Nomination for the Jaime Brunet Prize 2017

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Nominated by International Alliance of Women (IAW)

Sizani Ngubane – family and early childhood
Sizani Ngubane (71) currently lives and operates from a small farm just twenty kilometers outside of Pietermaritzburg City. She is the eldest of five siblings (2 girls and 3 boys). Her parents (Nomaswazi/Maqhude Ngubane) were married in 1945, and Sizani was born on November 24, 1946.

Sizani did not have an opportunity to be raised by both her parents. She and her four siblings were raised by her mother, who was working as a domestic worker earning about half-a-USD per month, which is part of the reasons why Sizani as the eldest child had to dropout of school to assist her mother in raising her siblings. Consequently, she did not have the opportunity to get a formal education, and she made it her own responsibility to be educated.

Sizani’s family is part of the indigenous communities, who traditionally lived off the land but were forcibly evicted from their ancestral land by the colonial and apartheid regimes. Men were forced to go and work underground in the mines to earn money to provide for their families. 17 million indigenous people were negatively impacted by these forced removals from 87% of the South African land when in fact they represented about 95% of the entire population. They were then squeezed into 13% of the barren South African land. Sizani’s father worked about 680 kilometers away from his home to earn money and provide for his family. He worked for many years as what was called a domestic servant and at a petrol station. He was only able to visit his home once a year during the festive season – for only two weeks. Sizani never had the opportunity to bond with her father.

Her mother used to work in town as a domestic servant. But because all indigenous people residing closer to towns were forcibly evicted – her mother resided about 35 kilometers away from town where she worked six days a week earning about a half-a-USD per month. Every day she would leave home for work at 03h00 to be at work not later than 08h00. Sizani grew up in one of the poorest families and rural communities. The family used to go to bed on an empty stomach.
Sizani started assisting her mother in raising her siblings when she was 6 years old. Later, before her mother left home for work, she would always wake up Sizani at 03.00 to make sure she would get up in time to get herself and her siblings to school. Her school, which was about 12 kilometers away from her home, was about a three-hour walk for her, so she also had to leave home early to be on time for school. When she was 15, she dropped out.

In 1959 when she was about 13 years old, her father used the scarf her mother culturally gave to him as a present when they started dating in 1945 to commit suicide. He was unknown in the area where he committed suicide and, as was their culture in those days, the local men dug his grave and buried him right next to the tree he had used to commit suicide. Sizani and her son, who is now 48 years old, only discovered his grave in 2009. The group of elderly men who buried him could not remember his grave; an elderly woman married to one of the men who buried her father was collecting firewood for her house and discovered his grave. In 2009 Sizani and her son Thulani went and paid their respect at his grave and made arrangement to move his remains to a graveyard next to her family’s graves.

Sizani’s vision was to help her mother get her 4 siblings through school, and she managed to take her 4 siblings as well as four of their school friends, whose mothers could not afford to educate them - through tertiary education.

How it all started and what moved Sizani
Sizani vowed to become a powerful mover of positive social change when she was still just a child. At a very early age she started dreaming of travelling to other African countries to observe their cultures, meet their women, see their struggles, and learn from their stories. She was conscious that women in other parts of the continent had also been dealt difficult hands, and that solidarity and valuable learning opportunities would be found in cultural exchanges. She wanted to see other rural areas, realizing that different environments give birth to different sets of problems, but somehow knowing that someone who lives in a different country can still teach you something about your own situation.

When Sizani was seven, her mother tried to tell her daughter that this idea, her dream of travelling, would be difficult, if not unlikely. She leaned down to this little girl and said, “Sizani,” in a voice that meant business, “traveling is expensive, and everywhere you go you will see the same things. You will see grass, you will see trees, and you will see buildings and people.” Not to be discouraged, Sizani’s reply was full of determination, “Yes Mama, that is true, but the language will be different and the culture will be different.” Later in life, reflecting on how she came to start a career in women/girls human rights, Sizani recalls this moment of her childhood. Her mother was only earning eight rand per month (half-a-USD), they lived in a rural area and only visited the closest city, Pietermaritzburg, once a year or less.

Sizani’s world was limited. However, she knew this would not always be the case. She remembers warmth in her chest, which she feels to this day. A strong feeling from her heart, an urge that told her she must do something. Her future was set. She knew not how, but she knew what; she wanted a life dedicated to
studying and improving access to human rights. Then, hardly on the cusp of adolescence, her resolve was further hardened.

In 1956, at only 10 years of age, Sizani saw firsthand the detrimental effects of gender bias and the unjustified strain it puts on women. Sizani’s father was a migrant worker in Johannesburg, only returning home two weeks of the year during the festive season and the house was managed by Sizani’s mother. Once while Sizani’s father was away, and the house was obviously managed by her mother, his brother approached Sizani’s mother, demanding that she leave and give him the house and land. She, after all, was a woman and could not own or live on a piece of land by herself. He told her to find another man to live with because this house was now his. Forcibly evicted, she went to the only person she knew that could help.

