



Transforming our culture

Protecting the human rights of our
daughters in Zambezi Region

Women's Leadership Centre

About the Women's Leadership Centre

The Women's Leadership Centre (WLC) is a feminist organisation based in Windhoek, Namibia. The WLC facilitates the voice and leadership of Namibian women through participatory research, training, writing, photography, and the publishing of critical feminist texts that we distribute within our society.

The **Caprivi for Women's Rights Project** (now **Zambezi for Women's Rights**) was initiated in 2005 by the WLC. For the past 10 years, the WLC has conducted participatory cultural research and workshops with women, especially young women, in the Zambezi Region. These have focussed on women's human rights and culture.

This project currently aims to empower young women to resist harmful cultural practices, as well as to educate communities on the need to respect and protect the human rights of all their members, including the human rights of girls and young women.

The WLC thanks the Zambezi Regional Governor, as well as the Mafwe, Mashi, Masubia and Mayeyi Traditional Authorities for their support in this project. Thanks also to Berithar Sitali-Mapenzi, whose courage and support made this work possible.

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Introduction

The constitution of Namibia protects our human rights to dignity, equality and freedom from harm. However, there are many cultural practices in our various communities that violate the human rights of girls and women.

This booklet addresses some of the violations that affect **girls and young women in the Zambezi Region**. It focuses specifically on *sikenge*, the ritual through which girls are prepared to become women according to the norms and values of their traditional culture.

The information in this booklet is based on the **shared life experiences** of many girls, young women and older women from various parts of the region. It serves to **amplify the voices** of those who courageously broke the silence and taboos on *sikenge* and other practices, through which girls and young women are subjected to various forms of violence and abuse in the name of culture.

Breaking taboos and speaking out against these practices is the first step towards protecting the human rights of ourselves, our daughters, sisters, nieces, granddaughters, neighbours and friends.

Fortunately **not all girls and young women** living in the Zambezi Region are subjected to these harmful practices. However, similar violations against girls and young women also occur among other ethnic groups in Namibia, where research on culture and gender has yet to be done.

Research in other countries shows that human rights violations through similar cultural practices occur in many SADC countries such as Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa. This means that **cultural transformation for the realisation of women's human rights** is needed across the **whole of southern Africa**.

Who can benefit from reading this booklet?

This booklet is written for **everyone in Namibia, but specifically for those living in the Zambezi Region**: women and men, young people, traditional and community leaders, local and regional government leaders, church leaders, health care providers, traditional healers, law enforcement officers, community groups and civil society organisations, parents, teachers, social workers and youth workers.

What are the aims of this booklet?

Through the information provided in this booklet, the WLC aims:

- ◆ To raise awareness on the various forms of violence and abuse committed in the name of culture, with a specific focus on those that impact girls and young women, which also expose them to the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs);
- ◆ To educate young women on their human rights – in particular their sexual and reproductive rights;
- ◆ To encourage young women to refuse participation in harmful practices, and support them in leading cultural change in their communities;
- ◆ To educate parents and elders on their responsibility to protect girls and young women from all forms of violence, including harmful practices;
- ◆ To call on state agencies and civil society organisations to increase their efforts towards the realisation of women's human rights in the Zambezi Region.

We call on the Namibian government to urgently pass and implement the Customary Marriages Bill and the Child Care and Protection Bill to protect girls and women from all harmful cultural practices.

This is the second booklet on harmful cultural practices in the Zambezi Region published by the Women's Leadership Centre.

It builds on the information in the first booklet published in 2010: *Violence is not our culture. Women claiming their rights in Caprivi Region.*

Understanding culture

Our culture is important. It shapes our lives and our values, and gives us a sense of belonging and acceptance. It guides how we relate to each other as women and men, how we dress, how we marry and how we raise our children. It is a large part of who we are.

But all cultures change over time, they are not static. The traditional clothes we wear today are not the same as the traditional clothes our people wore a hundred years ago. The way we build our houses has changed, we eat different foods, and we send our children to school and encourage them to learn new careers. We now use modern technology such as cars, cell phones and computers as part of a globalised society.

Culture and human rights

All Namibians, regardless of culture, are bound by our Constitution and laws, and we all have the same human rights. We all have the right to life and liberty, and to choose our own path to happiness.

The human rights of all women, children and men in Namibia are protected by our Constitution, our supreme law, which was adopted in 1990 when our country achieved independence.

