

Just For a Change Season 2. Ep2. Recognising the complexity of people's stories - the case for empathic advocacy

[00:00:00] **Kentse Radebe:** [00:00:00] Welcome to season two of the Just for a Change podcasts powered by the Bertha Center for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. We love hearing and sharing stories about social innovation happening both locally and outside our borders in the global south. In season two, we put the spotlight on the Changemakers behind some incredibly innovative approaches and solutions who are creating systemic change.

[00:00:28] And we're also curious to find out what keeps them going. Join us as we discover how these change-makers are changing the way we're changing the world. Welcome to season two, two of the, just for a change podcast with me, your host Kentse Radebe. Last August in season one, we did an episode on how women are changing the way we're changing the world. [00:00:49] And in commemoration of women's month, this month, we're continuing with this thread. The idea of a single life with multiple narratives running in parallel is an intriguing one, it throws us off and perhaps even causes some discomfort when we grapple with the notion that sometimes there is no single linear and uncomplicated narrative.

[00:01:09] In this month's episode, we're exploring the multidimensional lives of women who work at the front lines of advocating for women's rights. We're particularly interested in the narratives that highlight how a woman locked up in prison for certain crime is also a mother of a

hungry toddler, a daughter of a woman who is HIV positive, and maybe even a talented sports woman whose dreams were crushed as a young girl when she was raped and social pressures and shame forced her to drop out of school.

[00:01:37] Empathy is described as the ability of a narrative to put us in another place or time, or even allow us to place ourselves in another person's shoes and to see the world through their eyes. Daniel H pink in his book, a whole new mind defines empathy as the ability to imagine yourself in someone else's position and to Intuit what that person is feeling.

[00:01:59] Stories are important, there's no denying that and if you've been following this podcast, you will know that we love stories. They are powerful, and they have the potential to change our thinking, perceptions and perhaps even our actions, but it is empathy that gives story their power in advocacy, in his book, Pink describes how empathy allows one to see the other side of an argument, one of advocacy communication's main purpose. It's easier than we think to stigmatize, how do we decide who deserves justice and who deserves empathy? in this episode of Just for a Change, we'll be talking to various changemakers on the topic of empathic advocacy, hearing about their initiatives, but also why it is important to advocate for those who society often thinks deserves it least.

[00:02:46] Ishtar Lakhani has been working as a feminist activist and troublemaker in the field of social justice advocacy for over 15 years. She currently collaborates with a range of social justice organizations, movements, and networks globally, providing support to strengthen their approaches to strategic human rights advocacy. We wanted to

hear from Ishtar about her work in advocacy, as well as her thoughts on empathic advocacy specifically. Here's what she had to say:

[00:03:15] **Ishtar Lakhani:** [00:03:15] My easiest examples, I often ask people what made you care? Like what made you care about Human Rights? Or whatever issue you're working on. So, the rights of sex workers, what made you care, and I don't know, democracy or advocating for housing rights or environmental rights. And I've asked these questions to thousands of activists all around the world and all of them tell really deep, meaningful visceral, very personal stories of something that happened to themselves, a family member, a friend, an experience that they had that moved them to care and move them to care enough to do something about it.

[00:03:53] And in some cases dedicate their lives towards a particular cause. And so, when developing any kind of advocacy intervention, my question is: If that tactic, if we trying out a tactic and that didn't move us to care, what makes us think it's going to move someone else? So, if we weren't moved by, I don't know, a tweet or signing a petition or watching a panel, um, what makes it makes us think that that will move someone else? I think boarding narratives is a huge part of what we do as people who advocate for particular issues. Um, in my case, it's advocating for the rights of sex workers, what's really important around the narratives of sex worker rights is that so often it's, it's written or told by someone else and 99% of the time that someone else is I don't know, a Hollywood director or a journalist or someone who has never actually lived a life in the sex industry or knows anything about what it means to be a sex worker. So, what's really important is that we make sure that the narratives that are put out in the world are actually narratives led and, um, and told by those who are most effected.

[00:05:16] Um, I think this is a really important part of advocacy, really, really good storytelling because good storytelling will be the difference between someone actually listening to you or not.