This whole situation was and is still exacerbated by the fact that the pieces of legislation and policies like the Bantu Administration Act of 1927 (section 11 (3) deemed wives in customary marriages to be minors and subject to their husband’s guardianship. They could not own property or enter into any contract or even open a bank account in their own right. Women had to be represented by their male relatives. This provision has been repealed, but its legacy remains. The position is worse in the province of KwaZulu-Natal where Sizani was born and brought up; customary marriages were not governed by the Bantu Administration Act, but by the Code of Zulu law which prevented the indigenous women from being able to acquire property in their own names: they remain legal minors, subject to their husbands’ guardianship. Some of these pieces of legislation have been repealed but its legacy still haunts the women and girls especially in terms of their land and property rights and their right to enter into any contract.

Sizani accompanied her mother to approach the chief, asking for his help and requesting that he fulfill his duty to look after the health of a community. They told their story, the cruel behaviour of their family member and their stranded situation. After hearing this series of unjust events, he replied, “Mama Ngubane, I wish your daughter was your son, I would be allocating land to you now. But because she is a girl and your eldest son is still too young I am sorry I am unable to allocate land to you in your own right as a woman.” They were refused. Sizani, her mother and four younger siblings were homeless, unable to take any possessions from their former home and were forced to seek refuge at aunt’s house.

Her mother moved into her auntie’s home. Two years later Sizani’s mother wrote to a young male marital family member, asking him to stand on her behalf so she could acquire a piece of land. Because the Bantu Administration Act of 1927 and the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 stated that all indigenous women were considered minors they could therefore not own property. Sizani’s mother needed a man in order to move out of her aunt’s house, she needed a man in order to move forward, and she needed a man in order to have control over the future of her children. She did not have autonomy. Sizani’s family got their new home made up of wood, mud and corrugated iron on the roof, but the land technically belonged to their young male relative, who could lawfully evict them and claim the property at any time. Sizani knew this was unfair and promised herself that when she grew up she would do something to help stop it.
Her father’s suicide took place when she was 13 years old. Her mother continued raising her kids by herself.

3. Sizani as a Human Rights Defender / African National Congress (ANC)
Sizani started her human rights career working underground for the ANC. At the age of six, with radio close to her ear and covers over her head, so that if the apartheid police who were hunting down the members of ANC come to her house they will not hear what radio stations she was listening to. Sizani spent hours listening to the Radio Freedom of former Rhodesia and the Laurenco Marques of the Mozambique Radio, which first introduced her to the African National Congress (ANC). From this young age she was attracted to the topics discussed on these stations and she wanted to know more. She wanted to immerse herself in the struggle for equal rights. In 1966 Sizani quietly started mobilizing the highly disadvantaged members of rural communities to see the path of freedom outlined by the ANC. She did not have any contacts within the party at this early stage, except for her mother who was also an ANC member. Sizani was working on her own to recruit new members, figuring out her strategy as she went along, trying to stay under the radar. In 1978 three middle-aged men close to Sizani’s home were arrested, suspected of being members of ANC, so her priority was to work silently. She helped many rural people realize what human rights they deserved access to and how those rights were being severely limited by the apartheid regime. She aimed to present the facts of their oppression, allowing individuals to decide if they wanted to continue with their current lives or work towards change. ANC was a road to change. Sizani continued recruiting underground until she finally connected with other ANC members, after the party’s un-banning on February 02 1990. Now she was formally aligned with the ANC, and she started another leg in her fight for democracy.

In 1990 Sizani was one of the members of the ANC who opened a first ANC office in the Northern Natal region, and together with another member of ANC she was appointed to the Peace Committee. They were assigned to face the violence of the apartheid regime, and they were directed not to look away. This period exposed Sizani to the senseless violence against innocent people and strengthened her resolve to keep fighting. During that period thousands of innocent people were killed, either by the police or the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), which was a brain child of the apartheid system, simply for being members of the ANC.

