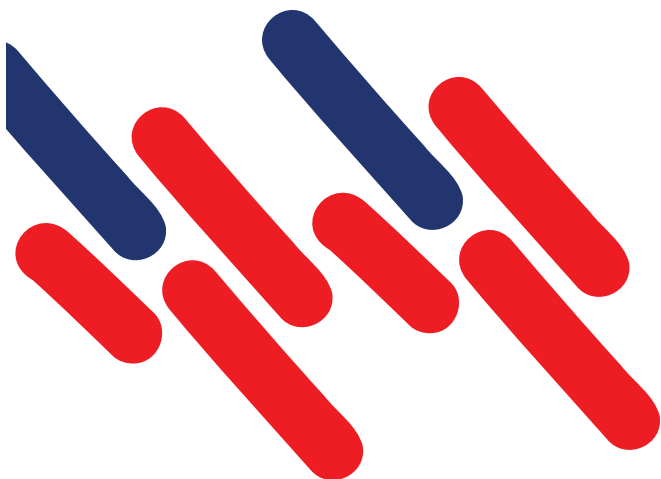




**SOUL CITY
INSTITUTE**

FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

FLAC - Feminist Leadership Accelerator Centre Storybook

a celebration of the journeys, achievements, and transformative experiences of our fellows.

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LETTER FROM CEO

It gives me immense pleasure to present the FLAC - Feminist Leadership Accelerator Centre Storybook, a celebration of the journeys, achievements, and transformative experiences of our fellows.

The FLAC Programme was established with a clear purpose: to nurture and support young feminist leaders who are committed to advancing gender justice, challenging inequality, and driving meaningful change in their communities. We recognise that the future of the feminist movement depends on the leadership, innovation, and courage of young people who are willing to question the status quo and imagine a more just and equitable world.

**"FEMINIST LEADERSHIP IS THE
COURAGE TO LEAD WITH CARE,
TO SHARE POWER, AND TO
CREATE SPACES WHERE EVERY
VOICE CAN SHAPE A MORE JUST
FUTURE."**

Throughout the fellowship, participants were challenged to think critically, engage deeply with community issues they are passionate about, and convert their ideas into action through assignments, campaigns, and practical leadership experiences. What stood out was not only their commitment to completing these tasks, but the passion, excellence, and creativity with which they approached every opportunity. Their campaigns and initiatives demonstrate the power of young feminist leadership in action and highlight the impact that can be achieved when young leaders are equipped with the right tools, support, and encouragement.

The value of the FLAC Programme extends far beyond individual development. The programme creates a space where young feminist leaders can build knowledge, confidence, and networks while strengthening their leadership capabilities. It fosters solidarity, collective learning, and collaboration, all of which are essential for sustaining a vibrant and resilient feminist movement. Through the fellowship, participants gain not only skills but also a deeper understanding of their role in shaping more inclusive and equitable societies.

This storybook is an important reflection of that journey. At its core, feminism is about storytelling. Stories allow us to share experiences, amplify voices, build connections, and inspire action. By documenting the experiences of our fellows, we honour their growth, celebrate their contributions, and showcase the profound impact that the fellowship has had on both their lives and the communities they serve.

As you read the stories captured in these pages, I invite you to reflect on the resilience, determination, and vision of these remarkable young leaders. Their journeys remind us that meaningful change begins with individuals who dare to imagine a better future and are willing to work collectively to make that future a reality.

To our fellows, thank you for your dedication, leadership, and commitment to creating positive change. Your stories are a testament to the power of feminist leadership and the enduring strength of our movement.

We are proud of what you have accomplished and look forward to witnessing the impact you will continue to make in the years ahead.

In solidarity,
Phinah Kodisang
Chief Executive Officer

INTRODUCTION

It can begin with a young woman sitting in a room and wondering whether she belongs there. It can begin with grief that has nowhere to go, with a body people have taught you not to talk about, with a question about why the rules seem to work differently for women and girls, with the frustration of watching institutions fail the people they are meant to protect.

Sometimes it begins with a sentence that has never been said out loud.

The Feminist Leadership Accelerator Centre — FLAC — is a platform that equips, connects and amplifies feminist leaders so they can challenge unequal systems, influence decision-making and accelerate social change.

It goes beyond leadership training. Through mentorship, networks, resources, practical experience and opportunities for collective action, FLAC supports young feminist leaders to move from learning and potential to influence and impact. The programme's own logic moves through healing, feminist consciousness, leadership, advocacy, practical experience and community action.

But the real meaning of that sequence becomes visible in the Fellows' stories: in the moment someone who once stayed in the background stands before hundreds of students; in the decision to challenge misinformation about contraception; in a clinic youth zone created because young people asked for a space that would not judge them; in pad distribution, survivor support, school dialogues, public statements and demands for accountability.

These stories are not neat stories of "before" and "after." Feminist leadership rarely moves in a straight line. Confidence can sit beside fear. Healing can happen while anger remains. A person can become more powerful without becoming less vulnerable. The Fellows show us that leadership can be a voice, but it can also be listening; that advocacy can mean addressing a public meeting, but it can also mean helping a survivor understand a protection order; that knowledge matters most when it moves from one person to another; and that the private and the political are never as separate as they appear.

This book therefore begins with the self, but it does not stay there.

It moves from the question, Who am I becoming? to What do I know, and what will I say?

Then it asks a harder question: What happens after speaking? The answer is power in practice — the work of challenging systems, creating alternatives, demanding accountability and acting in community. Finally, the book widens its frame. None of this is done alone. Across provinces and across borders, Fellows describe sisterhood, mentorship and solidarity as part of the infrastructure of change.