In Namibia we celebrate many different cultures, but we are all Namibian citizens with equal human rights. The Constitution of Namibia protects our right to enjoy, practise and develop our cultures, as long as we do not violate the human rights of any other person.

However, many of our cultural practices do violate the human rights of others, in particular of girls and women. We need to learn about our human rights and the laws protecting us from violence and abuse so that we can identify and challenge harmful cultural practise, refuse to participate in them, and begin to transform our cultures to value and protect the human rights of all.

What are our human rights?

We all have the **right to dignity**, to be treated with **respect**, and to be **free from torture** and **degrading treatment**. This means that we may not be beaten, humiliated or abused through harmful cultural practices.

We all have the **right to equality**. This means that harmful cultural practices that discriminate against girls and women must be stopped.

Both girls and boys have the same **right to education**. This means that girls may not be taken out of school to undergo cultural practices, be excluded due to early motherhood or forced into early marriage.

Both women and men have the same **right to choose our marriage partner**, and to **equality in marriage**. This means that young women may not be forced into marriage. In Namibia, the age of consent to marriage is 18 years.

We all have the **right to information**, which includes information about our human rights and sexual rights and all the laws that protect our rights, and about all the services we need to lead healthy and happy lives.

We all have the right to **freedom of expression**: to speak our mind. This means that we have the right to break the silences and taboos on harmful cultural practices in order to protect ourselves and others from harm.

What are harmful cultural practices?

Harmful cultural practices are practices that expose people to humiliation, degrading treatment and forms of violence. They violate our human rights. Boys and girls, women and men can be subjected to harmful cultural practices.

Harmful practices occur in homes, families and communities. Where children are involved, they are subjected to physical, sexual or mental violence by someone who is responsible for them, or has power over them, whom they should be able to trust.

Many harmful cultural practices target girls and young women, based on the belief that girls must learn to become 'good women' who are subservient to men, and accept their inferior position in society. These practices enforce gender inequality and discrimination against women. One example is *sikenge*, which is practised in the Zambezi Region.

What is *sikenge*?

Sikenge is a traditional rite of passage ritual, which marks a girl's transition into womanhood. This initiation usually starts when the girl or young woman has her first menstrual period.

The ritual normally involves the girl being isolated from other people. During this time, she is educated about menstrual hygiene by her grandmother and other women. They will teach her about how to protect men from her menstrual blood, which is believed to be a source of illness for men.

The key roles expected of adult women in traditional society are marriage and motherhood. Therefore, during *sikenge* the girl must prove that she can do household tasks, such as pounding the grain brought to her by her elders. She is also instructed how to **serve her future husband in all ways, including sexually.**

The negative aspects of *sikenge*

Entrenching gender inequality

Gender inequality exists when men have a higher status in the family and society than women. This gives men the power and authority to control the lives of women.

Through the *sikenge* ritual, young women are taught that they do not have the same value as men in the family and community, and that they have to accept their unequal position.

Young women are taught that after *sikenge* they will be adult women. Their duties will be to marry, bear children and serve their husbands and in-laws.

In contrast, boys and young men are raised to become the decision makers as heads of households and community leaders. In this way men are allowed to dominate and exercise power and control in their relationships with girls and women.

Silence and obedience

From an early age girls are taught to be silent and obedient, and not to talk back to their elders and future husbands. The enforced silence and obedience rob young women of the power of their voice, their freedom of speech and opinion, and their right to speak out and negotiate to protect their own interests.

Violence and degrading treatment

Girls and young women are taught to respect men and elders, regardless of how disrespectfully or abusively they are treated themselves.

Grandmothers and other women involved in *sikenge* use humiliation – which is emotional violence, and sometimes even physical violence such as beating, to break any spirit of resistance and teach young women their role of obedience and subordination.

During *sikenge* girls are thus taught to expect and accept violence as a normal part of their lives as women. They are made to believe that husbands have the right to beat their wives, and that men beat the women they love.

Sexual abuse

During *sikenge*, girls and young women are also trained to fulfil their adult sexual role by learning how to ‘dance’ well in various sexual positions. This is also humiliating and degrading treatment. Young women are taught that their bodies will belong to their future husbands, to whom they must be sexually available at all times.

Grandmothers may even facilitate *kutamunwa* – ‘sexual readiness testing’ (puberty rape), through which a male relative (such as an uncle or grandfather) completes a young woman’s rite of passage into womanhood. Through *kutamunwa*, girls are forced into sexual activity with a close relative who holds a position of responsibility, trust and power.

