

GDX Going From Strength To Strength

Gender DynamiX (GDX), in its 6th year, held its 4th Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Cape Town on 29 October, 2011. Outgoing Chairperson, Mzi Nduna, Treasurer Margie Lagerwell and Executive Director Liesl Theron presented their annual reports which clearly set out how far GDX has come since the last AGM.

Ms Nduna opened the meeting reflecting on the nature and performance of the organisation during the last year (2010/2011). She said the Management Board, acting on a volunteer basis, provides solid support to GDX's growth in volumes. To those who were not familiar with the work GDX does, she explained that GDX is a human rights organisation that pioneers work for the protection of human rights of transgender people in this country and beyond. GDX is taking strides to realise the Vision of becoming a big influence regionally and eventually continentally. She also spoke about GDX forming a coalition with two other organisations, Transgender and Intersex Africa (TIA) and Support Initiative for People with atypical sex Development (SIPD) Uganda, to form Transitioning Africa and through this coalition GDX will in future steer its regional work.

"In that journey, in addition to the strengthening of the position of transgender and intersex people, and activists and organisations we have also witnessed some significant developments in the region, Ms Nduna said. She also applauded the "tireless efforts, dedication and commitment" of the staff, interns and volunteers with a special thank you to funders and others "who contribute from their pockets as we rededicate ourselves to continuing to serve the trans community."

In her address, Ms Lagerwell said the hardest part of being a non-profit organisation is balancing the organisational needs, projects and activity costs with funding guidelines. She mentioned the main funders who support specific projects and funders who fund overhead expenses. These funders are South African National Lotteries, Atlantic Philanthropies, Arcus Foundation, Open Society Initiative South Africa, Aids Foundation of South Africa, Global Fund for Women and AmFAR. One of GDX's first funders was Astraea Foundation who continues to support GDX.

"Painstaking hours are invested in funding applications, tailoring the needs for the GDX community and soliciting funders who fit our goals," she said. She added that the organisation continues to operate under the most stringent financial control and each staff member is used to their full capacity.

No annual report could be complete without the address of the Executive Director, Liesl Theron who started GDX after realising the need of putting a system in place where the rights and needs of transgender people could be addressed. Not only did GDX grow as an organisation known beyond South Africa's borders as well as globally, but is now also a leader in advocacy in South Africa with a range of government departments, reaching out to communities, continuously hosting workshops and group discussions and is featured regularly in the South African Media. There are South African parents contacting GDX for information and support for their trans teenagers, assisting transpeople in a range of litigation/court cases, assisting trans people from across the country to access shelters, and social spaces which are created where people can just hang out and be with each other.

GDX is currently in discussions with the Department of Education in the Western Cape regarding gender segregated school uniforms and inclusion of gender sensitive education. GDX has also managed to finally set a meeting date with the Department of Home Affairs regarding Act 49 of 2003.

"In this organisational year we seriously started engaging in setting a South African trans research agenda and South African gender inclusive HIV-related work and research which will translate into producing materials and information – the first in South Africa to be trans specific and catering for the needs gaps of our very own constituency," Ms Theron said.

She went on to say that GDX is actively involved in a national task team to ensure gender identity inclusion in the South African National Aids Council (SANAC) which is responsible for our national strategic plan on HIV/AIDS for 2012 – 2017. Until now transgender people were not present in the NSP, their vulnerability invisible and no interventions in place to address their very particular issues. GDX has made submissions for appropriate inclusion especially with regards to trans people who are currently subsumed within the gay and lesbian categories by default of their pre-transition bodies. International research shows trans people as the most vulnerable key population group. GDX sees the need for research and initiatives locally.

“We are proud to say we are also involved in giving input in the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill which will determine the future of health care in South Africa,” she stated. She added that all these policy paper submissions, draft bill white papers and processes will translate into future access of better services for all Gender Dynamix South African constituents.

Historically, with its first two years unfunded, GDX had to rely on donations and various opportunities. One such donation in kind is the website, still being hosted, maintained and provided without any cost to GDX. However it created an image of an organisation for middle class and affording people as it is a very limited number of people in South Africa who has access to the internet.

“Over the years we have worked very hard to overcome the barriers of not only this image but in reality to ensure we reach out to communities beyond those who are able to access us on-line.”

These days GDX is reaching out to a range of diverse communities in isolated and rural areas including Pietermaritzburg, Kimberley, Umlazi, Soweto, Guguletu, Nyanga and many more. GDX also has a drop-in centre and people from across the Peninsula drop in to make use of the space and resources offered.

Another big project of GDX is the upcoming Trans Health and Advocacy Conference at the end of November 2011. The strategy about hosting a conference of this nature is not only the three days meeting space it creates for trans people from across South Africa and medical and health practitioners, but also the work involved in the build-up to the conference.

“The collaborations and partnerships it creates with other organisations in preparations and the resolutions and documents, “spin-off” workshops and other exposure it creates is priceless.”

In conclusion she said that having the back-up of a conference allows “gravily” to engage with the Departments of Health, Education and Justice, with the UN and the WHO.