

# PREACHER WITH A MISSION

**When it comes to equality between women and men, David Serekwane, national organiser of the Congress of South African Students (Cosas), is a 'Moruti' (preacher) with a mission. By Rosalee Telela**

“Comrades must stop talking about non-sexism in their offices. They should go out and preach equality.”

As a national organiser of Cosas, David Serekwane spends most of his time visiting Cosas branches all across the country. “Sometimes I find myself away from home for a month or two,” he says.

Serekwane says he believes firmly in the emancipation of women: “that principle is central in my life. I practice what I preach.” He argues the organisation’s principle and practice of non-sexism has so far been more successful in different regions where “women are members of their executives, but are not represented on the national level.” All the members of Cosas’ national executive are male. He believes this gap has to

be closed and supports the organisation’s effort in this regard: “10 out of 30 delegates from each region who will be attending the Cosas national congress will be female comrades. This shows that we are addressing the issue of inequality.”



Photo by Rosalee Telela, SPEAK

**David Serekwane, National organiser of COSAS**

Serekwane says he only became a “champion of women’s rights when I got involved in politics. Before that I was not

even aware that men oppress women.” He believes: “it is our culture that makes women feel inferior and men superior.” Serekwane’s awareness led him to accept being elected as the women’s organiser for his SRC in high school. “Other students laughed at me but I did not mind. They were not informed about sexism and it was my task to educate them,” he says.

As a male who was trying to get female students involved, he experienced many problems: “It was not easy getting female students to be active members who could make a difference. When they were alone they would talk, but when in the company of male comrades, they would keep quiet and not participate.”

SPEAK asked him how he organised female students. “we held discussions and workshops on sexism. These were successful because some of the female

comrades became confident enough to participate in meetings and present speeches."

Serekwane is convinced the only way women can get involved in organisations is if "they are given a chance to do so. We need to make sure that we train female comrades. It is the responsibility of people who are leading the organisation, whether male or female. As a youth organisation, Cosas is the right place to begin such training."

He says sexual harassment of women by male comrades also makes it difficult for women to get involved: "when they meet a female comrade they immediately want to propose love to her. At the end of the day she decides she does not want to be politically involved any more. Disciplinary measures should be taken in such instances." He added these instances include sexual

harassment and rape that happen a lot in schools in the township. But disciplinary action is not enough: "these problems need to be solved in a way in which people will understand why we are fighting against this kind of behaviour. That is why our education campaigns around sexism, sexual harassment and rape are so important," adds Serekwane.

**Y**et most of the time these campaigns are last on the list of many organisation's agenda." The process of educating students on the issue of sexism "has been successful in that female students are presidents of SRC's and students are getting used to the leadership of women," he says.

For Serekwane sex and AIDS education should be part of every student's learning experience in

school. "AIDS is there, we can't ignore it," he says. He is glad his organisation has taken a position on this issue: "Cosas leadership recently held a workshop on AIDS. We felt we needed to know what it was all about. As part of the youth, students have to be part and parcel of AIDS

awareness campaigns. We plan to hold workshops in schools together with progressive health organisations.

"The road to equality is long and hard, but if we as the youth educate ourselves and our parents about equality, things will change. It is important that women in South Africa stand up for their rights. Those men who still believe in the culture of 'I'm a man and I'm the boss' must realise that things are changing and they also need to change." ○



Cosas "Moruti" David Serekwane says "youth-gatherings should be used to educate young people about equality"