Sikenge can thus expose a girl or young woman to sexual activity that she may not fully understand, is unable to give informed consent to, for which she may not be physically and emotionally ready, and which constitutes the crimes of incest and rape under the laws of Namibia.

Re-shaping girls' bodies for sex

As part of their grooming for their adult sexual role, girls and young women may be expected to undergo the following painful practices:

- **Elongation of the labia minora**

During *sikenge*, girls may be instructed by their grandmothers or aunts to start to pull and stretch their labia minora (inner vaginal lips) for the sexual pleasure of their future husbands. Girls' genitals are regularly inspected to see whether they are pulling their labia correctly, and girls are evaluated by the length of their labia. This violates their right to dignity and privacy, as well as their right to health and well-being.

Before her wedding night a woman may be inspected and if she does not have long labia, she may be sent back to her grandmother for further training. Labia elongation is a painful and humiliating process which women are expected to practise as long as they are sexually active.

- **Drying out the vagina for dry sex**

During *sikenge* girls and young women are taught that they must practise dry sex in order to please and keep their husbands. They learn which herbs and powders to insert into the vagina or drink as herbal teas to make their vagina dry, tight and 'hot'. Women who are lubricating naturally during sex may be insulted as being a 'lake' or a 'river', and may be deserted or divorced.

- **Cutting and scarring of young women's bodies**

During *sikenge* young women may be subjected to scarification, usually by their grandmothers, with cuts made all over their bodies and particularly around the waist, into which substances are rubbed to create scars. Young women are expected to endure this painful process in silence, which serves to enhance their capacity to give pleasure to men, who like to feel these scars during sex. Some scars are created on the upper arms which are believed to make a man think of a woman even when he is with someone else. Young women are thus taught to expect and accept that men will not be faithful to them.

Dangers of re-shaping girls' bodies

Elongation of the labia minora through pulling and stretching, using twigs, sticks and stones, causes discomfort and pain through swelling and injury of the genitals. Sores may become infected, and increase the risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections during sexual intercourse.

Inserting substances into the vagina for dry sex, such as herbs and chemicals, may irritate and damage the vagina wall and cause infection. The lack of natural lubrication during sex increases friction and may further damage the vaginal tissue. Condoms cannot be used during dry sex, which exposes young women to the risk of early and unwanted pregnancy if they cannot access and use other forms of contraception. As with labia elongation, damage to the vaginal tissue increases the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV and HPV – the virus that can cause cervical cancer.

Cutting girls' and young women's bodies with razor blades or other instruments to create scars creates a further risk for HIV infection if the instruments are not sterilised and are used on more than one person, and if the person creating the scars has sores on her hands and does not use protective gloves.

We must cherish and respect girls' and young women's bodies in their natural beauty and with their natural functions!



High prevalence of HIV in Zambezi Region

The above sexual and other practices contribute to the high prevalence of HIV and Aids among women in Zambezi Region. **More than half** of the women in Zambezi Region aged 25 to 49 years, who were tested in the 2012 sentinel survey by the Ministry of Health and Social Services, were HIV positive. The infection rate was **50.8 percent**, compared to the **national average of 26.3 percent** for this age group. Instead of decreasing like in other regions of Namibia, this rate **increased** by more than ten percent over four years, from 40.3% in 2008 to 50.8 percent in 2012.

In 2012 the **HIV infection rate for younger women**, aged 15 to 24, was **21.5 percent** in the Zambezi Region, compared to the national average of **8.9 percent**.

All state agencies must educate communities on girls' and women's right to be protected from harmful cultural practices that increase their risk of infection with HIV, as well as HPV that can cause cervical cancer.

HPV and cervical cancer

HPV (human papillomavirus) is another sexually transmitted infection that is very common in Namibia. HPV can cause genital warts as well as cervical cancer. The cervix is situated at the opening to a woman's uterus (the womb). Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women in Namibia after breast cancer, and can occur in young women.

Condoms can be useful for the prevention of HPV. There is also a vaccination to prevent cervical cancer, which should be available in health centres across Namibia soon. This vaccination is most effective if given at an early age, before a girl starts to have sex.

From around 21 years of age it is important for women to have regular pap smears to check that the cervix is healthy. This can detect any changes in the cervix at an early stage and help to prevent getting cervical cancer.

