



20 YEARS WORKING FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Gender Research & Advocacy Project,
Legal Assistance Centre
19 February 2013

This month marks 20 years of the Gender Research & Advocacy Project (GR&AP) of the Legal Assistance Centre. GR&AP is one of five departments of the Legal Assistance Centre, which is Namibia's only public interest law firm.

The gender department was launched as the “Gender Research Project” in February 1993, with the aim of investigating law-related gender issues and making recommendations for legal reform. It was originally staffed by one lawyer, Dianne Hubbard, and one field researcher, Kaveri Kavari. “Advocacy” was added to the name in 1999 to capture this important component of the project's work.

The Gender Research & Advocacy Project seeks to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women through legal research, law reform and related advocacy work.

GR&AP's first step on a particular issue is usually to **conduct research**, to understand what is needed in Namibia and to learn about best practices from other jurisdictions. GR&AP draws on its research to **advocate appropriate law reforms**, including efforts to involve the public at large in debates about legal change. It then uses a variety of mechanisms to **raise public awareness** of the laws in question and to **train service providers** to implement new laws effectively. In many cases, GR&AP also conducts **follow-up research** to see if new laws are serving their intended purposes in practice.

GR&AP has produced major research reports on more than 16 different topics – including issues relating to family law, gender-based violence and children's rights. Amongst these are comprehensive assessments of rape, domestic violence and maintenance in Namibia; five monographs on topics ranging from stalking to sex work; and two books of academic essays, one on gender and sexuality and one on inheritance practices in different Namibian cultures. Although the research is aimed primarily at informing debate in Namibia, one of GR&AP's research reports was cited in a US Congressional hearing.

Another organ that has been in the frontline with gender- and law-related research is the Gender Research Project (GRP) of the Legal Assistance Centre...Through the GRP it has been possible to advocate for the Combating of Rape Bill and the 'Domestic Violence Bill', which are two of the most important Bills to combat violence against women and children.

“Namibia National Progress Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action”,
Department of Women Affairs, 1999 at page 47

GR&AP has influenced the content of many gender-related laws. Working in partnership with the Law Reform and Development Commission, and various ministries – particularly

the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare – it was involved in the formulation of the Married Persons Equality Act, the Combating of Rape Act, the Combating of Domestic Violence Act, the Maintenance Act, the Criminal Procedure Amendment Act (on vulnerable witnesses) and the Children’s Status Act. GR&AP has also provided influential input on gender-related aspects of other laws, including the Labour Act, the Social Security Act and the Communal Land Reform Act. **This group of laws has substantially re-shaped the gender landscape for women in Namibia.**

GR&AP’s involvement in these laws was not limited to desk work; it also stood shoulder to shoulder with other members of Namibia’s women’s movement in marches and demonstrations calling for the speedy passage of many of these pieces of legislation.

The Legal Assistance Centre is a driving force behind gender-specific law reforms.

*Second Millennium Development Goals Report: Namibia,
National Planning Commission, 2008*

GR&AP research has also helped to shape some legislation which is still in draft form – including the Child Care and Protection Bill (expected to go to Parliament in 2013) and an inter-related cluster of family laws on marriage, divorce, marital property and inheritance. At present, GR&AP is working with the Ministry of Home Affairs & Immigration on a new law on birth and death registration. **Improving child protection and advancing gender equality in the family context will be the key challenges for the next decade in the gender sphere.**

GR&AP has also worked together with government on **policy issues**, providing input into documents such as the Education Sector Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy and the National Plan of Action on Gender-Based Violence.

In an effort to raise public awareness of gender laws, GR&AP distributes hundreds of thousands of **educational publications** annually, in English and indigenous Namibian languages. For example, in 2012 alone, GR&AP distributed over 430 000 publications, including training guides for service providers, and posters and pamphlets aimed at the general public. GR&AP staff write **newspaper and magazine articles** and make **regular radio and television appearances**. They also conduct **workshops** for service providers and community groups, continually experimenting with different workshop paradigms to seek the most effective approaches.

Your publications are so important and influencing the lives of people throughout the country. I have spoken with paralegals from 10 regions throughout Namibia and each one has praised your work and used it frequently.

*volunteer from the International Human Rights Clinic,
University of Maryland School of Law, working in Namibia, 2011*

Thank you very much for your help. It is exactly what I need!

feedback from a client, 2011

GR&AP has taken some very **innovative approaches** to community education. It has produced two dozen comic books on legal topics, which have proved extremely popular, as well as several feature-length films, a radio ‘soap’ and numerous radio shorts, two animated cartoons and a book of poetry on gender-based violence. Keeping up with modern technology, GRAP maintains a Facebook group and makes increasing use of **text messaging to provide legal information to people in far-flung parts of the country**.

... the Legal Assistance Centre, a local NGO, has taken the initiative to make law more accessible to the grassroots communities through translations and simplifications of various laws.

Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): Second & Third Country Report: Republic of Namibia, Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare, 2004 at page 8

Throughout its years of operation, GR&AP has also provided **assistance to individual clients** – whenever possible empowering them with information and confidence to navigate legal procedures like protection order applications and maintenance enquiries on their own.

The Legal Assistance Centre is very helpful. Especially for the people who are not able to afford help.