[00:05:28] **Kentse Radebe:** [00:05:28] Today, we're excited to hear from the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Task force also known as SWEAT as well as rape crisis. As we dive into the conversation of empathic advocacy, we're particularly interested in these stories about women, because conversations about sexual assault and sex work are often framed as taboo and uncomfortable, and sometimes as challenging to our social norms, values, and beliefs. The idea of empathy and systems thinking relates to a deep, emotional understanding of key actors in a system which leads to important systems, level insights.

[00:06:04] In other words, empathy helps us resist judgment, question assumption, understand and appreciate the motivations that ultimately create system shifts. Stigma is a powerful social force that often rob society of our ability to be nuanced and our understanding of a social phenomenon, for a rape victim, it could be subtle implications from friends and family that placed the blame on the victim.

[00:06:28] Some questions amidst, their discomfort of the conversation could be, for example, what time of day was it? What was she wearing? Was she alone? Was she drunk? The stigma of being raped can often prevent women from reporting sexual assault. For a sex worker on the other hand, stigma put sex workers at risk since criminal and licensing laws against sex work often leads to violence. According to an article in the conversation, mere knowledge of someone's sex work can be used against them by abusive partners as blackmail or suggesting they're unfit parents in custody cases. Not only that, but stigma is also socially isolating, it leaves sex workers with few options to

turn to for support and is a critical barrier to accessing health care, human rights and justice.

[00:07:16] As a feminist organization, rape crisis works towards achieving women's rights by offering counseling, education and training advocacy and community mobilization where a SWEAT advocates for and deliver services to South African sex workers. The organization's vision is to see a South Africa, where people who choose to sell sex are able to enjoy freedom, rights and human dignity. Both of these organizations deal with immense stigmas about their work and often make strong cases from pathic advocacy. However, we also know that both of these organizations have also faced various kinds of backlash for their social and political views, as Samantha Power said: All advocacy is at its core, an exercise in empathy.

[00:08:02] And on that note, I'd like to welcome our guest for today, Zeenat Hendricks, communications coordinator at Rape Crisis and Duduzile Dlamini, the advocacy manager at SWEAT. Just a note to our listeners that this podcast is recorded remotely and our guests are mostly at home, so you may hear a child or a dog in the background.

[00:08:21] Okay, Zeenat, sister Du, do thank you again for joining us for this podcast episode. I wanted to start at the top and it was a conversation that we were having as the podcast team, Rape Crisis, SWEAT and mothers2mothers. It's another organization that we're interviewing as part of this episode, they are sister organizations, or you guys have done work together in the past, I'm not sure, Zeenat?

[00:08:45] **Zeenat Hendricks:** [00:08:45] Uh, yes. So, Rape Crisis, Cape town Trust, and I think SWEAT, uh, we did some workshops, uh, maybe in 2019 with some of the staff and they're beneficiaries, yeah, on sexual and reproductive health rights, uh, sex workers. Um, so yeah, we, we have quite a close relationship with them.

[00:09:06] **Kentse Radebe:** [00:09:06] Oh, amazing. I love to see that collaboration happening between organizations that are doing really similar work because I think when we were even thinking about this podcast and this episode and thinking about these two organizations and then finding out that you guys have actually collaborated on different projects, yeah that's amazing. So, Sis Dudu, if somebody didn't know anything about SWEAT and you had to describe it to them, how would you explain the work that you do there?

[00:09:33] **Duduzile Dlamini:** [00:09:33] Sex Worker Education and Advocate's Task force is an organization that's fighting for their rights of sex workers, but also fighting for the full decriminalization of sex work in South Africa. So, we advocating for a full decriminalization of South Africa because of sex workers, they've been violated many, many, many, many times in multiply and because of the criminalization that affects sex workers.

[00:10:02] So the organization is, um, helping sex workers and support sex workers right, in advocating, but, uh, empowering sex with cousin capacitates sex workers to stand and speak by themselves.

[00:10:17] **Kentse Radebe:** [00:10:17] That sounds like, like a tall order, but I think it's a little bit similar to, to what you were doing Zeenat at Rape Crisis because I remember the first time I met you and the passion that, that you spoke about in terms of the work that you do, could you tell us a little bit more about what you do at Rape Crisis, your journey there and what that has been like?