When the local ANC office received word of a murderous crime, the Peace Committee (Sizani/her colleague) rushed to the scene to collect valuable evidence before the police arrived. During this political unrest, white police were and most of them are still often untrustworthy and corrupt, and they made a habit of arriving at a crime scene only to destroy the evidence, as a way of preventing the offenders from being convicted. Sizani and her partner would hurry to the scene, survey the area, conduct witness interviews and gather evidence, such as bullet shells. They saw the innocently murdered people with families, who were treated with careless brutality. The images of their bodies riddled with bullets are burned in her mind, sights that are impossible to un-see. In one instance a father, mother, brother and aunt were killed by members of the IFP. This was a family that Sizani herself had recruited only one month before. To say it was a hard job is an understatement. Apartheid was on everyone’s minds at this time but it was not the only problem plaguing South Africa.
4. HIV/AIDS
In the early 1990s HIV and AIDS were affecting increasingly more people, and it started sinking in that it was here to stay. To combat further proliferation and to educate those living positively with HIV/AIDS, Sizani founded an organization called the uMbutho waBesifazane to tackle issues related to this disease. Its purpose was to support both women and men. Inspiration for this organization was born during a 1991 exchange programme to Canada, in which she participated under the umbrella of the new National Progressive Primary Healthcare Network led by the late Dr Manto Shabalala. Lasting three and a half months, the programme sought to foster learning opportunities that participants could take back to their countries and provide teaching occasions to educate a wider public. Sizani was one of a 15 person international delegation staying with host families all across the country. During that period she would do three presentations a day at universities, colleges and high schools (for Grade 11 and 12) about the current political and HIV/AIDS situation in South Africa and the human rights (or lack thereof) of South African citizens. She would share a few tragic stories of those lost before their time, but she focused her presentations on apartheid, using her personal experiences and experiences of those she knew to speak about the current oppressive situation. She wanted to expose the reality. The exchange was a positive experience, and Sizani used what she learned abroad back home, which ultimately culminated in the formation of the open volunteer movement: uMbutho waBesifazane. Unfortunately, because of the turbulent political situation in 1992 and her work with the ANC, Sizani did not have much time to focus on this effort. This organization was on the back burner of Sizani’s other obligations, but she was still passionate about fostering a safe space for those living with this new and frightening disease.

5. ANC - continued
Around this time Sizani was invited along with other women, ministers and deputy ministers to attend a meeting about the future of the country and the future of women. At this time belonging to a certain political party could define your fate and it dictated the people one associated with; the country was divided. This meeting was arranged to ask the question, what would an organization for women look like an organization that was not about political parties but about coming together as South African women, regardless of race, colour, gender or sexual orientation? The answer was to establish the SA Women’s National Coalition. In 1991 Sizani became a Provincial Coordinator, conducting research about what women imagined for a new democratic South Africa. She focused on rural areas, the only Provincial Coordinator to do so, because she knew too well how easily rural populations are forgotten, and Sizani knew the new democratic government must represent everyone.

In 1992 everyone within the SA WNC came together to combine their research. This ultimately resulted in the formulation of the Women’s Charter for Effective Equality. In 1993 when the ANC and Nationalist Party decided to rework the Constitution, select members from the WNC were invited to participate in the negotiations. Although Sizani was not one of the selected few, she was instrumental in providing crucial
information about what rural and indigenous women wanted out of a new government. This information was taken into consideration when the above-mentioned parties were constructing the current Bill of Rights within the constitution. The new Constitution was adopted in 1996. Perhaps it would have looked different if Sizani had not sought the valuable opinions of rural and indigenous women. Although this was a major victory over the continuation of oppression, Sizani’s constant fight for the protection of human rights has not always resulted in positive outcomes.


Attacks on Sizani’s life

Attacks on Sizani as a Human Rights Defender have not stopped since 1980, but that has never deterred her from continuing her work. In 1980 her family had to relocate to the northern part of the KwaZulu Natal Province after the family felt threatened by the apartheid police called Special Branch (SB), who had got information that they were members of the banned African National Congress (ANC). In 1993 she was employed in the northern KwaZulu Natal region as an African National Congress (ANC) Organiser, and one morning she returned to her office to find a threatening message spray-painted in red on her wall. It read, “Sizani we are looking for your head.” After that, in March 1993 her home, where she was staying with her mother, her sister and brothers, niece, nephew her son and daughter, was attacked by 150 IFP men. They were looking for Sizani, her son (25) and her daughter (17) who were activists of the ANC at a very young age. Her brother happened to be in a wrong place at the wrong time and was gunned down by these men and her home was burned down.

In 1998 she bought a small house in Eastwood Township 15 kilometres outside of Pietermaritzburg City, her neighbours having told her how safe the township was. Some of them had spent forty years staying in this township. But from the first week of moving into this house - Sizani’s house was broken into every month or even twice a month until she could not afford to pay for her insurance premium, which was going up every time she made an insurance claim and she left the house. In February 2000 she bought a home. Two months later - in April 2000 she was hijacked at her gate by five policemen who stole her son’s brand new bakkie she was driving and sold it in Mozambique as part of an international syndicate. Her house was vandalized in 2010 - it may be seen towards the end of her documentary:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXWq2LB2ZQyw&fe

After the 1993 incident, she and her extended family were forced to run for their lives. She and her family left everything, running with only their clothes on their backs to Durban, hiding from danger with her friend Dr Manto Shabalala, who later became the Minister of Health under the new democratic government. The extended family was scattered all over KwaZulu Natal until in 1995 when the family moved back to the Midlands of KwaZulu Natal.