Sexual violence targeting young women

Apart from sexual readiness testing – puberty rape - girls and young women may be exposed to rape through the following cultural practices:

Virgin myth to cure HIV and Aids

Some people wrongly believe that sex with a virgin can cure a person from HIV and Aids. After *sikenge* young women may be preyed upon by men who want to use their bodies sexually to 'cure' themselves from the disease.

Raping girls and young women using witchcraft

Before or after *sikenge* a girl can be subjected to *mulaleka* – which means someone having sex with her while she is asleep. Many young women are subjected to *mulaleka* through witchcraft practices that put them into a dreamlike state during which they are raped by men, mainly male relatives.

Breaking sexual taboos to gain wealth

Another form of *mulaleka* focuses specifically on incest and involves the belief that having sex with a close female relative such as a mother, sister, daughter or granddaughter will make a man wealthy. Young women may be exposed to this kind of abuse after *sikenge* by men in the family seeking personal gain, as they are easier targets than older women.

Rape in child marriage

Girls who have undergone *sikenge* are seen as adult women who in some cases may be given away in arranged and forced marriages soon after the ritual. Through child marriage young women are exposed to daily sexual abuse including rape. This can result in early pregnancy with a high risk of maternal mortality and morbidity, and infection with sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

Consequences of sexual abuse

Through all these forms of sexual abuse and exploitation girls and young women experience a violent and abrupt initiation into sexual relations.

They are disempowered because they are unable to negotiate the terms of their sexual encounters and are not able to abstain from sex or insist on condom use. This results in serious health risks such as early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections including HIV and Aids. Child brides may die in childbirth as their body is not physically ready to give birth.

Sexual violence may result in girls and young **women feeling extremely violated**, which can lead to depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleeping difficulties, eating disorders, emotional distress and suicide attempts.

Sexual violence **limits the life opportunities** available to girls and young women. It can increase risk-taking activities such as drug and alcohol abuse and engaging in risky sexual behaviour, including sex work.

Children and young people may learn that sexual violence is a 'normal' part of a relationship, and this can lead to more violence as they get older.

All human beings have sexual rights

We all have the right to be in control of our bodies, our sexual interactions and our relationships!

- ◆ We have the right to decide when we are ready for sex.
- ◆ We have the right to choose our sexual partners.
- ◆ We have the right to choose our marriage partners, or to choose not to marry. In Namibia, the age of consent to marriage is 18 years.
- ◆ We have the right to say no to sex, even if we are married or in a relationship, and even if we have had sex with this person before.
- ◆ We have the right to be protected from all forms of sexual violence.

What does the law say?

The **Combating of Domestic Violence Act** prohibits all forms of violence in domestic relationships, such as between couples who are married or living together, or by parents and grandparents against their children and grandchildren.

This law prohibits all forms of **physical abuse**, such as beating, kicking or burning. This includes beating girls and young women during *sikenge*.

The law also does not allow **emotional and verbal abuse**, for example humiliating and embarrassing a person through repeated insults. Verbal abuse is commonly used to humiliate girls and young women during *sikenge*, for example when they become tired from pounding grain.

Under the **Combating of Rape Act**, no-one is allowed to force us into having sex: not our boyfriends, husbands, fathers, step fathers, uncles, cousins, grandfathers, traditional healers or any strangers.

Forced sex of any kind is rape. Marriage is no excuse for rape. Rape is a serious crime that must be punished.

It is also considered rape if one person is under the age of 14 years and the other person is more than 3 years older, even if both people agree to sex.

It is a **sexual offence** to have sexual contact with a person under the age of 16 when the other person is more than 3 years older, even if both people agree to have sex.

Having sex with a close relative is called **incest**, which is also a crime.

Regarding *mulaleka*, the Combating of Rape Act specifically prohibits having sex with a person who is unable to understand or prevent the situation, because of being drunk, **drugged, asleep**, or disabled.

Sexualising girls through *sikenge*

Sexualisation occurs when a child or young person is groomed for sexual relations; when a person's worth is measured by their 'sexiness' and ability to please sexually. The person is treated as a sex object rather than as a whole person.

Some of the practices of *sikenge* are aimed at sexualising the bodies and minds of girls and young women. They are taught how to perform sexually, and how to re-shape their bodies for the sexual pleasure of men.

Preparing girls to perform sexually from the onset of their first menstruation, when many are only 11 or 12 years old, is not appropriate in our current times, when the focus should be on their formal education and the delay of their sexual debut as an HIV prevention strategy.