The journey is SELF, VOICE, POWER, and COLLECTIVE CHANGE.

It is a journey from finding a voice to understanding what that voice is for.



**A FELLOWSHIP
BECOMES A
MOVEMENT
WHEN LEARNING
CHANGES HOW
PEOPLE LIVE,
SPEAK AND ACT.**

**THERE IS A
PARTICULAR KIND
OF CHANGE THAT
BEGINS QUIETLY.**

PART I – SELF

“I am becoming.”

Before a person can challenge the world around her, she may first have to challenge the stories she has been taught about herself: that she is too quiet, too loud, too emotional, too inexperienced, too different, too much, or not enough.

For many Fellows, feminist leadership begins here, not with a microphone or a campaign, but with the deeply political work of taking up space.

CHAPTER 1 -

BECOMING



Finding the Courage to Take Up Space

"I doubted my voice, my thoughts, and even my presence."

— Asemahle Sigwinta

When Asemahle first entered FLAC, she carried excitement and fear together. She was quiet, nervous and unsure of herself. In rooms where other people appeared confident and knowledgeable, she wondered whether she belonged. Sometimes she knew exactly what she wanted to say, but the words would not come. The fear was not only of speaking. It was the fear of being wrong, being judged, and discovering that perhaps the room had been right to feel bigger than she did.

Then a session created something she had not expected: safety.

Asemahle describes becoming vulnerable during an early session and a media and communication workshop. She cried. She felt overwhelmed. But she also felt held. That matters because the first transformation in her story is not performance; it is permission. Permission to be uncertain. Permission to learn. Permission to be seen while still becoming.

The fellowship then gave language to experiences she had sensed but not always named. Through intersectionality she began to understand how different parts of identity shape people's lives. Through ecofeminism she saw more clearly how environmental challenges can fall differently on women and on communities with fewer resources. Feminism became less an abstract idea and more a way of reading the world and reading herself within it.

Her story sits beside the poetic territories offered by Amogelang Tabane:

**THE AUDACITY TO BE HEARD. REFUSING TO SHRINK.
WHEN TRUTH SPEAKS. LEADING WITHOUT PERMISSION.
FINDING POWER IN VOICE. THE COURAGE TO MAKE
GIRLS VISIBLE.**

Even without reproducing the poem here, those titles form a vocabulary for the chapter. They name the shift from seeking permission to recognising that one's presence is already legitimate.





Ankonisabo Bakhaha's work travels a similar road through a different set of questions:

FINDING MY VOICE. FROM SILENCE TO STRENGTH. QUESTIONS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE. BREAKING THE SILENCE. WOMEN RISING TOGETHER. HER TITLES REMIND US THAT CONSCIOUSNESS CAN BEGIN AS A QUESTION.

A question about who has power. A question about whose experience counts. A question about why something that has always been treated as normal should remain unchallenged.



Mhlali Mzimkulu's route into voice is shaped by a different experience. She lost sight in her right eye after complications during surgery. She writes that this affected her confidence and made her afraid to speak when something was wrong because she feared being judged or laughed at. FLAC became, in her words, a space where young people could talk without fear of discrimination or judgement. It allowed her to

"DISCOVER WHAT IS THAT MIHLALI WANTS."

That sentence carries more weight than it first appears to. Feminist leadership is often discussed as the ability to lead others. But Mhlali's story asks what must happen before that: the ability to hear yourself. To know what you want. To imagine a future that belongs to you.

Nolwazi Ziqubu's awakening begins not with trauma or disability, but with distance. Growing up, she says, she was largely uninterested in news and social issues. Politics and national affairs felt like the concerns of older people. Music, celebrity news and fashion felt closer to her life. FLAC disrupted that separation. Suddenly, GBVF, unemployment, mental health, reproductive healthcare and social norms were not "adult issues" happening somewhere else. They were shaping the lives of young people now.

The shift from awareness to action became visible when Nolwazi stood in front of approximately 300 students at KwaThema TVET College and spoke about consent and stealthing. She was extremely nervous. But the shy young woman who preferred to remain in the background was now speaking publicly about an issue many people avoid discussing privately.

That is why finding a voice is political.

It is not simply becoming more confident in a room. It is becoming able to name what is happening around you, to place your experience within a larger social reality, and to decide that your understanding belongs in the conversation.

"I AM IN A SPACE WHEREBY I CAN DREAM, ABLE TO VOICE OUT, TO FIND YOURSELF, TO EXPRESS MYSELF FULLY."

WHY FLAC MATTERS

Across these stories, becoming is not a finished state. It is an active verb.

Asemahle becomes more intentional. Mhlali reclaims possibility. Nolwazi moves from distance to social consciousness. Amogelang's audacity refuses shrinking. Ankonisabo's questions become strength.

Their journeys remind us that transformation often happens quietly — through questioning, learning, healing and finding the courage to take up space. Finding your voice does not mean having all the answers; it means trusting that your experiences, questions and ideas are worthy of being heard.

The first form of power is not certainty. It is the courage to discover your own voice — and believe that it deserves to be heard.



CHAPTER 2 -

HEALING IS LEADERSHIP



FLAC IS MORE
THAN A
TRAINING
INITIATIVE
IT'S A SPACE
OF RADICAL
IMAGINATION,
LEARNING,
HEALING, AND
ACTIVISM.
DESIGNED TO
PREPARE
YOUNG
FEMINIST
LEADERS TO
CREATE
TRANS-
FORMATIVE
CHANGE IN
THEIR
COMMUNITIES

From Pain to Purpose

"FRIENDSHIP IS THE HEARTBEAT OF ACTIVISM."