With Dr. Manto Shabalala she was safe, for the time being.
However, it is not in Sizani’s nature to sit still, so although she was lying low people needed her support and the fight for human rights was far from over. She started working for the National Progressive Primary Healthcare Network, a newly established organization created by Shabalala. Sizani decided to dissolve the uMbutho waBesifazane and include it in the Healthcare Network because she knew she would reach more people and have a greater positive effect. After a short time working in the healthcare sector, Sizani was happy with the work she was doing, but she wanted to focus her efforts on girls and women’s human rights specifically.

The difference between attendance and participation
Sizani returned to Pietermaritzburg to start work that would lead her to create the Rural Women’s Movement. She stopped working for the ANC after the first democratic election in 1994, realizing her passion did not lie in politics. After raising awareness for voter education before the election, she left the ANC to pursue her passion. She wanted to devote her time contributing to change she could see and feel, working with people on the ground that suffered from day to day. Her heart knew its path, and she simply followed. She applied to be a trainer at the Association for Rural Development based in Pietermaritzburg. They did not see a trainer in Sizani, but instead appointed her as Gender Specialist towards the end 1994. She was to tackle issues around human rights and gender equality, especially concerns around land rights, property and inheritance rights of women/girls and increasing women’s effective participation in community development, assist the Association for Rural Development and the rural communities it was working with - to develop a Gender Strategy to be implemented both within the organisation and in the communities the Association was working with.

Officially starting in January 1995, she embarked on a three-month acclimatisation programme to acquaint herself with the communities the Association was working with and the problems they faced. She accompanied a colleague to a rural community meeting, arranged to collect research for an ongoing project. The male colleague she accompanied had reported a strong ratio of women attendance at meetings, and Sizani wished to assess the gender dynamic. They arrived at the meeting spot, the yard of the local school, to find a circle of men sitting comfortably in chairs under the shade of a large tree, out of the sun’s harsh glare. It was 37 degrees Celsius that day. No woman in sight. Sizani quipped to her colleague, “Is this to be a man’s only meeting?” As soon as they exited the car and started walking towards the men, Sizani detected rustling from the nearby hedges; women started coming out of the periphery, leaving the bushes’ anonymity and taking a place away from the men. Seeing Sizani they felt empowered to join the meeting, but not empowered enough to take an equal place next to the men. Although there was shade enough for all under the tree’s umbrella, they settled ten meters away, subject to the sun’s extreme power but occupying their well-known place as ‘subordinates’. Seated with the men and saddened by the overt gender exclusion, no man nor her colleague who was facilitating the meeting had requested the women to seat themselves closer, Sizani asked herself what she was doing here as her colleague was facilitating the meeting. The Association for Rural Development was invited into the community, and Sizani knew that gaining trust meant abiding by the area’s cultural rules.
Being a woman herself, she stood, moving her feet out of the shade’s protection and joining her fellow women. Taking her new seat, the women immediately started pulling Sizani’s skirt, whispering in her ear. She realized these women were listening attentively but were too afraid to voice their opinions in front of the men. They wanted Sizani to speak for them. She sat absorbing the women’s words, extreme heat not the only force to hit her, nearly knocking her over. She remembers past reports from this community and their claim of women’s regular attendance at meetings. Then it dawned on her. **There is a dramatic difference between attendance and participation.** The women had been mere pawns to the men, a façade of equal gender participation. They wanted more, but did not have the means to push back and take what was rightfully theirs: equality.

Sizani would be the hardware store, making a variety of tools available, but leaving the women to choose which best fit their needs. Women would shop the store with a project in mind, needing assistance for the best construction method and seeking advice but ultimately carrying out the task themselves. When working with a community Sizani knows that, “we must walk the journey, we must not impose, but we must walk the journey with them.” This is Sizani’s philosophy. After several years of being a Gender Specialist, in an organization which was not in support of her approach of working with women only, she finally broke away to create her own human rights organization.

7. **Rural Women’s Movement (RWM)**

Rural Women’s Movement is the only grassroots movement leading an intensive campaign for women and girls’ independent land, property and inheritance rights, lobbying National Parliament and policy-makers for policies that are user-friendly to indigenous and rural women/girls, women/girls who are differently abled, LGBT, widows, single mothers, married women, women/girls living positively with HIV/AIDS, LGBT, out of school girls, survivors of abductions, torture, forced marriages, rape and incest.

Sizani has built from the ground up a vibrant movement of rural/indigenous women/girls to create space for them to have their voices heard, to have food security for their families and communities, security of tenure and access to land in their own rights as women and girls. The movement was initiated in the 1990s and officially launched by Sizani and a group of 250 indigenous/rural women and youth in November 1998. The Commission on Gender Equality, Commission on Human Rights, National Land Committee as well as the Centre for Applied Legal Studies based within the Wits University were also represented at the event. RWM is now a coalition of some 501 Community Based Organizations (CBO) with a membership of approximately 50,000 women. The members work together across ethnic lines. They work at the village level but also work with their sister organizations at provincial, regional, national and international levels.

