave of Covid will diminish. The plan is to begin our project by November 1st in preparation for the *16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence*, which occurs from November 25 to December 10, 2021.

We deeply appreciate Together Women Rise's sensitivity and understanding extended to all grantees in response to the pandemic. The funding that we received last year was a tremendous help to our dedicated team to survive the 15-month period of cancelled programs.

We are devoted to the women we serve and look forward to completing the projects we proposed as health and security conditions allow. We are also in touch with our partners in Malaysia to follow the progress in virus cases and the extent to which travel is allowed.

We will keep Together Women Rise up-to-date on our plans and any changes. Our plan:
South Africa: November 2021 – program against GBV with Rape Crisis Trust in Cape Town
Malaysia: October 2022 – program against child marriage with Rohingya refugees

Thank you again for the wonderful work that you do for women around the world! We are deeply honored and thrilled to be a Sustained Grantee.



Joanna M. Sherman, Artistic Director