— Onalenna Lekalake

Onalenna applied to FLAC during what she calls a season of "deep hopelessness." From Taung and living in Rustenburg, she remembers sitting at home and wondering where life would take her. The fellowship arrived at a crossroads.

Her story could easily be told as one of professional opportunity: a first experience of the workplace, exposure to boardrooms, new places and new possibilities. But Onalenna tells us that FLAC meant more than that. She describes it as restoration. She found a place where she felt she belonged within feminist activism. She found women who became more than colleagues. She found sisters.

And she found counselling.

The programme's attention to trauma and healing became one of the most significant parts of her experience. The principle underneath it is radical in its simplicity: before asking young activists to return to communities carrying other people's pain, make space for them to recognise and work through their own.

Healing, in this frame, is not separate from leadership. It is part of how leadership becomes sustainable.



Mihlali understands this in her own way. Years after a childhood car accident, she still experiences flashbacks in taxis. She also remembers a distressing experience of arriving at a 24-hour clinic and waiting through the night without medical attention. Her story connects personal trauma to wider questions about health systems and access. FLAC provides therapy and spaces to talk about healing, but it also provides the language to ask why care fails, who gets listened to and what young people should be able to expect from institutions.





**RORISANG
MAKOA**

Rorisang Makoae's pain enters the story through a phone call.

A twelve-year-old child in her family had been gang-raped. The family's hope that identification of the alleged perpetrators would lead to justice was followed by institutional failure. The perpetrator was dismissed by police for not first approaching a traditional authority. A later suggestion that the matter be settled with cattle deepened the family's sense that a child's violation was being negotiated rather than prosecuted. No arrests followed.

Rorisang's grief hardened into a question: what do you do when the system meant to protect people will not act?

For her, the answer became journalism.

"IF THE LEGAL SYSTEM WOULDN'T ACT, PERHAPS EXPOSURE WOULD," SHE WRITES.

Journalism sharpened her curiosity and widened her understanding of exclusion. She began to see how injustice reproduces itself across different experiences, including the lives of people with disabilities. She did not initially think of this as becoming feminist. She thought of herself as someone driven by equity.

Then FLAC gave that instinct a political home.

"I REALISED THAT I AM THE PERSON WHO CAN BRING CHANGE TO MY SOCIETY BECAUSE REAL CHANGE MUST START WITH ME." — RORISANG

Onalenna is not the hopelessness she arrived with. Mhlali is not the medical trauma she survived. Rorisang is not only the injustice that shaped her activism. Their stories move toward agency.

Onalenna's placement exposes her to practical survivor support: counselling, legal assistance and the process of helping people navigate protection orders. She has long felt a calling to stand against gender-based violence and femicide and to support young girls to stand up for themselves. Theory becomes proximity to the real work of care and justice.

This is also where the wider ADAPT placement story belongs. Survivor support, harmful gender norms, community mobilisation, healing and accountability sit together. The work is not only to respond after violence. It is to help break the cycles that make violence predictable and survivorship lonely.

For Onalenna, sisterhood is part of that work. "When women support one another," she writes, "we become an unstoppable force." The line "friendship is the heartbeat of activism" turns care into a political idea. It tells us that movements are not sustained only by campaigns, strategy and public pressure. They are also sustained by who notices when someone is tired; who listens when the work becomes heavy; who reminds another woman that she belongs.

Pain can become purpose. But the bridge between them should not be romanticised.

That bridge is made of healing, support, language, community and the chance to act.

FLAC's PURPOSE

FLAC is more than a training initiative it's a space of radical imagination, learning, healing, and activism. Designed to prepare young feminist leaders to create transformative change in their communities, the programme includes a rich curriculum grounded in intersectional feminist theory and practice. Key modules include:

- Gender and Healing: Reflections on childhood gender conditioning and its lifelong impact
- Feminism 101: Introduction to feminist thought and movements
- Feminist Activism and Movement Building
- Sexual & Gender-Based Violence and SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights)
- Feminist Leadership, Communications, Media & Advocacy
- Economic and Climate Justice

The programme is guided by a collaborative approach between the FLAC team, experienced mentors, and the Fellows themselves working together to deliver community-led, feminist solutions and advocacy grounded in lived realities.



PART II — VOICE

Voice is more than volume.

It is the right to speak accurately about your own body. The right to ask questions without shame. The right to make an informed choice. The right to challenge misinformation, stigma and silence, and to help someone else do the same.

CHAPTER 3 -

OUR BODIES, OUR RIGHTS

Breaking the Silence

There are subjects young people are often expected to understand without being allowed to discuss them honestly.

Menstruation. Sex. Contraception. Consent. HIV prevention. Pregnancy. Abortion. Desire. Boundaries. Pain.

Silence does not make these realities disappear. It simply makes misinformation more powerful.

Lethabo Jood's feminist consciousness is also rooted in breaking silence, particularly in a space where silence can be mistaken for faithfulness. Her understanding of feminism has been shaped by both her Christian faith and the realities she sees in her community. For her, feminism is about dignity, safety and fairness for women. It began with asking why women are so often expected to suffer quietly, including in spaces that should protect them. She has come to believe that faith and feminism do not have to stand in opposition: both can be called upon to affirm women's dignity rather than excuse their pain.