[00:10:34] **Zeenat Hendricks:** [00:10:34] It's been a very enlightening moment, um, working for an organization like Rape Crisis. It's been you know, something that I've had to do a number of reflections on, am I doing the right thing, am I in the right space? Am I, am I the right person to do this work? Um, just because our environments and I'm sure

that Sis Dudu can agree, the environment that we work in is so, um, you know, it's intense, uh, it's rigorous, it's constantly changing, it's traumatic um, but it's also really challenging and there's a lot of room for, um, creativity and, you know, for improvement all the time. And of course, that improvement always starts with you, with the individual. Um, so for a long time, at least two years of my role, I've been, you know, trying to figure out, you know, what does sexual violence mean, you know, and how do I understand it?

[00:11:25] How do I relate to it? Um, and what can I, as the communications, you know, person do, uh, to better the strategy so that community, and at large South Africa can benefit from the work of Rape Crisis and so then more people have access to services. Um, so we're saying all of that, it had actually led me to, you know, where I am at the moment in, in figuring all of that out and being, you know, having an opportunity to study further and to apply different methods, um, to enhance the work of the organization and I suppose, um, it's, it's transmissible as well. It may not only sit, you know, in this organization, it may be something that I can transfer into a different space, um, so this, the social justice sector is a very, um, it's a unique space, um, and it tastes you quite a bit. Um, it, it really challenges you to the point where you have to step back and preserve your energy, um, for the future of this work, because it's going to take a long time, um, to see change and to do change.

[00:12:30] **Kentse Radebe:** [00:12:30] So Zeenat, I think when you're speaking, you're making me think about a conversation that we often have about having resilience as, as people who are activists and who are in the advocacy space. And I think that's so phenomenal and so critical to the work that you do and I think for me, what I love about what you were just saying is around how you utilize creativity in your advocacy strategies and sister Du, I want to bring you back into the

conversation here? Because in 2019, you worked on a campaign with SWEAT where you guys actually put together a sex worker led party during the 2019 general elections as a strategy to highlight the rights of sex workers and to make the case for the decriminalization of sex work in South Africa, what motivated SWEAT to create that campaign and how did it allow you guys to tell your story?

[00:13:17] **Duduzile Dlamini:** [00:13:17] Um, that campaign was, um, come up from the advocates as a tool to show how much sex workers are capable to do staff and capable to what they want in house advocates for, for themselves, for him, for, for, for their rights and advocates for full decriminalization. And that campaign in was the way that it works for us, it's work, the way that people they can learn and understand accept sex workers the way they are we and in also understanding that what is important for sex workers to be treated fairly and, and also projecting their dignity that they can able to do other stuff without being a sex worker, even though they can do but as adding skills on top of the skills that they have. So, the campaign was showing that how much sex workers are powerful and how much it's needed that to change these laws that enable, that criminalize sex workers and keep them vulnerable as a, as a key population that is not been recognized in this country.

[00:14:25] The, the campaign went very well and shows that it's how much a woman, black woman, how much is having power to do things by themselves, but how much being vulnerable in the space where they are not capable to do things because they've been taken away their dignity and their respect of, and also their agency from them.

[00:14:49] **Kentse Radebe:** [00:14:49] Zeenat, I want to bring you back into the conversation here, reflecting on what's Sisi Dudu was just saying about power and vulnerability and being a woman and what that campaign illustrated for SWEAT because I think one, for me, one of the things that stands out about Rape Crisis approach is the fact that you talk about working from a feminist woman's collective. What does that mean? And how does that shape the way that you organize as an organization?

[00:15:16] **Zeenat Hendricks:** [00:15:16] Yeah, I think so, so Rape Crisis, you know, believes in the feminist principles, um, as well as the principles of empowerment, which is, which is really the journey that the survivor goes on when he or she attends our counseling service, um, what counseling sessions. And when I think about, you know, the collective voice or collective ownership and how we craft campaigns or how we craft messages, um, for me that really links strongly to community, um, it, it eases about the conversations that we're having, not just with government, but also conversations that we're having with community members. Um, and that's why we, we employ, you know, women from the community and they attend our training courses and through that they then become, you know, the community educators in that community. So, they are basically, you know, seeing the social ills in front of them, but also, you know, journeying with the communities and trying to help and trying to educate and doing the workshops, doing the training with that specific community too.

