



¡THEMBA!



August 2007 Volume 2, Number 2

EDITOR'S NOTE

It is with great sadness that I write my last editor's note for *iThemba* as I prepare to leave our beautiful country to rejoin my family overseas. It has truly been an honour and a privilege to share the news, highlights and events of the HPRU over the past year. But, do not fear, *iThemba* will continue to flourish under the very capable leadership of its co-editor, Zakir Gaffoor.

This is a special edition of *iThemba*, dedicated to celebrating our women during August – National Women's month. It was 51 years ago that over 20,000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to demand that they be heard. We have come a long way in our infant democracy, and we have a long journey yet to travel.

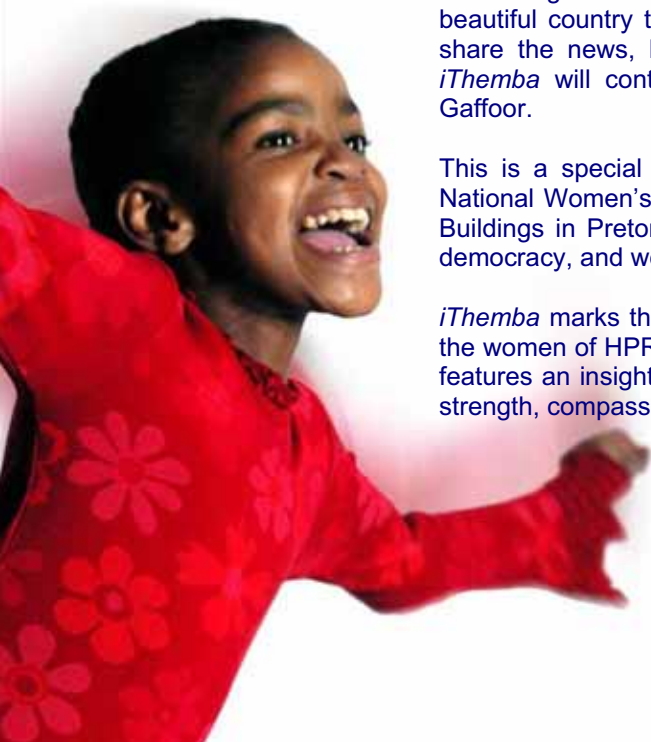
iThemba marks this auspicious day with our first-ever HPRU Women's Day celebration, where the women of HPRU were treated to a day of fun, entertainment and pampering. *Day in the Life* features an insightful interview with HPRU counsellor, Sharon Moodley who truly embodies the strength, compassion, and nurturing that is "Woman".

I leave you with the powerful words of those brave women who dared to challenge the apartheid regime back in 1956. May they be an inspiration and a hope to all!

Now that you have touched the women you have struck a rock, you have dislodged a boulder, you will be crushed

Women's Freedom Song, August 1956

- Melanie Mills and Zakir Gaffoor



STAFF CORNER

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Congratulations to 2 of HPRU's amazing women who reached academic milestones.



Phakamile Truth Mngadi obtained her Masters in Biotechnology from Durban University of Technology; her theses: Molecular Characterization of aflatoxigenic and non-aflatoxigenic *Aspergillus* isolates.

Resha Boodram completed her Bachelor of Technology degree in Biotechnology and obtained a distinction for her Research Project.



Well done from all the *iThemba* editing team and all the staff at HPRU!



Photographs by Ivor Hamilton

Winners in the HPRU Woman of the Year Awards for 2007.

Above from left to right: Thesla Palanee – Excellence in work; Nonhlanipho Makeka - People’s person; and Nicola Coumi – Born leader

HALALA! NTANDOKAZI! HALALA!

All that glitters is gold..... a spectacular Women’s Day celebration at HPRU

A very wise friend of mine once remarked “Why on earth do we celebrate women on just one day of the year? We don’t celebrate the beauty of the earth and all its creations on one chosen day, but, rather, we embrace its beauty everyday. The same should be said of women, and we should celebrate their beauty, compassion, nurturing, courage and strength with every breath we have in us, every moment of our lives.”