Nyasha Tarisai's work around menstrual health begins with that fact. She speaks about breaking the taboo around menstruation and challenging the myths that can shape young women's health choices, including misinformation that contraceptive implants cause infertility. Her intervention is deceptively simple:

LET US BREAK THE SILENCE.

But breaking silence is not the end of the story. What follows matters just as much: accurate information, informed choice and bodily autonomy.

Nobuhle Sithole's fellowship work at Ndwedwe Community Health Centre in KwaZulu-Natal makes this practical. Under the Adolescent and Youth Friendly Services programme, she supports health education, awareness of SRHR and access to services. She facilitates conversations about relationships, consent, mental health and gender-based violence. She visits schools with health teams to discuss personal hygiene, HIV prevention and informed decision-making. Again and again she encounters the same barrier:

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE AFRAID TO VISIT CLINICS BECAUSE THEY FEAR JUDGEMENT OR STIGMA.

So her work becomes partly about trust.

A youth-friendly service is not simply a clinic with a label on the wall. It is a place in which a young person believes they can ask a difficult question and still be treated with dignity. Nobuhle's strongest leadership insight grows directly from this work: listening is as important as educating.

Young people do not only need information delivered to them. They need someone who will listen without judgement. **"LISTENING IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS EDUCATING."** — **NOBUHLE**



Mandisa Mabuza's story extends this idea into communication and stigma. Her work with young people around SRHR and HIV prevention is not only the transmission of health facts. Conversation becomes a way of making certain subjects speakable. When a young person can ask a question without fear, they gain more than information. They gain room to act.



For Asemahle Sigwinta, bodily rights become linked to concrete advocacy. During her placement at LoveLife, she and another groundBreaker worked on issues affecting young girls. They advocated for sanitary pad donations and held a Born Free Dialogue at Ntaphane JSS on teenage pregnancy and abortion. In those conversations, a gap became visible: the local clinic did not have a youth-friendly space.

Asemahle and others wrote to the Department of Health and engaged stakeholders. Their advocacy contributed to the creation of a youth zone at Ntaphane Clinic — **A SAFER SPACE FOR STUDENTS SEEKING SUPPORT WITHOUT FEAR OF JUDGEMENT.**

This is what bodily autonomy looks like when it leaves the classroom. It looks like products. Information. Services. Privacy. Respect. Access. A room designed with young people in mind.



FUN FACT:

Feminism isn't about women having more power than men. It's about challenging the systems, beliefs and practices that create gender inequality. At its heart, feminism works towards a world where your gender does not determine your rights, safety, opportunities, choices or freedom and where everyone has the power to participate, lead and live with dignity.

And here's why that matters: women and girls are not a minority. In 2026, approximately 32.3 million people in South Africa are female, about 51% of the population.

That means gender equality is not a "women's issue" affecting a small group. It is an issue that directly shapes the lives of more than half of South Africa's population and ultimately affects the whole country.



Glancia Phiri's story adds another layer: identity and bodily autonomy are inseparable from the right to self-advocate and to find supportive spaces. A feminist health lens therefore cannot treat young people as a single, uniform group. Their access to safety and care is shaped by who they are, where they live, what resources they have and how institutions respond to them.

The wider Soul City material on menstrual health broadens the issue beyond access to menstrual products alone. The Fellows connect menstruation to dignity, education, healthcare, stigma and equality.

It is about dignity. It is about education missed because of pain or lack of products. It is about whether health concerns are taken seriously. It is about stigma, economic inequality and whose bodies are treated as normal enough to be discussed openly.

A pad distribution programme can meet an immediate need. It can also carry a larger message: no young woman should have to disappear from public life because her body is menstruating.

The same principle runs through consent, contraception and sexual health. Knowledge cannot guarantee freedom, but a lack of accurate knowledge can make freedom impossible.

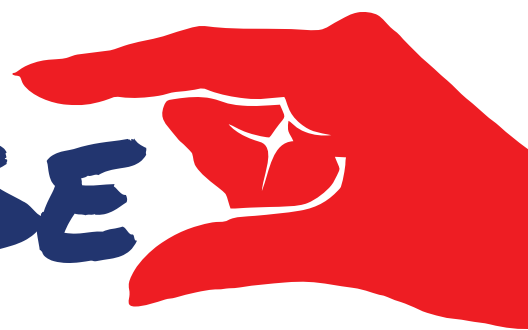
The journey is therefore not simply from silence to speech.

IT IS FROM SILENCE > CONVERSATION > ACCURATE INFORMATION > KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS > INFORMED CHOICE > BODILY AGENCY.

And once one young woman can name what she knows, she can help another do the same.

CHAPTER 4 -

KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION



Learn. Teach.
Give Back.

*"AS WE LEARN,
WE TEACH. AS WE
GROW, WE GIVE
BACK."*
— ZUKHANYE

Zukhanye Kotyi's
story begins
long before
FLAC.

She grew up
in Khayelitsha
in her

grandmother's home, surrounded by family, community and the values of sharing and service. As a child she became a Brownie, then a Girl Guide and later a Soul Buddy. In high school, she joined RISE and the Representative Council of Learners. By Grade 12, she was Head Girl.

Leadership was already present. FLAC deepened its meaning. This is the accelerator in practice: not simply building knowledge, but creating the support, connections and opportunities that help young leaders turn what they learn into action. For Zukhanye, leadership is not a title. It is service. It is what happens after you see a need.