7. **RWM beliefs and working methods**

RWM Mission is to attain gender equality in a democratic South African society, to which end they focus their efforts on promoting the social, educational, economical and political development of indigenous women and girls, including advocating for women’s rights, eliminating discrimination against women including GBV, advancing women’s capacities and leadership skills, promoting their participation in the
decisions that affect their lives and amplifying their voices for peace and security at provincial and national levels.

The RWM has consistently argued that democratic South Africa has failed to meet key constitutional obligations to ensure security of land tenure for residents of the former Bantustans. RWM strongly believes that no one should face the indignity of extreme, absolute, chronic poverty; no-one should be denied an opportunity to realize their full potential. RWM strongly believes it is in everybody’s interest to leave no one behind and to ensure a fair opportunity for all.

Sizani knows that rural and indigenous communities are too often left behind, are taken advantage of, are oppressed, suppressed, and women are especially susceptible to such evils. She therefore provides intensive training on different pieces of legislation and policies and encourages women/girls to effectively participate in policy making processes by assisting women to prepare their oral and written submissions to present before the Portfolio Committee on Rural Development and Land Reform and the Portfolio Committee of Justice and Constitutional Development and other structures of policy-makers within the National Parliament as well as effectively participate in Public Hearings conducted in all provinces by the National Parliament.

At the local level RWM also works in the following ways: training women to farm, making land claims, establishing individual and collective farming, income generation, confidence-building and mutual support, helping others through farming crises, and countering corruption and gender bias in land allocation.

Nationally, the Coalition of RWM CBOs challenge undemocratic practices and discriminatory laws through intensive campaigns, test cases brought before the SA Constitutional Court, they challenge policies/practice that distort customary law, undermine security of tenure and independent rights of indigenous women/girls in land while entrenching the powers of the chief and their traditional authority.

8. RWM- achievements
The time when indigenous women were not allowed to speak in community meetings is now history. RWM are sitting shoulder to shoulder in the leadership structures as members. Young women are challenging the traditional leaders in terms of women’s participation in traditional courts.

Some young women have participated effectively in the economic empowerment programme and are now successful in their businesses. Some have contributed into financially supporting orphaned and vulnerable children and out of school girls and some boys.

Women are now effectively participating in the policy making processes. They assist other women in their respective communities who are not members of RWM – sharing information and providing advice to their challenges.

RWM is the only grassroots women’s movement being actively involved in policy making processes. Women and girls are aware of their independent rights to land, property and inheritance rights.
Sizani also continues to work successfully against a local traditional harmful cultural practice that allows men to rape and abduct girls and women and force them to become their rapists' farm wives. This was a breakthrough for Sizani, and she was successful in spite of the fact that some of the local women who were working hand-in-hand with her were life threatened by local traditional men and their authorities - who strongly believed that they were trying to eradicate 'a very good cultural practice which provides space for young women/girls to get married and their fathers to get about 10 cows and mothers get one (1) cow from the groom’s family as ilobolo' (so-called bride price).

The level of domestic violence and harmful cultural practices against RWM members has stopped. RWM is celebrating seven years of no ukuthwala (forced marriage) in two communities - eMangweni and amahlubi of uThukela District. Fathers and uncles of orphaned girls and young women are now prioritizing school for their nieces and daughters rather than trading them off into marriage.

As a direct result sexually transmitted diseases have decreased by 15% in the areas where RWM works. Teenage pregnancy has decreased by about 10% in the last seven years. The number of young women dying of complicated child-birth as a direct result of their bodies being still too young has stopped in the two communities where Sizani in partnership with local women stopped ukuthwala.

Nationally, Rural Women’s Movement was the leader of the successful lawsuit that got the Communal Land Rights Act 11 of 2004 declared unconstitutional because it was unfair and enshrined gender bias. http://www.customcontested.co.za/laws-and-policies/communal-land-rights-act-clara/

RWM – led by Sizani - campaigned tirelessly against the Traditional Courts Bill of 2008 and the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003. This resulted in a vote against the government-sponsored draft law in parliament’s National Council of Provinces (NCOP). The RWM succeeded in amplifying the voices of rural and indigenous women who have been part of the Rural Women’s Movement. The RWM argued that the Bill would create a separate legal system for the 18-Million people living in the former Bantustans and make them subjects of traditional leaders with second class rights in the South African democracy. Many of the local leaders have a practice of not allowing women to represent themselves in court or to testify before the court, and it is all too common that they take land away from women whose spouses or fathers have died, to give to men who throw the women off the land they long worked to support their families.