August 9th is National Women’s Day in South Africa. The acknowledgment of South Africa’s women has historic significance. On this day in 1956 some 20,000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest against a law requiring black women to carry passes. This day is celebrated as a reminder of the contribution made by women to society, the

achievements that have been made for women’s rights, and to acknowledge the difficulties and prejudices many women still face.

This year, the HPRU, which comprises over 70% women, held a celebration in honour of our women.

24 hours until showtime, Ladies!

With less than 24 hours until Showtime, the organising committee of the inaugural HPRU Women’s Day celebration watched in horror as 40 knot winds ripped at the event marquee sending it flying through the air like a piece of tissue-paper. Unseasonal wet and windy weather lashed the shores of Durban, and threatened to unravel weeks of careful planning. But in true women’s spirit, the committee pulled together,

FEATURE



Photographs by Ivor Hamilton

Above: HPRU ladies looking very "Glitz and Glamour" in traditional Zulu & Indian dress

event that will be spoken about for many years to come!

The lovely ladies of the HPRU celebrated National Women's Day in true style. Glitz and Glamour was the order of the day with our ladies dressed to the nines in everything ranging from shimmering Indian saris to traditional Zulu attire.

Our women were treated to a spectacular day of fun, entertainment, pampering and prizes. Gift bags crammed full of beauty products, vouchers, cosmetics and goodies wet the appetite. East Coast Radio DJ, Peter G, had the ladies in stitches of laughter and often compromising positions to win fabulous prizes including facials, body treatments, cellular phones and dinner vouchers.

Women were treated to a spectacular Latin-American dance display, choreographed and directed by well-known Durban choreographer and designer, Kevin Ellis. One of the highlights of the day has to be the fashion extravaganza. Eight beautiful HPRU women put on a showing of an original collection by award-winning designer, Kevin Ellis. Feathers, beads and black lace dominated, and the crowd went wild! Step aside Kate Moss... these ladies stole the runway!

If the fashion extravaganza wasn't enough to get ladies on their feet, the crowd was whipped into frenzy when surprise guest entertainer, Jae took to the stage. Flanked by 2 very gorgeous hunks, Jae got everyone on their feet and dancing with renditions of her own songs as well as favourites such as Tina Turner's "Simply the Best" and Brenda Fassie's "Vulindlela".

The event culminated in the announcement of winners of the HPRU Woman of the Year Awards. Thesla Palanee won in the category "Excellence in work", Nonhlakanipho Makeka winning "People's person" and Nicola Coumi walking off with the award for "Born Leader". Congratulations to the winners and a HUGE congratulations and thanks to the dedicated organising committee, Nirvana Baliram, Rashika Maharaj, Resha Boodhram, Nomvula Gcaleka and Melanie Mills. The bar has certainly been set very high and I'm sure that all the women of the HPRU are looking forward to another fun-filled and successful Women's Day event in 2008!

- Melanie Mills



Above: Getting down and grooving



Photographs by Ivor Hamilton

Above: Jae & her sexy male dancers turning up the heat



Above: HPRU HIV Counsellor, Sharon Moodley conducting a counselling session at the HPRU clinic at R K Khan, Chatsworth

COMPASSION, STRENGTH AND A STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY – HPRU COUNSELLOR, SHARON MOODLEY

Committed HIV counsellor, Sharon Moodley talks frankly to Zakir Gaffoor about what motivates her to help women in the trials and in her community

As a counsellor for the HPTN 035 study based in RK Khan, Chatsworth, Sharon Moodley sees her job as simply continuing her lifelong quest towards uplifting the community in which she lives. Born in Greenwood Park, as a young girl she bore witness to the forced removals of the Group Areas Act, when she and her

family were relocated to the then South Asian/Indian township of Chatsworth.

She describes what life was like growing up as a teenager here: “Back then, no one was rich. Poverty was a common thread that bound us all together as a community - we did everything together. Truly, in our own isolated and segregated world, we lived the spirit of Ubuntu”.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

The voices of women were not heard in the 60's and 70's. As a result, Sharon recalls vividly how they were expected to "internalize their feelings, suppress it. We never had the opportunities that men had, neither economically nor socially".