Together with another FLAC Fellow, she co-founded a pad distribution programme. They had seen a gap in their community and decided not to wait for someone else to fill it. The initiative was about menstrual products, but also about dignity and the principle that a lack of basic necessities should not prevent a young person from participating fully in life.

Then they carried the fellowship outward.

They visited high schools to share what they were learning. This is the core of Zukhanye's philosophy: **KNOWLEDGE SHOULD MOVE.**

Her work on media and information literacy makes this principle even more urgent. In a world where young people encounter information constantly,

empowerment is not only having access to media. It is being able to ask: **WHO CREATED THIS? WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE? WHAT IS MISSING? WHAT IS TRYING TO INFLUENCE ME? WHAT HAPPENS IF I SHARE SOMETHING THAT IS FALSE?**

Critical thinking becomes part of feminist leadership because misinformation is not neutral. It can shape health choices, deepen stigma, reproduce stereotypes and influence how communities understand rights.

Nobuhle's school visits operate on the same logic. She learns about SRHR, gender equality and community engagement, then enters spaces where young people need that knowledge in practical, accessible language. Education becomes empowerment when it helps someone make a safer, more informed decision.

Mandisa's dialogues show another dimension: **KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT ALWAYS MOVE AS A LECTURE. SOMETIMES IT MOVES AS A CONVERSATION. A PERSON SPEAKS, ANOTHER ASKS, SOMEONE ELSE RECOGNISES THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE, A HARMFUL ASSUMPTION BECOMES VISIBLE, AND WHAT HAD BEEN PRIVATE BECOMES SOMETHING THE GROUP CAN EXAMINE TOGETHER.**

This is also why peer-led spaces matter. The wider LoveLife story brings safe dialogue, mental wellness, sexual health, HIV, GBV, peer pressure and self-confidence into conversations shaped with young people rather than simply delivered to them. Young people help interpret the issues through the realities of their own lives.

That movement can be written simply: **I LEARNED. I QUESTIONED. I UNDERSTOOD. I SHARED. SOMEONE ELSE BECAME INFORMED. KNOWLEDGE PRODUCED ACTION.**

The sequence is not always linear. Sometimes action creates new questions. Sometimes teaching reveals how much more there is to learn. Sometimes service changes the person who thought she had come only to serve.

But Zukhanye's phrase holds the chapter together because it rejects the idea of knowledge as private achievement. **"AS WE LEARN, WE TEACH. AS WE GROW, WE GIVE BACK."** Knowledge becomes power when it circulates.

PART III — POWER

“Speaking is not enough.”

The Fellows’ stories do not stop at confidence or awareness.

The next question is what happens when a young woman recognises that the problem in front of her is not only personal. A failed police response, a clinic without youth-friendly care, unemployment, domestic-worker exploitation, climate injustice, exclusion from decision-making: these are systems.

Feminist leadership therefore has to learn how to name power and how to challenge it. This is central to FLAC’s feminist approach: understanding inequality not only as individual experience, but as a question of power — and building the leadership needed to challenge the systems that reproduce it.

CHAPTER 5 -

JUSTICE IS FEMINIST



From Instinct to Feminist Consciousness
"I WAS JUST A YOUNG GIRL VOICING OUT AND REFUSING TO FIT IN."
— ABIGAIL

Abigail Tlamelo Mmoshe grew up in southern Botswana with a strong instinct for what she called "unfairness." She questioned

what she did not understand, defended herself and refused to stand by when others were bullied. What was sometimes called being a "loudmouth", she now recognises as an early instinct for advocacy.

That instinct shaped her path into social work and her commitment to social justice. FLAC gave Abigail a deeper understanding of the systems behind the inequalities she had always questioned.

Through the Fellowship, she began to recognise how patriarchy operates through culture, language, gender roles and everyday expectations. Feminism, once something she viewed as distant and controversial, became connected to her own reality and to issues such as reproductive rights, gender-based violence and unequal access to services.

Where Abigail once hesitated to call herself a feminist, knowledge has given her the confidence to claim the identity and defend what it stands for.

"I AM DELIBERATE UNAPOLOGETIC FEMINIST!"

Mandisa's reflection moves from homes to Parliament. Domestic-worker rights expose how gender inequality operates inside private households: through exploitation, violence, unequal power and the vulnerability of women whose labour is essential but often undervalued. At the other end of the spectrum sits formal political power and the

underrepresentation of women in leadership and decision-making.

The chapter between these two spaces — home and Parliament — is the story of structure.

If inequality is reproduced in homes, workplaces, clinics, schools, police stations and public institutions, then women's rights cannot be defended in only one of those places.

Lethabo Jood sees this structural struggle inside the church as well. In her community, she has witnessed gender-based violence being hidden, minimised or excused in the name of Christianity. Her response has been to question the beliefs and practices that ask women to endure harm in silence. By speaking about GBV in church, she challenges the idea that protecting an institution's comfort should come before protecting women. Her feminism insists that dignity and safety must remain non-negotiable, including in faith spaces.



Nomthe Mpembe's Statement of Demand makes this structural language explicit. Addressed to the President, it places youth unemployment and gender-based violence side by side as crises of dignity, safety and the future. She calls for sustainable job creation, accessible skills development and entrepreneurship pathways; stronger enforcement of laws; comprehensive survivor support; education to dismantle harmful norms; transparent action plans; measurable outcomes; and accountability.

The shift is significant.
A demand is different from an appeal to be noticed.
It assumes citizenship. It assumes the right to expect institutions to act.

"WE DEMAND TRANSPARENT ACTION PLANS, MEASURABLE OUTCOMES, AND ACCOUNTABILITY."