So, there's a close connection between the level of understanding and the context and I think context is so important when it comes to, um, you know, any form of collectivity and understanding what that can mean for society as a whole. Um, so that, that feminist lens really, it lends itself, not only to just, you know, the rights of women, but also humanity as well, um, our service, I think, looks from the outside. Like we

only see women, um, but we actually also see members of the LGBTI community as well as men. And it is something that we are working on as well, you know, to make it more sort of known that we also see, uh, male survivors of rape. Um, and so yeah, the, the feminist approach, um, has caused a lot of, um, contingent within the organization, you know, in understanding what is feminism especially in 20, in 2021, you know, who relates to feminism, even in the organization, you know, just looking inward and understanding from that perspective, you know? Um, and we've had a number of conversations about that because it does drive strategy and it does drive the vision of the organization and maybe even it changes the vision of the organization and it changes people.

[00:17:34] Um, so we've, we've been on quite a journey with, um, you know, developing feminist principles that speak to Rape Crisis, that speak to firstly, the people who work in rape crisis, um, and not the donors and the funders who often, you know, the conversations, but how can we as an organization be the ones to lead that first. And that in itself is, uh, you know, inclusive, um, which is also a principle of feminism.

[00:17:58] **Kentse Radebe:** [00:17:58] So Zeenat, I really appreciate what you're saying about the complexity of the context that you guys work in as an organization. But I think what I also appreciate is you painting this picture for us that really highlights that even internally within rape crisis, you have almost like a pushback, think that's what you were saying around understanding what is, you know, feminism, how do you organize and work with feminist principles? And I think for us, where we would also want to bring into this episode was this idea of empathic advocacy and I see almost the duality between the feminist organizing principles that you're speaking about and this idea of

empathic advocacy, which is being able to walk in somebody else's shoes or being able to understand the complexity of their stories.

[00:18:43] And I'm curious about how within Rape Crisis, you've been able to work with really different individuals to be able to tell their stories in order to highlight the issues that you want to highlight. What has that been like? And maybe if you could give us some examples of the campaigns that you've organized that tried to get at those aspects that try to get at this idea that there is no one way of understanding rape or how rape comes about in our society. And that having that feminist perspective is actually quite powerful and useful, but also at the same time, acknowledging that maybe people might not necessarily understand that. How do you bring people on that journey with you?

[00:19:23] **Zeenat Hendricks:** [00:19:23] Absolutely, um, yeah, be it important to mention, I think I mentioned it earlier is about community. Um, and I think that what I've realized in my space, um, was that I was not the one that was going to bring, you know, the answers. I was not the one who was going to create the best strategy and then, you know, the most creative one even. Um, and so again, like I will say this, that looking inward and really looking at the people who do the work on the ground, who we can call activist, um, you know, social activists, they are the ones who hold the knowledge. They also the ones who have all the context and they've got the underground experience. And I think often in, in our space and even in the nonprofit space, we kind of overlook that, um, you know, we don't acknowledge the fact that these people who do the work on the ground, they, you know, that they hold so much knowledge and expertise.

[00:20:14] Um, and where's the loop to bring that back into the organization. And so, what we've done over the last two years is we've included all of that in our, you know, in, in co co-creation sessions, for instance, we just use an example. Um, we were given some funding to host these workshops on sexual and reproductive health rights. And already that term is such a loaded term. And when you take that to a community, it's just like, you know, what are we talking about here? you know, we talking about abortion, we're talking about getting, you know, getting tested at a clinic and having access to these services, which, um, people don't know that they have.

Um, you know, sometimes people don't even know that they can go to the police station to report the rape and that the police station, well, the investigating officers are responsible to then take you to a Duduzile care center which is the clinic that sees you after your rape. Um, and so things like that needed, you know, collective input and we sat together for an entire year and we developed. Um, a, a campaign that was just simply called, Know Your Rights. And we developed the CDs of posters and we worked with a very, you know, well-known artist school that Russell Abrams, um, he's just done some amazing painting in Joburg, and we, we sat with him and we actually asked him to, to Skitch real life personas of a community member in Athlone and a community member in Khayelitsha because those were the communities that people were working in at the time. Um, and we created these eight personas, you know, um, very typical to the community, not stereotypical, but really typical to each of those community and facing real life challenges.