The consequences of imposing adult sexuality on girls

- ◆ Sexualisation creates a culture that does not value girls and young women – girls are viewed as sexual objects for others rather than as independent persons who have the right to make their own choices and decisions.
- ◆ Young women may be encouraged to have sex at an early age and engage in risky sexual behaviour, increasing the risk of unwanted pregnancies and of contracting STIs including HIV and HPV.
- ◆ Young women may accept violence in their relationships as they have internalised the portrayal of women and girls as sexual objects and violence as a normal part of sexual relationships.
- ◆ Girls and young women may be sexually harassed and preyed upon by boys and men after *sikenge*.
- ◆ Girls and young women grow up quickly and miss out on their childhood.
- ◆ Often a girl or young woman is forced to marry a much older man. This puts them at high risk of contracting HIV from their husbands, who are more likely to have had many sexual partners.

Why does *sikenge* continue?

Culture of silence and secrecy

The *sikenge* ritual is shrouded in silence and secrecy. It is taboo for young women to talk about *sikenge* or share their experiences. This allows the violence to remain hidden and allows for further violence throughout a woman's lifetime.

Culture of acceptance

Culture is used to justify and excuse violence and ignore the experiences of girls and young women. There is also social pressure on families and individuals to conform to cultural expectations, and stigmatising of those who refuse and resist harmful practices..

Young women who resist *sikenge* are subjected to ridicule and exclusion

Young women who comply with (oppressive) cultural practices are embraced and accepted by elders, while those who resist may be rejected by traditional leaders and elders and may be subjected to humiliation and ridicule, and excluded from marriage and other important social events.

Position of girls in society

Sikenge reflects deep-rooted gender inequality, based on and re-enforcing cultural beliefs about the inferiority, lack of personhood and human rights of girls and young women. Gender inequality diminishes society's response to violence against girls and young women. Communities may choose to ignore violence, and law enforcement agencies such as police may be reluctant to get involved even if violence is reported.

Lack of explicit legal protections

The Namibian laws against violence do not specifically mention harmful cultural practices as forms of violence - this makes harmful cultural practices invisible to the eyes of justice. People also do not know that violence is a violation of human rights. Laws against violence are not sufficiently implemented, particularly in traditional courts in rural and remote areas, and are therefore not effectively protecting girls and women in these areas. 24 years after independence, urgent law reform to protect rural women, as well as children across Namibia, is still outstanding.

Limited support for girls and young women

Except for the Women's Leadership Centre, which works to build awareness around violence through harmful practices in Zambezi Region, there is little support for girls and young women to escape practices such as *sikenge*, and to protect those who stand against it.

Complicity of women in perpetuating *sikenge*

Both women and men allow *sikenge*, and women are in charge of the practice, especially grandmothers and other older women. For older women, their role in harmful traditional practices can provide social status and power, preserving hierarchies and control strategies based on age differences among women.

Sikenge can also be exacerbated by external forces, such as extreme poverty and emergency situations including flooding in the Zambezi Region. For example, child marriage can become a survival mechanism for families in times of economic crises, as it can provide both bride-price (*malobolo*) and reduce the number of family members needing to be fed.

Finally, it is difficult for people to challenge beliefs and practices which are deeply embedded within their own cultures.

Protecting our daughters

As parents, grandparents and elders, we have the responsibility to nurture and support our girls equally with our boys, provide them with a good education and where possible training for a career, and protect them from all kinds of harm. We need to understand that exposing our children to violence and harm is a punishable crime, even if it is a cultural practice.

As teachers, we must educate our learners on their human rights, including their right to refuse any practices that bring them harm. We must explore ways in which to strengthen the voices of girls in our schools, create safe spaces in which they can share their experiences, and encourage them to seek help and support. We must further be alert for signs of sexual abuse, and take appropriate steps to report this and ensure the safety of the child.

As health workers and social workers, we need to increase our awareness of the prevalence and impact of harmful cultural practices in our communities, and take appropriate measures to report abuse as well as counsel and protect the child.

As traditional leaders, we must take the lead in breaking the silence and taboos on harmful cultural practices and mobilise our communities to prevent and eliminate them.

The responsibility of our government

Namibia has signed the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

According to this Convention, our state must protect children from all forms of violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

This should include the establishment of social programmes to provide support for children, and for reporting, referral, investigation, treatment, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement where a child has been abused.

This means that the state has a duty to protect children from all cultural practices that harm them in any way.

It is high time for our parliament to pass the Child Care and Protection Bill, and to ensure that it includes protections against all harmful cultural practices!