— NOMETHE



Ntsako's analysis introduces another system that is often treated as separate from gender: climate. Her observation **"THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS NOT GENDER-NEUTRAL"** is rooted in the unequal burdens environmental disruption can place on women and girls. During droughts, the distance travelled for water can increase. Girls may miss school. Women's food gardens and household livelihoods can become more vulnerable. Floods can destroy homes and deepen existing economic insecurity.

This is intersectionality in practice. Climate risk does not arrive in an empty landscape. It meets gender inequality, poverty, geography and unequal access to resources.

Ntsako therefore insists that women and girls should not be framed only as victims of climate change. They are organisers, educators, activists and leaders. Young people, she argues, should not be invited into policy spaces symbolically. They should be "co-creators of policies and solutions."

Hlayisani Baloyi's poem challenges an even older system: the rules that tell boys and girls who they are allowed to be.

Her feminism is not presented as a competition for a smaller share of existing power. It is about building a bigger room. It is a vision in which a woman can walk safely in public, a single mother can receive equal pay for equal work, a boy can be kind without being called weak, and a girl can be loud without being labelled difficult.

"THE WORLD DOESN'T GET TO DECIDE WHO WE GET TO BE. WE DO. TOGETHER."

— HLAYISANI

These are different stories, but they share a method. First, an injustice is experienced or witnessed. Then it is named. Then the system around it becomes visible. Then the question changes from **"WHY DID THIS HAPPEN?"** to **"WHAT ALLOWS THIS TO KEEP HAPPENING?"**

That is the point at which feminist consciousness becomes structural.

Justice is feminist because it asks us to look at who has power, who is protected, who is believed, who is paid, who is safe, who is represented, who is invited into decisions and who is expected to carry the consequences.

And it asks something more difficult still:

WHAT WOULD WE HAVE TO CHANGE SO THAT THE SAME STORY DOES NOT KEEP HAPPENING TO SOMEONE ELSE?

FLAC's FACT SHEET

Host Organisation: Soul City Institute for Social Justice (supported by Ford Foundation)

Core Purpose: To build a generation of young feminists and gender-minority leaders in South Africa by fostering a decolonial, radical feminist consciousness, providing healing spaces, and equipping fellows with tools for community activism.

Target Audience: Young women and LGBTQIA+ persons aged 19–25 from across South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini & Zimbabwe.

Structure & Duration: A 12-months hybrid model consisting of in-person residential sessions, virtual workshops/Masterclasses led by African feminist scholars and activists, continuous mentorship, and individual community accelerator projects.

Core Curriculum Modules:

- Personal Injustice, Trauma, & Healing
- Decolonial & Intersectional Feminist Methodologies
- Climate & Economic Justice
- Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR) & Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)
- Feminist Leadership
- Advocacy through Media & communications

CHAPTER 6 -

POWER IN PRACTICE



Young Women Leading Change

Leadership is easy to praise in the abstract. It is harder and more useful, to recognise what it looks like on an ordinary day.

Sometimes it looks like a letter to the Department of Health. **Asemahle and others** saw that young people needed a safer, more welcoming point of access to healthcare. They engaged stakeholders and advocated for a youth zone at Ntaphane Clinic. The result was tangible: a space designed to make it easier for students to seek support without fear of judgement. That is leadership as institutional change, even at a local scale.

Sometimes leadership looks like standing in front of hundreds of students while your body is telling you that you would rather disappear. **Nolwazi's** public talk on consent and stealthing becomes a marker of personal courage, but it also serves a public purpose. She is not speaking simply to prove that she can speak. She is using her voice to create understanding around consent.

Her broader journey asks what meaningful participation actually requires. A young woman may be present in a programme, meeting, consultation or event and still have little influence over the outcome. For **Nolwazi**, real inclusion is visible when young women help determine priorities, decisions and practice.

For **Rorisang**, power in practice also means learning how to make advocacy more effective. The fellowship's communication and media sessions strengthened her ability to express herself assertively, build networks, develop a personal and professional brand and use digital platforms to extend the reach of her work. Other sessions deepened her knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence and climate justice. The lesson was that passion matters, but advocacy also needs accurate knowledge, research, professional expertise and lived experience.

Sometimes leadership looks like refusing tokenism. **Ntsako** argues for a deeper form of youth participation in which young people help develop policy and solutions from the outset. Her position challenges institutions to distinguish genuine influence from invitations that leave the final decisions untouched.

Sometimes leadership looks like service with no stage at all. **Zukhanye** and a fellow participant identify menstrual

needs and start distributing pads. **Mihlali** describes similar community support as "more than just giving"; it is love and support, and a way to apply what has been learned. **Nobuhle** sits with young people in health spaces and learns that listening is part of the intervention.

Sometimes leadership looks like helping a survivor navigate a system. **Onalenna's** placement gives her exposure to counselling and legal support, including help with protection orders. The work is detailed, practical and often invisible. Yet it can determine whether a survivor feels abandoned by a system or accompanied through it.

Sometimes leadership also looks like creating a small, trusted space where a woman can finally speak. **Lethabo** is not currently attached to a formal organisation, but she continues feminist work within her church and community. Through conversations about gender-based violence and one-on-one support, she creates room for women to speak openly, feel supported and recognise that their experiences are valid. For her, an important achievement is seeing women understand that faith can be a source of protection and empowerment rather than a reason to remain silent.