[00:21:59] Um, and you can check it out on our Instagram and our Facebook and what it looks like and it became a very real, uh, poster, um, both for digital and, uh, you know, offline then printed as well. Um, and each poster had a story, you know, about the experience of a

rape survivor, that experience of a 17-year-old being raped by her boyfriend, um, and falling pregnant and not knowing I need to go. Um, and so bringing that kind of activation, uh, you know, into the digital space or into digital communications is a difficult thing because that same audience doesn't live there. And so, it's really like, where are you bringing the message home? And within that, obviously there was so much experiential learning going on for the organization as well as for myself.

[00:22:41] Um, because now, you know, the team doing the work and see, oh, this is what happens and this is how we can actually use our voice in campaign. This is how we can help to co-create, um, and it helped me to understand how much work I needed to do in order to, you know, harvest stories from people and from communities, and then create campaigns through that, you know, and not just sitting back and going, no, I think that's a cool campaign, let's run with that and let's come up with a hashtag. Um, so obviously very admin driven, and much more rigorous way to work, but so much more valuable and awarding at the end of the day and amazing story to tell, um, you know, to your audiences, to your beneficiaries and, and just for staff to share amongst themselves, if this is what we have, we have achieved and it's all based on real things, you know, it hasn't been fabricated. Um, so when we talk about the empathetic or empathetic advocacy or being an activist in walking in someone else's shoes, I think that was the, you know, that was the, the moment that we realize that, okay, this is, this is us practicing empathy.

[00:23:45] It's the first, you know, it's the first step in the design thinking process. And the design thinking process was what we used to develop that campaign. Um, and so the, the empathy phase was a long phase. It was about three months we'd we sat and we tried to understand, you know, what is this community going through? What do they have

access to? Do they have data? And how can we think about all of those things and tell the story about it? So, it was a very interesting experience.

[00:24:11] **Kentse Radebe:** [00:24:11] Sure, I think the power of story and narrative is really what's, what's coming through for me in, in both what you and sis Dudu are saying, and I think for me, sis Dudu just to bring you in again, here, around this idea of storytelling and how important it is to be able to tell authentic stories. Um, I remember in 2017, when I first met sis Dudu, she was speaking about sex work, being an advocate, being an activist and working at SWEAT and I think at the time I hadn't heard of SWEAT in its entirety. I knew about the organization, but I didn't really know what you did. And after since SIS Dudu spoke and I think it was to a room full of people, there must have been like 40, 50 people in that room. And she really just, you spoke about your journey and I remember just being so overwhelmed, but also really, really understanding from really, I don't know, whether it's from another person's perspective and almost that, that, that idea of being able to walk in someone's shoes and from then I was really captivated by SWEAT and the work that you do.

[00:25:07] And I, and I guess for me, it links to a campaign that you worked on as well Sis Dudu, you collaborated with the International Aids Society and in the campaign, you speak about how I'm not a victim, I'm a sex worker, activist and human rights defender. And I wanted to ask you about why is it so important to highlight all these different roles that you occupy and play in society? Why is it so important to tell more than a one-sided story about who you are and your journey in the work that you do?

[00:25:39] **Dudzile Dlamini:** [00:25:39] It's because, um, I like to tell, people must hear from the horse's mouth. I believe that rather people come to me and ask as a sex worker because in, within the

community, we experienced stigma and discrimination. So, I want to prove people wrong the way they think and the way, they assume things. The stigma, the discrimination that we experience from the community, from our neighbors, where they buy, even going to our children behind the backs and telling our children how bad we are because of their beliefs and then the way that they treat us within the community, taking away the dignity, I want to really make sure that how much I protect my dignity from my community and how I respect the community. So, I want to prove them wrong that being a sex worker, that doesn't mean that they must call me names, being a sex worker, that doesn't mean that I'm a bad person, I'm a bad mom. So, I'll have to prove them wrong that I'm a good and I, I have to, I deserve to be respected regardless of the work that I do.

[00:26:46] So I always make sure it's what I'm doing, that's why also, because people, they think that you're a sex worker, you are a victim? No, it's not even though you make choices from the limited, you choose from the limited choices. I chose to be a sex worker and I have the confidence, the money that I made there, the things that I made to support my family, that just means I'm a worker.