And whilst we may associate that era with the sexual revolution, no such change came to Chatsworth. Sharon recalls how "parents never ever spoke to their kids openly about sex and sexuality, or life in general for that matter". The community was conservative and religious, and remains so to this day. "Arranged marriages were more common, and women usually had no say as to who they would marry. Sharon recalls how women's issues such as domestic violence and teenage pregnancies were "highly sensitized topics of discussion - such things were still very much a huge scandal back then".

Seeing these things motivated her to make a difference in her community, particularly for those whose voices were least heard: women and children. At the Chatsworth Child Welfare organization, her eyes were opened to the "terrible abuse that women and children were suffering. The community looked pious and morally-upstanding from afar, but beneath the surface their was this silent epidemic of abuse, neglect and suffering".

Following years of experience as one of Lifeline's leading counsellors, Sharon finally became involved in the field of HIV/AIDS. She vividly recalled her first experience disclosing a client's HIV positive status to him for the first time: "It must have been around 1990 or so, and I was at Addington Hospital. A young man had come in for testing. He appeared strong and fit, and clearly came from a wealthy background. When I disclosed his status to him, he became enraged; refusing to believe that he was HIV positive. That incident left a deep impression on me."

At Umkhuhla House, a division of CANSA Hospice, she was confronted with counselling people who were dying of the disease for the first time. "A lot of people in the community referred to it as 'cancer', so as to avoid the shame and humiliation that came from being known in the community as someone with AIDS. The implication was that if you were infected with the disease, you slept around-something that was

considered utterly taboo in conservative Chatsworth at the time".

In the year 2007, HIV/AIDS is still virtually unmentionable in Chatsworth. "The younger generation however, seems to be more open about discussing it", says Sharon.

At the RK Khan site, Sharon has seen first hand from counseling participants, how women are bearing the brunt of the epidemic in this community. "Women are usually the first to test, the first to disclose, and therefore the first to suffer possible stigmatization from friends and family", she says. It makes her angry, she says, since in a majority of cases, "these women are given the disease by cheating husbands who may also be the sole breadwinners - they are powerless to do anything."

"The greatest thing for me is seeing a women taking back their power and protecting themselves and their families"
– Sharon Moodley

That is partly why she is so inspired by the possibility of a women-controlled method of HIV prevention. "A microbicide could potentially remove all those difficulties in one fell swoop", she says. Her enthusiasm for the study and women empowerment is echoed in her counselling. She describes condom negotiation as a particularly difficult aspect for women in the study. "Getting women in 'monogamous' relationships or marriages to negotiate condom use is really hard. Often they don't listen to their intuition or 'gut feeling'-the part of them that tells them something is not right in the relationship - that their partners may not be faithful". She has come to the realization that it is more effective to counsel women about making the correct choices in life and thereby empowering them, rather than simply telling them to use condoms.

Sharon says that "when a woman is empowered to make the correct and appropriate decision for herself, she will be more likely use condoms for protection. It's a self-esteem thing. It's about feeling worthy enough to protect yourself. This I have learnt through years of counselling women. You wont find it in a textbook!"

Her skill is clearly evident to all who work at RK Khan. She is the only counsellor who is specifically requested by participants. Her deep empathy and understanding for their problems, not just study related, has allowed her to form long-standing close bonds with many of the women who come to the clinic. Her approach is to go

A DAY IN THE LIFE

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above and beyond the call of duty, and the result is a source of pride for her: “the greatest thing for me is seeing women taking back their power and protecting themselves and their families – be it from HIV/AIDS,

abuse, poverty or domestic violence. Its wonderful to know that I played a small part in bringing about such positive changes in the lives of study participants”.

- Zakir Gaffoor

UPCOMING EVENTS



Microbicides 2008 Conference
 24-27 February, 2008
 Hotel Ashok
 New Delhi
 India
www.microbicides2008.com



The 15th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections
 3-6 February, 2008
 Boston
 USA
www.retroconference.org/2008

RECENT EVENTS

HPRU NATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS

Photographs by Ivor Hamilton



Remember – we welcome your comments and suggestions.

For further information or questions regarding the stories in this publication, please contact the editor, Zakir Gaffoor at ithemba@mrc.ac.za