And sometimes leadership looks like a demand written on paper and directed upward. **Nomethé's** statement insists that public leadership should produce measurable outcomes. This is youth voice not as testimony alone, but as accountability. **"LEADERSHIP HAS NEVER BEEN ABOUT TITLES — IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT SERVICE."** — **ZUKHANYE**

Across the Fellowship, power in practice follows a recurring pattern: **ISSUE. KNOWLEDGE. COURAGE. INITIATIVE. ACTION. IMPACT.**

But the final step is not "success." It is leadership redefined. The Fellows' stories resist the idea that a leader must be the loudest person in the room or the person with the highest title. A leader can be the person who notices what is missing. The person who asks the question everyone else has normalised. The person who brings people together. The person who listens. The person who writes the letter. The person who shares what she has learned. The person who refuses to let representation end at being invited. Power is not only something institutions possess. It is also what people create when they act.

PART IV – COLLECTIVE CHANGE

“None of us does this alone.”

The mythology of leadership often gives us one person at the centre of the frame.

The Fellows’ stories give us something else: sisters, mentors, peers, colleagues, communities and movements. They remind us that individual courage becomes more durable when it is connected to other people.

In this sense, FLAC is more than a fellowship. It is a hub where feminist leaders connect, share knowledge, collaborate, advocate and build movements together.

CHAPTER 7 -

OUR POWER IS COLLECTIVE



Sisterhood, Mentorship & Solidarity
"FRIENDSHIP IS THE HEARTBEAT OF ACTIVISM."
— ONALENNA

Onalenna's sentence returns here because it may be one of the clearest descriptions of the fellowship's relational power. She arrived during a period of hopelessness and found a "tribe of sisters." The phrase is deeply personal, but it carries a political insight: belonging can change what a person believes she is capable of.

Asemahle describes the Fellows becoming more than colleagues. They became sisters — a supportive community marked by understanding and genuine care. Mhlali says the same in her own language: they moved from strangers to sisters. When someone is feeling down or needs to talk, she knows there are women available to listen and give advice.

Nolwazi's sisterhood crosses geography. FLAC connected her to Fellows from other provinces and from outside South Africa. She describes a shared language of "change, equality, justice over injustice," of challenging stereotypes and entering spaces women have been told are not for them. This is where solidarity becomes bigger than friendship.

Friendship says: **I CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU.**

Solidarity adds: **I UNDERSTAND THAT WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU IS CONNECTED TO STRUCTURES THAT AFFECT US DIFFERENTLY BUT BIND OUR STRUGGLES TOGETHER.**

The wider cross-border FLAC story gives this an important regional frame: local struggles are different, but the systems producing inequality are interconnected. Feminist solidarity across Southern Africa therefore cannot require everyone to have the same experience. It requires enough listening to recognise both difference and connection.

Abigail's story adds mentorship. Her journey is marked by people and ideas that help her name what she is becoming. Mentorship matters because feminist leadership cannot only celebrate firsts — the first young woman in a room, the first person to speak, the first person to enter a profession. It must also ask what pathways are created behind her.

The fellowship also changed the way Abigail names herself. She entered with a long-standing commitment to social justice, shaped by her training as a social worker and her ambition to advocate for people's rights. At first, she was more comfortable calling herself a social activist than a feminist. Through sustained discussion of feminism and intersectionality, she began to see how reproductive justice, GBV, culture, mental health, social welfare and other systemic inequalities are connected. She now claims both identities with confidence and describes herself as a deliberate, unapologetic feminist — ready to explain and defend feminism even when she is the only person in the room doing so.

Who gets guidance? Who is introduced to the room? Who is warned about the obstacle before they reach it? Who is encouraged to apply even when the process feels daunting? Who is told, with credibility, that they belong? Mentorship turns individual experience into infrastructure for someone else.

The collective chapter therefore follows a different arc:
**I ARRIVED ALONE.
WE FOUND EACH OTHER.
WE LEARNED TOGETHER.
SOMEONE SUPPORTED OR MENTORED ME.
OUR EXPERIENCES CONNECTED.
INDIVIDUAL COURAGE BECAME COLLECTIVE POWER.
I NOW SUPPORT OTHERS.**

This is movement-building in its most human form. It is not only the public campaign. It is the relationship that makes the campaign possible.

CHAPTER 8 -

THE FUTURE WE ARE BUILDING

Freedom Is Not Finished

What does freedom look like when it is lived rather than declared?

That question sits beneath the final chapter.

Nomethe's work positions freedom beyond political recognition. Freedom is unfinished while violence remains normalised, while young people are locked out of meaningful work, while women and girls move through public life without safety, while marginalised people are treated as afterthoughts, and while governments can announce commitments without being measured against outcomes. Her demand is for dignity that can be experienced.

Hlayisani imagines freedom from gender rules themselves. Equal pay. Girls who can lead. Boys who can feel without shame. Women who can move in public without rehearsing danger. A feminism that does not simply fight for a seat at an old table but is willing to build a bigger table — a bigger room — with space for everyone.

Ntsako asks us to imagine a feminist climate future. Women and girls are not positioned at the edge of environmental decision-making, waiting to be rescued from climate impacts. They are recognised as leaders with knowledge, experience and solutions. Young people are not consulted after the plan is written. They co-create it.

Nolwazi asks a similar question about participation. Being invited into a room is not the same as having power in it. The future therefore requires institutions to move from youth participation as visibility to youth participation as influence.

Rorisang extends the frame beyond national borders. Migrant protection, healthcare access, Pan-African solidarity and regional accountability challenge the idea that dignity should depend on nationality or where a person happens to cross a border.