The Traditional Courts Bill is Dead!!!: http://www.womeninandbeyond.org/?p=9171

RWM has mobilized for the review of the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act, which prevents rural people from addressing the complex legacies of the apartheid Bantustan. Such laws, policies and practices distort customary law, undermine security of tenure and rights in land.
Comment from a friend based in Canada about Sizani’s interventions:

This is what Frieda Werden the Executive Director of the WINGS: Women’s International News Gathering Services based in Canada had to say about Sizani:

Sizani is recognized and well regarded internationally. Her advice has been sought on implementing the UN’s Millennium Development Goals. She is invited around the world to speak. But she has never disappeared into the realm of experts and egotists. She is one of the rare acclaimed leaders who stick close to their roots. She and her organization have made many friends but also vicious enemies who do not want things to change. She has been physically attacked several times; even recently, she was deliberately struck by a truck and her home and the organization’s office were destroyed; but she doesn’t run away and she is not bitter. She consistently inspires women who know her to stand their ground bravely and not give up on their goals.

Another comment from the friend above:

“What strikes me as most powerful about Sizani is that she expresses and communicates love. I felt this when I first met her in 1995 in Beijing, and now I see that love - plus strategy and hard work! - can move mountains.

Please watch the recent (2016) film, which speaks better than I”:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXWq2LBZQyw&sns=tw

Current Activities
As Amicus Curiae, RWM is currently involved in a serious case in the South African Constitutional Court: The Jezile v the State Case:
A 33- year old man from the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa abducted a 14 year old school girl and raped her and forcibly trafficked her to Cape Town where he works and forced her into marriage with an exchange of R8000 received by her father without consent of her mother.
http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZAWCHC/2015/31.htm

He was convicted to 22 years for human trafficking, rape, abduction and forced marriage. He made an appeal in Court arguing that according to the Constitution he is allowed to practice his cultural beliefs and Customary Law. RWM, Legal Resources Centre and the Commission on Gender Equality came in as what the Courts call Amicus Curiae to assist and influence the court proceedings on behalf of the 14 year old little school girl.
http://www.customcontested.co.za/jezile-appeal-highlights-difficult-questions-ukuthwala

The RWM is currently organising women across the province of KwaZulu Natal, have integrated some parts of Limpopo and Northern Cape Province to highlight the implications of the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Bill which seeks to entrench apartheid geographies with its proposals to establish traditional
councils based on the old “tribal authorities” of the Bantustans, which were established in terms of the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act.


The RWM is also playing an active role in exposing elite mining deals that fail to benefit rural citizens. It has contested the illicit leasing of land in the former homelands for mining and other projects without the informed consent of the rights holders as required by the Interim Protection of Informal Land Rights Act. These initiatives and campaigns have often involved partnerships between Community Based Organisations and organisations providing research, advocacy and legal support. However, the strength and legitimacy of any rural/indigenous movement depends on its capacity, and currently Sizani is engaged in a process of renewing the RWM from below. This involves a focus on revitalising the RWM in three provinces and linking local organisations in order to strengthen alliance-building within and between the three provinces and on a wider national scale.

As part of this process the RWM will be facilitating a series of meetings in the provinces to start to develop a shared vision for the future and begin a conversation about the different options for organising and deepening the Movement. An important part of this conversation will be the discussion and eventual agreement of a set of organising principles.


Local activists fear for their lives:


Murder deepens the mining nightmare for rural communities:

Key organisational principles to be agreed on

- Amplifying the voices of indigenous women/girls to articulate, advance and defend the rights of indigenous/rural citizens, particularly women/girls and promote democracy;
- Ensuring gender parity of representation at all levels of the movement and its Coalition;
- Linking local community based organisations in local, district, provincial and national (Limpopo/Northern Cape provinces) formations and networks as the heart of the Movement;
- Demonstrating practical commitment to deep democracy, innovative communication and consensus decision making;
- Supporting transparent professional management and accounting of funds raised and disbursed through the Movement.
Key issues at the heart of RWM mobilisation and action

The core issues of concern to members of the RWM include:

- Mobilising to prevent loss of land and resource rights as a result of corruption, land grabs or mining deals with local elites/traditional leaders;
- Contesting undemocratic and corrupt practices that impact on rural citizen’s lives and livelihoods;
- Monitoring the institutions of traditional governance and their impacts on indigenous citizens’ rights;
- Mobilising against policies and laws that dilute the rights of rural people and render them as second class citizens/chiefly subjects;
- Identifying and supporting precedent setting cases for strategic litigation;
- Ensuring land and tenure security rights for all with a particular focus on securing women’s rights in land.

The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) said 53% of the country did not have enough food. It’s estimated that 14 million people go to bed hungry each night in this country. 
[https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/14-million-in-sa-go-to-sleep-hungry-9408923](https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/14-million-in-sa-go-to-sleep-hungry-9408923) In its effort to eradicate the grinding hunger which is breaking the back of the indigenous/rural communities the RWM is looking to purchase a Self-Sustainable Organic, Climate Smart Farm by purchasing land to be utilized as an Indigenous Women and Girls Skills Training Centre through which they can provide intensive training and grow organic farming amongst peasant and indigenous women in South Africa. 
[https://gogetfunding.com/rwm-indigenous-womens-farm/](https://gogetfunding.com/rwm-indigenous-womens-farm/)

Present situation for women in the rural areas after the adoption the Constitution

The human rights of women are now protected by the Constitution of the country. Whoever violates their rights could be challenged in the court. But the biggest challenge is that all these pieces of legislation and policies that have been passed since 1994 until today have not been implemented.

