

Feminising our Struggles: The CHW Case Study

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On Tuesday the 25th of July 2023 in keeping with the theme of the winter school which is '*organising*', one of the sessions covered the importance of feminising our struggles, and the role that women play in the struggles.

The school looked at the water struggle that is currently faced by working-class communities around the country. It was evident during the session that women and children bare the biggest burden when it comes to the water struggle, participants had the opportunity to reflect on the importance of women in the struggle for water.

There was an emphasis on how women are the main caregivers at home and in communities, so they are mostly left to organise to secure good, clean water for their families. These are points that showed the importance of feminising our struggles. This session also looked at the Gauteng Community Health Care Workers (CHWs) as a case study to draw lessons from. In 2009 they began organising a movement through the support of Khanya College where a common purpose was identified and agreed to. This was to fight for quality health care for working-class communities. For Khanya this was also about movement building and the CHWs eventually built their organisation. The Forum took on labour issues and began the struggle for permanence. Khanya supported them through political education and skills.

Kegomoditswe Modise-Gomolemo, a CHW from the People's Housing Movement (PHM) also shared the struggles for permanence. Only the CHWs in Gauteng are permanent after a long struggle with the Department of Health. This segment was extremely important seeing as most of the CHWs were women and their struggles in the Gauteng province was feminised by Khanya College, it made sure that the leadership was women and that the women in the Forum took up leadership positions and a feminised struggle.

Kegomoditswe highlighted the labour struggles that were faced by the CHWs in the Northern Cape and emphasized the important role that women play in the fight for equal healthcare for all. As workers, who are mostly women that are at the forefront of healthcare in our communities their struggle for better working conditions should belong to all of us in our various sectors.

Even though the story of the Gauteng CHWs is inspirational, it is important for other workers, particularly CHWs to learn from the shortcomings of the Gauteng Forum. Today, with the victory that Khanya contributed immensely to, the CHWs in Gauteng have abandoned the movement. As they moved up and their salaries tripled, they have no interest in the same communities they pledged to serve in their constitution.

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