Where girls can find help

Traditional leaders, health workers, social workers, teachers, pastors and police officers in our communities have a responsibility to support girls and young women who are in need of safety and protection.

The government also provides support through the following institutions in Katima Mulilo:

Women and Child Protection Unit: Tel: 066 - 251215

Ministry of Education: Tel: 066 - 261920

Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare: Tel: 066 - 251485

What to do if you have been raped

Rape is illegal. Report the rape to the Women and Child Protection Unit or the police as soon as possible. You will also need to see a doctor or nurse.

If you have been raped, you may need to be tested for HIV and you may be given **PEP** (Post Exposure Prophylaxis). This medicine can help prevent HIV infection. You need to start the PEP treatment within 72 hours (3 days) of the rape, so you need to get to a clinic as soon as possible. Going to a clinic quickly is also important to receive **contraception** to prevent getting pregnant through rape. If you cannot receive the contraception, you should get a pregnancy test right away if your next period is late, and you should tell your doctor if you want to terminate the pregnancy.

Currently a girl or woman can request a legal termination of pregnancy in Namibia if there is:

- A serious threat to a women's life or health; or
- A serious risk that the child will suffer from a mental or physical defect that will result in a serious and irreparable handicap; or
- Where the pregnancy is the result of rape, incest or intercourse with a woman who is mentally incapable of consenting to sexual intercourse.

How can we prevent *sikenge*?

- ◆ **Share** the fact that *sikenge* is against national and international laws.
- ◆ **Educate** your community, parents and elders on the dangers of practices such as *sikenge*.
- ◆ **Speak out** for your right to remain in school, to delay sex, to delay marriage, and to choose your partner.
- ◆ **Educate** young women about their right to refuse *sikenge* and early marriage, and also about the option of divorce.
- ◆ **Enlist** traditional and community leaders to stop *sikenge*.
- ◆ **Organise** and support awareness-raising campaigns and public education programmes about the negative effects of *sikenge*.
- ◆ **Work** with the media in raising awareness about the health, psychological and other effects of *sikenge* on girls and young women.
- ◆ **Participate** in the development of community groups to help girls who are vulnerable to *sikenge* and early marriage.
- ◆ Work with boys, parents and other adults to **promote** gender equality, to respect girls' rights and autonomy, and to have zero tolerance of violence against girls and women.
- ◆ **Help** girls to know their rights and fight unjust discrimination.
- ◆ **Mobilise** girls and women to come forward and fight against the practice of *sikenge*.
- ◆ **Mobilise** young men to reject the demand of *sikenge* by their parents.
- ◆ **Mobilise** young women to refuse *sikenge*, early marriage and *malobolo*.

Empowering our daughters

Personal power: Develop girls and young women's personal strengths so they become powerful advocates for themselves and others.

Safety: Prevent harmful cultural practices and help girls and young women to transcend harmful conditions so they can live the lives they desire most.

Activism: Encourage girls to develop critical thinking, voice, knowledge and skills so they can act to make their communities better places.

Human rights and culture: Transform culture so that all girls are valued and their human rights respected.

Adult guidance and support: Even one supportive adult in a girl's and young women's life can make all the difference to her opportunities and choices, and her vision of becoming a strong and independent woman.



Songs for a new *sikenge*

New *sikenge* song

Do not teach girls about dancing on bed
With their future husbands
Girls should speak their mind and
Choose what they want
Know what is right for you!
If you have sex always say yes to a condom
Respect yourself and people will respect you
Do not have sex in a way that you do not want
Or at a time that you are not ready

We are changing *sikenge*

We were forced into marrying at an early age
Today we are changing old *sikenge*
The testing of young girls by their uncles
Must come to an end!
Mulaleka must come to an end!
We were beaten to obey our husbands and elders
So now we are changing *sikenge*
In order to maintain our rights as women

We are changing old sikenge

In Zambezi Region

Mutamuno (testing girls) and mulaleka

We do not want!

We were beaten in sikenge

But now we do not want that anymore

So we are changing old sikenge into new sikenge

In Zambezi Region

Young women take care of your bodies

The disease of Aids is not a plaything to us

We should resist

Our bodies should not be cut

In order to attract men

We are changing sikenge

We do not want to be tested by our uncles!

These songs were written by young women from various villages at a regional workshop: *Empowering ourselves as young women in Zambezi Region - Protecting ourselves and our sisters from violence and HIV & AIDS* conducted by the Women's Leadership Centre in Katima Mulilo in October 2013.