Women and girls land, property and inheritance rights are not recognised by most traditional leaders/chiefs. Threat of Traditional Courts Bill prompted her to drive 15,000 miles across the country to inform women:

Indigenous/rural women and their communities have not experienced democracy – the majority of rural communities do not have access to clean water. Some women wake up at 01h00 to search for clean water and come back home at around 08h00; the only successful programme has been the construction of roads in the rural areas.

There is a huge gap between the have and the have-nots, the level of corruption is very high. Here is one example:

The King of the Zulu – Zwelithini Zulu received R300-million this year. This is on top of all the benefits he gets as a king. He is married to more than five women and all of them have their own budget.
Indeed President Jacob Zuma has been encouraging traditional leaders to make such land claims. In his speech to the National House of Traditional Leaders earlier in 2014, he told traditional leaders to get “good lawyers” so that they could put in land claims.

After 23 years of democracy - 85% of the SA land is still in the hands of the few white men whose population represents about 5% of the country. The indigenous population is estimated at about 80% but is squeezed into 13% of the land. White men owned 65% of the land before the democratic government but under the democratic government they own more land: 80%

Indigenous people are currently experiencing a different form of indigenous people land dispossession by elites who want to pollute their rural areas by establishing coal mines on communities’ land without their consent. The king’s brothers are currently threatening to kill a land activist who led a community struggle against the establishment by the king’s family of a coal mine in their community without the community’s informed consent.

**The future**

Sizani’s future vision is to assist young women within RWM to build a vibrant Indigenous Young Women’s Movement to tackle issues that affect young women/girls for them to be able to strengthen their leadership skills. Establish an Indigenous Women/Girls Self-Sustainable, Organic Agricultural Skills Training Centre and also plans to build RWM from below to amplify women/girls voice in two other provinces (Limpopo/Northern Cape).

**Awards or prizes, distinctions, decorations, honours from other organizations or countries**

2017 – Sizani has been nominated for the **2017 Africa Food Prize** by her American friend.

August 2017- Sizani was invited to present RWM’s Submission before: The High Level Panel (HLP) on the Assessment of Key Legislation and Acceleration of Fundamental Change Rights Activists Call for Empowerment of Women, Especially Those Living in Rural Areas: Sizani questioned the ownership of communal land in rural areas and the role of chiefs.


July 2016- Sizani chosen to cut the ribbon for the new Centre for Women Leadership at Management College of Southern Africa (MANCOSA) based in Durban:

October 28-29, 2016 - A 48-minute South African video documentary feature about Sizani Ngubane and the Rural Women’s Movement:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXWq2LBZQyw&feature=youtu.be

December 09, 2016- Sizani selected by the BBC World Service’s to be part of its program: ‘100 woman shines a light on life as a woman in the 21st century’ as we celebrate one hundred (100) years since the emergence of feminism.  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXWq2LBZQyw&sns=tw

October 07, 2015- Five heroes working to empower women around the world
Sizani’s interventions recognized by a journalist - selected as one of the five heroes
https://matadornetwork.com/pulse/5-heroes-working-empower-women-around-world

The Traditional Courts Bill is dead. Long Live Sizani Ngubane!
February 21, 2014 by Dan Moshenberg 21 Comments
http://www.womeninandbeyond.org/?p=9171

October 10, 2014- Video about the on-going struggle – for the land rights at the traditional local authority level: “Sizani Ngubane: The Impact of Traditional Authority on Rural Women in South Africa ”:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bd1cA70qQho

2012 - Report on the issue from a major public radio network in the US (Sizani is quoted):

2012 - This struggle had to be won at not only the national level, but also at the provincial levels, as noted in this article from the Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution, which quotes Sizani and lists her as an organizing contact:
https://www.casac.org.za/2012/12/

2011 - Intensive, life threatening campaign against abduction, torture and rape of young girls/women aged 12 – 30 years of age to be brides of men they do not choose: Sizani quoted by the American Los Angeles Times about bride abduction: http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jul/12/world/la-fg-zulu-women-20120712

June 2011 – Sizani invited to share her experiences of the RWM Human Rights work. On invitation of the KAS Regional-Program Gulf-States in Abu Dhabi to representatives of institutions that are engaged in development work - addressed the conference in Abu Dhabi as its delegates examines innovative and more sustainable ways of cooperation between donors from Gulf countries and communities on the continent of Africa.
http://www.kas.de/wf/en/33.22964/
2011 - Sizani had also been invited to speak at the Business School of the World to provide concrete suggestions on how the Gulf Region could contribute to sustainable socio-economic development in Africa. Sizani flew into Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the United Arab Emerites. Women’s rights in traditional societies: The South African example: [http://www.kas.de/rpg/en/publications/22964/](http://www.kas.de/rpg/en/publications/22964/)

June 2011 Sizani flew into Canada to receive the 3rd Annual Ruth Selwyn Award (June 16, 2011) for Achievement in Empowering Girls and Women at the International Centre for Human Rights Education in Montreal – Canada. Her Award included an opportunity to attend the International Human Rights Training Programme in Montreal with TV, press and Radio opportunities to increase awareness about the RWM work throughout Canada.

