

# Foreword

The writers of this book are members of the Young Urban Women (YUW) Programme, which targets young women from the ages of 15-25. Many of them are interns at three Afrika Tikkun Centres in Gauteng – the Wings of Life Centre in Diepsloot, the Arekopaneng Community Centre in Orange Farm, and the Phutaditjaba Community Centre in Alexander. YUW is a multi-country programme implemented in urban areas across South Africa, Ghana and India. It seeks to enable young women’s economic participation and ensure the realisation of their sexual and reproductive health rights. In South Africa, the YUW programme is implemented in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

One of the five strategic objectives of ActionAid is to “*Ensure that women and girls can break the cycle of poverty and violence, build economic alternatives and claim control over their bodies*”. The YUW programme contributes to meeting this organisational objective by promoting collective action led by the active agency of young women. ActionAid’s work is about raising voices of marginalised communities through building their capacities and capabilities to take action.

The idea for this book emerged at a consultation workshop held by ActionAid South Africa on the government’s National Development Plan (NDP) for 2012 through 2030. YUW members attending the consultation felt that their voices and struggles were not being heard and appreciated by decision makers such as those who drafted the NDP. They felt that telling their own stories in their own voices would help dispel some of the myths surrounding young women’s lives; hence the idea of this book of writings by young women emerged.

ActionAid South Africa and Afrika Tikkun worked together to make this book a reality. A call was made for young women interested in writing their stories from the three centres. Five young women were then selected from each centre and fifteen young women were brought together in a three day ‘writeshop’ facilitated by Shamim Meer.

The writings in this book are the product of the ‘writeshop’ in which young women were inspired and in turn, inspired each other with their wonderful spirit of joy, their tears and laughter. The stories mostly cover issues of availability, accessibility, acceptability and the quality of sexual and reproductive health information and services for young women. The artwork, preceding every story, was created by the young women expressing in visual form what their stories mean to them.

We thank all young women writers who shared their personal stories in this book. Writing a personal story is courageous and difficult. Every story written in this book has its own strength and emotional power.

ActionAid thanks Human Dignity Foundation for their continued support of the YUW programme in the three countries.

**Kodwa Tyiso**

**YUW Programme Manager: South Africa**