[00:27:09] So I have to prove them wrong that I'm not that I'm not that kind of person that they think, I'm not that bad, the way that they think. The last thing that I have to share with you is that, but also touching the society, they must stop like assuming who we are, we know who we are, we really do, but we are not victims, but what makes us become victims is the things that they saying and calling names and discriminate us rather, they must come to us, can ask and then we going to tell, we know who we are. That's why I did that video, sharing my story with a power and energy and the confidence to share it. I know, yes, I go through a lot, but I know who I am, I know what I want and I know that really, really am a human rights defender for every and

each woman in South Africa that need to be supported in terms of social, um, social justice. I am a fighter. I'm not fighting physically, but I can use my voice to raise the issues that other woman's experience.

[00:28:22] **Kentse Radebe:** [00:28:22] Zeenat I want to, I love where Sis Dudu ended up off with, in terms of fighting for the rights of women because rape crisis has been around since I think it's 1976. So as an organization you've been around for quite some time and I'm interested in how, even though maybe the core crux of the issues that you focus on has remained the same. In essence, what has shifted that has also influenced the kinds of advocacy campaigns that you are focused on and the kinds of strategies that you employ when you're thinking about, you know, advocating for women and other, the individuals that you service as an organization?

[00:28:59] **Zeenat Hendricks:** [00:28:59] Well, I think the most important one would be, you know, getting the counseling service out there. Um, you know, as a source of help, I think most importantly, you know, survivors of sexual violence, um, when they are in that state, it's quite hard to, you know, to be able to internalize certain things around you and to reach out to a helpline for instance, um, to reach out to a WhatsApp line or to, uh, to come to a face-to-face counseling service. And I think during, um, the beginning of the pandemic, um, we saw the need, you know, to establish a WhatsApp counseling service, um, or rather a support service because so many individuals were sitting in spaces where they, that was the only hope, uh, was, did each out via WhatsApp. Um, and so that has steadily grown over the last two years, that more and more people, you know, outside of the Western province, um, for instance have now that's how they reached us.

[00:30:01] And then in terms of, you know, certain changes, I think with regard to seeking help and, and, you know, coming to a road to recovery and, and joining the counseling service, just getting that

information out there and seeing how much more people we are seeing every year, you know, from, from year to year, how many more clients we're seeing, obviously that's an indication that, you know, people are seeking help, this issue's becoming, you know, more, the more awareness around the issue and people are feeling, you know, like they can reach out from an advocacy perspective, uh, we've been working closely with, you know, with the department of health and the department of justice and the department of social development, um, In and communities in developing a sexual offenses court, um, uh, infrastructure, um, and the campaign is known as the Rape Survivors Justice Campaign and basically every year you will see us protesting outside the Khayelitsha court for the last five years, at least. Um, because that court, you know, sees a lot of rape and sexual violence cases.

[00:31:07] And so the need for it to become a specialized code, um, you know, is obviously evident. And so that campaign has been going on for the last couple years. And we are really trying to establish more of these courts in the country, so that survivors have, you know, a better service when they go and report and when they go to court. And so, the basic things about the sexual offenses court are that it's in, it's infrastructure, it's different to a normal. Um, the survivor is separated from the perpetrator, um, you know, the personnel who works in the court, they all trained, um, and would have gone through some form of sensitivity training, um, and, and obviously the experience for the survivor would be different.

[00:31:50] So there'll will be less sick with trauma, um, in this case, um, so this is an ongoing campaign that we are be busy with. Um, and, and we've now looked at how can we expand on it? And what we're doing at the moment is looking at, you know, other specialized services for survivors. So maybe not just the court service, but also the forensic

service that the survivor has to go through. You know, how specialized is that and how specialized are the personnel working in those spaces as well? And how can the Rape Crisis be a part of that training, um, and, and the voice in driving these campaigns, um, in government at the down tables, you know, in volume into meetings, et cetera. And even with donors and funders,

[00:32:29] **Kentse Radebe:** [00:32:29] I think what's so critical about what you're saying is it's about more than just, you know, raising awareness about sexual assault and sexual violence, but also speaking to what happens on the other side of that journey. That for a lot of us, as, you know, average people, we actually don't understand what that process looks like. What's involved the amount of effort. And I suppose also emotional effort required from, from victims who come forward to report rape and sexual assault. So I, I really appreciate that and I think that brings me also to Sis Dudu, the work that you do with mothers for the [00:33:00] future, because part of the work that you do, isn't just about advocacy and being an activist, but it's also walking alongside women who have had a similar journey to you. Can you tell us a little bit about maybe some of the challenges that you've experienced in engaging with women who are mothers through the organization, mothers for the future and what that journey has been like?