2011 - Sizani was nominated for the prestigious 2011 Woman of the Year Award, presented annually by Shoprite Checkers, one of the South Africa’s largest group of chain stores in partnership with the South African Broadcasting Corporation TV2.

[https://za.linkedin.com/in/sizani-ngubane-a1b67b10](https://za.linkedin.com/in/sizani-ngubane-a1b67b10)

June15, 2010 – video of Sizani speaking at the United Nations (UN) meeting on the progress about the Millenium Development Goals: [https://www.un-ngls.org](https://www.un-ngls.org)

2010 - Drivers of change Award - RWM led by Sizani was honored by the Southern Africa Trust when it became Finalist of the Drivers of Change Awards: The criteria in this annual competition was that entrants had to be able to demonstrate their commitment to sustained development within communities to ensure a better future for all South Africans.

The Drivers of Change Awards recognize outstanding individuals and organisations across Southern Africa region who inspire the development of innovation public policies and strategies that demonstrate a real impact in overcoming poverty that build and create conditions that make for a real and lasting difference to the lives of people living in poverty.

Previous winners include the President of Malawi and the elected Chairperson of the African Union. Sizani was invited to fly to Johannesburg to attend the annual gala dinner evening for the presentation of this coveted social investment award.

July 2010 - A video showing one chapter of the RWM, things they have organized and difficulties they work to address: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlyndPhHUR4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlyndPhHUR4)

August 2008 - Sizani was selected Woman Leader for the World by the Global Women’s Leadership Network in the United States of America.

[https://www.slideshare.net/cfcamargo/women-leaders-for-the-worldgwn2008sm-45032095](https://www.slideshare.net/cfcamargo/women-leaders-for-the-worldgwn2008sm-45032095)
2007 – Sizani became a finalist in the South Africa’s Women of the Year event.

http://whoswho.co.za/sizani-ngubane-8170

2006 - Sizani made a small input into information on this Book: Land, Power and Customs

Controversies generated by South Africa’s Communal Land Rights Act

About this Publication:


2006 RWM – led by Sizani received the Nelson Mandela/Graca Machel Innovation Award of 2005 from the World CIVICUS Assembly for her human rights work. She flew to Scotland-Glascow to receive the Award.

https://za.linkedin.com/in/sizani-ngubane-a1b67b10

May 16, 2011: A glowing tribute to Sazani’s leadership and honesty at the beginning of a 13-minute video about an American woman’s presentation to a Rural Women’s Movement meeting:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Vh0aPTsffs

Insight into the effective work ethics of the RWM, based on experiences of volunteers from abroad:

https://www.indeed.com/cmp/Rural-Women’s-Movement/faq

Dr Aninka Claassens’ other publications, listed here, indicate the complex context of South African land policy and reality in which Sizani Ngubane and the RWM operate.

http://www.publiclaw.uct.ac.za/pbl/staff/aclaassens

Document showing there is still an on-going struggle for land rights at the policy level:


2012 - Sizani’s mother – Nomaswazi Ngubane’s (86) Submission on the Traditional Courts Bill, based on her personal experience - presented to: The Select Committee on Security and Constitutional Development, Department of Justice & Constitutional Development in 2012 (two years before she passed on)


How will Sizani spend the money of the Brunet Prize/award if she wins

If she wins the Brunet Prize Sizani will rebuild her home that was demolished/vandalized in 2010 by some policemen from the Hilton Police in partnership with the US former retired police: Richard Baratta who defamed Sizani throughout the world after she exposed his corruption in her rural area of kwaMpumuz. . Right now she is homeless and the price of renting homes has gone up by 300% since year 2000 when she
bought this house, and she may have to retire now that she is 71 years old and will use her house for her retirement.

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**Final remarks**
Every day Sizani dedicates her time to working with the indigenous, rural, marginalized communities, particularly indigenous women/girls in order to enable them to empower themselves and be able to improve their own rural livelihood. Rural spaces and those who inhabit them are easily forgotten, left to exist in the dark fringe of big cities. Rural and indigenous communities, particularly women and girls, are like the lonely sapling left to grow in her mother’s shadow, impaired, unable to reach their full potential without access to her own resources. They cannot flourish if they are evaluated by city standards without the support of their own people.

Lene Pind
Head of communications
International Alliance of Women

Joanna Manganara
President
International Alliance of Women