



24 December 2020

Remembering Mam' Sizani Ngubane

We are deeply saddened by the recent passing of Mam Sizani Ngubane Founder of the Rural Women's Movement (RWM), long time human rights activist and advocate for the struggles of rural women. Mam Sizani dedicated herself to improving the lives and living conditions of rural women and girls, she lived her life in the trenches working tirelessly to amplify the voices of rural women. No distance was too great to travel, no community too humble to visit. U-Mama traversed all of KwaZulu Natal (KZN) bearing witness to community struggles and initiating grass roots activism wherever she went.

Mam Sizani was an international icon, who co-founded regional movements like the Women's Land Link Africa (WLLA), an initiative that was her vision since the Beijing Conference at the city of HUIROU in China and worked with HUIROU Commission and Groots International to realise this vision. She introduced us as young people in the land sector to drive this vision. She advocated against the Bantustan-isation of the rural countryside where draconian traditional laws are applied. She fearlessly spoke out against laws such as Traditional and Khoisan Leadership Act and the Traditional Courts Bill, and the Rural Women's Movement was the first applicant in a court challenge against the Ingonyama Trust. She fought tirelessly against practices such as ukuthwala and violence against women and girls, a practice that is still a reality in many villages in the former Bantustans.

Mam Sizani's courage in adversity was something to behold, those of us who were privileged enough to work alongside her, heard her speak about the threats to her safety and the attacks that she survived. Despite the risks Mam Sizani stayed the course and always spoke truth to power no matter the cost. She could not be silenced or bullied into submission, a true mbokodo!

While her numerous accolades, both national and international, will serve as records of her work and contribution to advancing human rights. Mam Sizani also leaves behind a living legacy reflected in the rural women who will continue to push back against assertions of patriarchy and elitism that threaten to dispossess them. Ma's legacy lives on in the young activists, researchers and lawyers who learnt how to do this work by watching her and working alongside her. Over the years she tucked many of us under her wing and took us with her as she went about challenging patriarchal power, highlighting the discrimination suffered by widows and exposing unaccountable leadership. While Mam Sizani is now resting, the work that she was dedicated to is not yet done.

We join the range of organisations, communities and individuals who are mourning this loss and we extend our heartfelt condolences to her family at this difficult time.

Lala ngoxolo Ma Sizani sizohlala sikukhumbula.

Rest in Power Mbokodo!