Interview with President Hifikepunye Pohamba,
The Namibian, 11 September 2009

GR&AP has also taken responsibility for **Namlex**, the index to laws in force in Namibia which is periodically updated and made available free to the public on the Legal Assistance Centre website. Although this is not specifically a gender issue, it is an initiative which has increased public access to laws in general.

Internationally, GR&AP publications have been used as models by other countries in Southern Africa. GR&AP staff have made presentations on Namibia to the UN Committee which monitors the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in New York, and to the UN Committee which monitors the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Geneva. GR&AP has also shared information about Namibia in workshops and meetings in places as far afield as India, Sweden, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK.

GR&AP currently has a **staff of four** – its largest staff component ever. In the last 20 years, a total of 16 persons have been employed as staff members, along with 22 consultants.

Layout artist Perri Caplan and data analyst Christa Schier in particular have assisted GR&AP so tirelessly that they are practically honorary staff. GR&AP has also received assistance from 71 interns and volunteers from Namibia and countries around the world, as well as from 7 visiting academics and professionals – in addition to the other 30-40 LAC staff and Trustees which form part of the Legal Assistance Centre family. **Overall, some 150 people have contributed directly to GR&AP’s output, with the indirect support of many other people and organisations, too numerous to count.**

<p>Present GR&AP staff</p> <p>Dianne Hubbard, Coordinator Rachel Coomer, Public Outreach Manager Yolande Engelbrecht, Paralegal Yolanda Itamba, Project Assistant</p>  <p>Dianne Hubbard</p>	<p>Past GR&AP staff</p> <p>Kaveri Kavari Doufi Namalambo Laura Tjihero Willem Odendaal Leigh-Anne Agnew Evelyn Zimba Collette Campher Naomi Kisting Mercedes Ovis Anne Rimmer Sophie van Wyk Grace Kapere Nekundi</p>
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Dianne Hubbard – still the coordinator of the project 20 years down the line – has taught in the Law Faculty at the University of Namibia and is the present Deputy Chairperson of the Law Reform and Development Commission. *Insight* magazine recently named her as one of the 20 most powerful people in Namibia, stating that “*it has been the thoroughness of the input that has encouraged government to trust Hubbard's suggestions and advice*” and citing this as “*a rare example of positive extra-parliamentary and non-executive influence*”.

Hubbard, when asked about some of her highs and lows over the last 20 years, recalled one particularly embarrassing moment when she was forced to launch a publication consisting of empty pages with a fake cover, after a printing company encountered an unexpected delay.

The most tense moment involved a demonstration planned to coincide with the opening of Parliament in 2003, calling for the passage of the Combating of Domestic Violence Bill. An urgent interdict argued by the Legal Assistance Centre at the eleventh hour failed to overturn a police decision not to allow the group to come anywhere close to Parliament. But about 250 women dressed in black with red “blood” on their hands marched up to the edge of the police barriers anyway, where they were met by a phalanx of pointed guns. The resulting media coverage helped draw attention to the bill, which was passed by Parliament later that year.

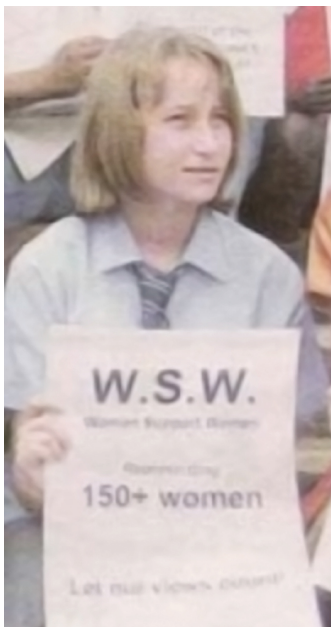
A memorable high point for Hubbard was presenting a lecture on “Celebrating 20 Years of Progress towards Gender Equality in Namibia” in March 2010, as part of a lecture series

organised by the Office of the President. This event focused on acknowledging the many gains made by Namibian women since Independence – a refreshing change from GR&AP’s usual calls for action.

Hubbard praised the incredibly dedicated staff GR&AP has attracted over the years, and also laughingly observed that she can chart the growth of her children over the years through photographs of them accompanying her at various gender events.



Dianne Hubbard and daughter Kelsey at one of the first demonstrations for gender equality shortly after Independence



Hubbard’s children, Kelsey & Jason, at a demonstration on the Children’s Status Bill in 2006



The Legal Assistance Centre is doing a very great job. When the ministry has laws, they are there. When we have conferences, they are there. They have done a very great research on rape and they will be making an important contribution to the input of this conference.

Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, speech at National Conference on Gender-Based Violence, 19 June 2007

GR&AP would like to **thank** the many **Parliamentarians, government ministries, and UN agencies** it has been fortunate enough to work with over the years, and the many **donors** who have kept the department alive in the face of several close brushes with extinction. GR&AP would also like to thank its **partners and colleagues at the Legal Assistance Centre and in civil society at large** – all working as interdependent links in a chain of people who tackle different facets of sex discrimination and related social ills. GR&AP would also like to thank the **communities** it works with, where ideas are exchanged about how to make the Constitutional guarantee of equality before the law a more meaningful reality. **It is the teamwork between all of these individuals and groups which is slowly but steadily advancing gender equality in Namibia.**