Her own journey also carries an unfinished ambition. Although she qualified as a social worker after not being admitted to study law, she has not abandoned the

dream of becoming a lawyer. Both paths are tied to the same purpose: advocacy, social justice, mental health, social welfare and the defence of people's rights. In that sense, FLAC did not give Rorisang an entirely new direction; it gave language, tools and feminist clarity to a direction she had been moving toward for years.

And across the Fellows' Statements of Demand, a generation of young women speaks in the language of active citizenship: education, employment, economic opportunity, safety, health, justice and accountability. This is not a request to inherit the future. It is a declaration that they are already participating in making it.

A collective closing

Freedom is not finished when a young woman still has to become brave before she can ask for basic healthcare.

Freedom is not finished when survivors must fight the systems meant to protect them.

Freedom is not finished when a girl misses school because she cannot access menstrual products, when misinformation shapes reproductive choices, when women's labour is undervalued, when young people are visible in photographs but absent from decisions, or when climate shocks deepen inequalities that were already there.

Freedom is not finished when safety is a privilege. But unfinished does not mean absent.

Freedom is being made in a youth zone at a clinic.

It is being made in a school dialogue where a learner asks the question they were afraid to ask.

It is being made when a young woman who once doubted her own presence stands in front of 300 students and speaks about consent.

It is being made when pads are distributed because someone noticed a need and acted.

It is being made when a survivor is accompanied through a protection-order process.

It is being made when a young woman addresses power and asks not for promises but for transparent plans and measurable outcomes.

It is being made when knowledge is shared, when misinformation is challenged, when mentorship opens a door, when women across borders recognise one another's struggles, and when someone who once believed she had to shrink discovers that she can take up space.

The future these Fellows are building is not a future in which every woman becomes the same kind of leader. It is a future in which many forms of leadership are recognised.

The one who speaks.
The one who listens.
The one who questions.
The one who heals.
The one who teaches.
The one who organises.
The one who writes.
The one who demands.
The one who gives back.
The one who makes room for another.
The movement began with the self.
It became voice.

Voice became action.

Action became power.

And power, shared, becomes collective change.

This is what it means to accelerate feminist leadership: equipping young leaders, connecting them to one another and amplifying their ability to turn voice into influence and collective action.

**"THE WORLD
DOESN'T GET TO
DECIDE WHO WE
GET TO BE. WE
DO. TOGETHER."
— HLAYISANI**

WHAT'S NEXT FOR FLAC?

FLAC is entering an exciting new chapter, expanding its reach and strengthening its investment in the next generation of feminist leaders across Southern Africa. With Cohort 3 (2026–2027), the programme will build on the momentum of previous cohorts, supporting young feminist leaders to turn knowledge, lived experience and advocacy into meaningful change.

With continued support from partners and funders, FLAC aims to grow a connected network of feminist leaders who are equipped, supported and resourced to strengthen movements across the region.

Next Steps of the Programme

The FLAC fellowship follows a structured, multi-phase progression as cohorts transition from foundational learning to long-term impact:

1. Community Accelerator Project Execution & Subgranting

Implementation: Fellows roll out their localized community projects (addressing SGBV, SRHR access, queer rights, or local advocacy) using seed funding and technical guidance from SCI.

Mentorship & Monitoring: Continuous 1-on-1 and group coaching from seasoned African feminist mentors to track project deliverables, community reach, and qualitative impact.

2. Residential Sessions & Cross-Cohort Exchange

Residential Intensive: Fellows convene for in-person residential sessions focused on deep reflection, collective healing, personal safety/wellness strategies, and peer review of project milestones. Advocacy Integration: Linking cohort projects to Soul City's broader national campaigns and policy advocacy efforts (e.g., SADC gender commitments, sex worker rights dialogues, and national GBVF initiatives).

3. Graduation, Alumni Network, & Movement Integration

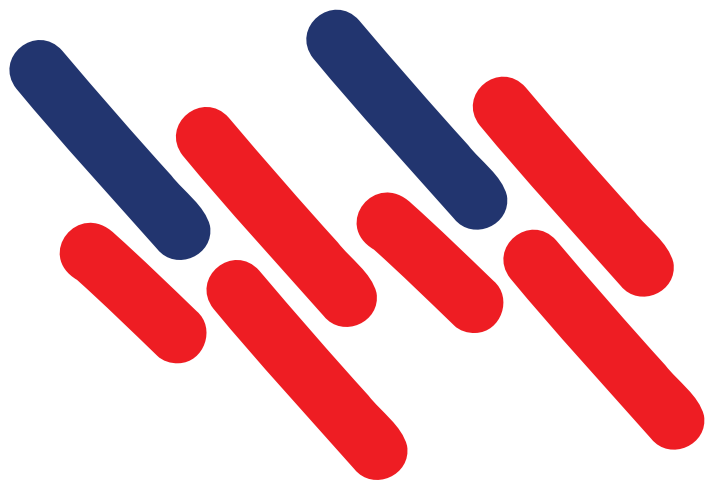
Transition to Alumni: Completing cohorts transition into the FLAC Alumni Network, serving as regional movement anchors, mentors for incoming cohorts, and delegates at national and international feminist forums.

Continuous Resourcing: Connecting fellows to sub-granting opportunities, activist funds, and civil society partner networks to ensure project sustainability beyond the 12-months fellowship.

4. Expansion

Following Cohort 1 (2022–2024) only in South Africa, Cohort 2 (2024–2026) in SADC & Cohort 3 (2026–2027) in SADC.





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