[00:33:23] **Dudzile Dlamini:** [00:33:23] Uh, there's a lot of challenges because this space, mothers for the future is creating a safe space for mothers that can share more because become, it's not only sexual issues that they face but before they become sex workers, they are mothers before they become sex workers, they are sisters. So, for them to share more, but also filling the gaps that we not going to able to get it. So, we were looking at what are other issues that affect sex workers as a mother in the motherhood from the location where they stay in. So that space is very traumatized space because it's where you find the

mothers, how they feel and how they, they, they have a lot more than the HIV, the sickness, or the other stuff that the people they look and it's, we are so different in terms of that.

[00:34:22] We find that there is a lot of mothers, they are more mothers who are affected by even their homes, domestic violence. They, they, they are getting raped within the location beside the sex work industry. Then we find a lot around the issues that they affect them around their children in terms of children that are affected by HIV. We find that there are the services that they don't reach such as abortion services. So that sexuality is a sexual, all the sexuality for that to have, those are the things that we get in there. [00:35:00] And sometimes there is more emotional space where the mothers are seeing their feelings in how they deal with those feelings and how they need support in solidarity in those days.

[00:35:14] But there are times where, where they sharing more experiences within what is happening in the sex industry, in their houses in household? So, the space is very, very challenging because sometimes there is things that we cannot able to give them. Like such as services such as, if they is a child, uh, issues where we need to refer the mother but we trying by all means to find partners to refer those mothers.

[00:35:43] **Kentse Radebe:** [00:35:43] No, I hear you. I hear you Sis Dudu, and I think maybe to then bring us almost to a wrap up. Zeenat, I think Sis Dudu painted quite a vivid picture of what women go through in

general, but also specifically sex workers and the challenges that they're faced with. And I'd be interested from your perspective, sort of on the flip side of that, of acknowledging all these challenges of acknowledging all the difficulties in trying to tell the stories of women who are living on the margins, whose stories we often don't hear. If we were to utilize empathic advocacy as a tool to understand your work a little bit better, what could we potentially see as change? What, what, what could be a different story than we could imagine that you could tell from your perspective?

[00:36:30] **Zeenat Hendricks:** [00:36:30] Often I think that when we, we look at our social media and we look at the news, what are we seeing? We're seeing the negative narrative, we're seeing the stats, we're seeing, you know, how bad things are. And unless you, you're not in it, you won't see that little light at the end of the tunnel, um, and, and it is most times keeping activists going, you know, is the success stories, is the stories of impact, is the stories of change, um, and I think it's for organizations such as Rape Crisis, such as SWEAT, um, and many other organizations who do this work to, you know, to reflect on their own stories of change, um, to define their own stories of change, and to give the beneficiaries an opportunity to paint that picture as well, you know, to, to listen to them, to listen to the stories that they are telling us so that we can respond to that. And that should be the narrative of the future.

[00:37:28] **Duduzile Dlamini:** [00:37:28] Women are still changing the way we are changing the world.

[00:37:33] **Kentse Radebe:** [00:37:33] A positive outlook story with Simnikiwe Xanga is up next, in the segment, we zoom in on an innovative organization that was born at a time of crisis. It is an organization that beautifully depicts the complexity in our stores.

[00:37:48] **Simnikiwe Xanga:** [00:37:48] Mothers2Mothers was founded in 2001 when the number of new HIV infections in South Africa was at its peak and a potent cocktail of stigma, fear, and lack of information as the organization puts it. This meant that most HIV positive, pregnant women couldn't access the treatment they desperately needed to stay healthy and prevent their unborn babies from contracting HIV. Dr. Mitch Besser, a medical doctor was volunteering at a hospital in Cape town had a game-changing idea, what if one could employ former patients who had successfully accessed and adhere to treatment, given birth to an HIV negative child as mentor mothers who could then help other women as they walked the same journey. In October this year, mothers2mothers will be celebrating 20 years.

