

## Photo Experience (XP)

In 2009 I was commissioned by Triangle Project ([www.triangle.org.za](http://www.triangle.org.za)) to conduct Photo XP training to 16 young women from Paarl, Worcester, Khayelitsha, and Inyanga in the Western Cape province.

The 2008 project called *Indawo yami*—My Place was developed in October and November 2008 in the township of e-Kapa (Cape Town) prior to the much spoken about 2010 World Cup. It was designed to give 'visual voice' to 7 unemployed, socially marginalized, lesbian women from Gugulethu and Nyanga townships, Cape Town.

The aim was to teach young women basic photography skills so that they could become agents of how their lives and identities are represented to the public, and to offer marketable skills for possible income generation activities. The six week skills training period, and the subsequent 'visual exploration' produced an incredible series of intimate photographs that document the complex relations between women's living identities (as queer youth—lesbians-sisters, survivors of hate crimes, lovers) and the communities and cultures within which their identities take shape.

The program followed the same conceptual and strategic approaches of previous Photo XPs.

In 2007 I did a collaborative project with a Cape Town based scholar/professor/photographer, which was followed by an exhibition held AVA in 2008 and book publication [Lesbian story](#).

In 2006 I worked within Forum of the Empowerment of Women (FEW) organization in a similar activity, culminating in a 2007 calendar.

In July 2004 I trained women in Ngotshe, Eastern part of KwaZulu Natal, in a project in cooperation with the Market Photo Workshop.

In June 2004 I trained 14 black lesbians from various townships while employed by Behind the Mask ([www.mask.org.za](http://www.mask.org.za)); and WomensNet gave us a space to exhibit during their Gender Stats launch at Museum Africa for Women's month that August.

Due to systemic poverty and a legacy of racial social structures in South Africa, LGBTI people, especially lesbian women still experience a cultural silencing that consequently translates into a lack of access to media representation and to safe public spaces where their own voices and bodies can claim the right to speak and be heard. The interest of social and cultural researchers, as well as that of photographers and other visual artists, in the lives, bodies, and sexualities of black women has done little to reverse this trend in the 12 years from the 1996 Constitution. Rather, their presence has often worked to reinforce the discursive silencing of black women by speaking and theorizing for and about their lives. The 'visual voice' project is about challenging power relationships of this kind.

I have contributed personally to the course, training the classes free of charge, providing two digital cameras which were shared by participants and have since been lost (through robbery and damage), buying point and shoot cameras and processing films.

Lulekiszwe (a LBT organization based in Gugulethu) recruited all the participants. GenderDynamix ([www.genderdynamix.org.za](http://www.genderdynamix.org.za)) contributed some office supplies and refreshments during our office visit; Viola May, events co-ordinator for Tourism Department and Board member of Federation of Gay Games supplied transport money for field trips and also open her boardroom for discussion between staff members and participants. Other spaces visited were Michael Stevenson Gallery to view a Summer 2008/9 exhibition. Major visits were political meetings like Federation of Gay Games (FGG) in October and also AWID conferences in November, we gate crashed at both of these conventions and transport fees were covered by Victor Mukasa, IGLHRC & Fadzai Muparutsa, GALZ.

We were also hosted by International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), Cape Town office for further discussion on how to bridge the divide between LGBTI issues at high and grassroots level.

The participants' ages ranged between 18-29. All are youth out of school are unemployed and identify as non-heterosexual.

They are Bellinda Ndandani, Eulander Koester, Lwando Matshaba, Millicent Gaika, Nikiwe Bobotyane (Gugulethu township) Nosizwe Cekiso (Nyanga township) and Pumezo Makasi (New Crossroads).