[00:38:42] A fantastic milestone. This organization continues to impact thousands of women's lives through its innovative model. We asked Nozi Samela, a senior communications officer and a former mentor mother to explain why it's so important for mothers2mothers to employ HIV positive mothers: from, from my

[00:39:03] **Nozi Samela:** [00:39:03] From my end, I just want to reiterate the importance of employing women living with HIV, one might ask why this particular group, well, when mothers2mothers was started, um, nearly 20 years ago now, you know, HIV was at its peak in South Africa, um, and stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV was it is highest. Children, born to mothers who are living with HIV, had a nearly 40% chance of becoming infected with HIV as well. So, it made perfect sense for us to employ women who are living with HIV, who fully understand the challenges that their communities face, who fully understand the stigmas that people living with HIV have to go through and women who have given birth to HIV free babies to give hope to other women who might be going through that process at that time

[00:40:24] **Simnikiwe Xanga:** [00:40:24] And now we are joined by a mentor from mothers2mothers. Thank you Velna for joining us on the Just for a change podcast today. And to start off our conversation, could you please elaborate on the mother2mother mentor, mother model, and what exactly is a mentor mother?

[00:40:42] **Velna:** [00:40:42] in simple terms, the mentor mother model improves the health of communities while delivering a meaningful employment for women living with HIV. At mothers2mothers, we employ women living with HIV as a community health workers called mentor mothers, [00:41:00] mentor mothers work both at health facilities and door to door to improve health communities across the 10 African nations. They deliver a life-changing services to women, children, adolescent, and the entire family.

[00:41:16] **Simnikiwe Xanga:** [00:41:16] Um, that's great to hear, Velna, thank you for mentioning to us about the mentor mother model. And I'm curious to know more on what are some stigmas that you've come across, um, that women you work with have had to face. If you can share that with us.

[00:41:34] **Velna:** [00:41:34] It's when the woman is tested for HIV and the family reject them when they are rejected, they don't see the necessity for them to come to the health facility to collect the medicine. So, they stop taking the treatment, so, it's where we come in and then we do our household visit and then we go with them to their household visits and then we meet their mother while she's still pregnant so we can build a relationship between their families and the client. It's, it's where we stop the stigma because we support them and educate them.

[00:42:12] **Simnikiwe Xanga:** [00:42:12] If we look at empathic advocacy and applying it to other people, what are some of the complex stories of women you work with?

[00:42:22] **Velna:** [00:42:22] The woman that I'm working with, a lot of them that are experiencing a rejection from their partners and their families and not being supported because it's kind of difficult for them to know that they're HIV positive while they're still pregnant because one thing that they will realize, the first thing is that I'm pregnant, what if my baby is HIV positive? So, their partners tend to live them and not support them. So, I have one of my clients that is, is going through that process, but we supported her and educated her. So she managed to come back to the clinic and the baby is 10 weeks now and she's HIV negative.

[00:43:14] **Simnikiwe Xanga:** Velna, now, if you can please share with us, what has it meant for you to be part of the mothers2mothers initiative? And you can please feel free to share it in your home language or your preferred first language, um, that you'd like to express this

[00:43:33] **Velna:** [00:43:33] *Speaking in her native language...*

[00:44:01] **Simnikiwe Xanga:** Thank you Velna, and when I hear you say that, what my take out is, is that it's helped you to be part of this initiative. And it's helped you to look after your children, it's helped you find work and it's helped you find connections with the community, um, and also their status when it comes to HIV. So thank you so much for sharing with us

[00:44:25] **Kentse Radebe:** [00:44:25] It's so good to be reminded that each one of us has a story. Some stories are perhaps more complex than others, and these are all stories that need to be told in their entirety, if we're to create just an equitable society. Empathic

advocacy is perhaps a new idea to many of our listeners. However, we hope that this episode planted even just a small seed around the matter, we can all do with a little bit more grace, a little bit more understanding and a lot more love and kindness towards each other.

[00:44:55] Thank you for tuning into season two of the Just for a Change Podcast powered by the Bertha Center for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. If you're curious about what innovation is happening in Africa and the global south and who the movers and shakers are behind these initiatives, then make sure you subscribe so that you don't miss any of our upcoming episodes.