

## Mira 2018 in a Nutshell

The video you have just seen, of our journey together in 2018, says it all. It was a phenomenal year!

I met most of you on 17 February this year at the first Mira session. We talked about why it was necessary to form Mira. The reason was a simple one.

Historically, women have been at the bottom of the social pyramid. Today, although there is gender equality, society still has expectations of women that put us in a box. Black women in particular are predominantly in the working class tier; and in the queues for social grants, not in the boardroom tier!

Mira exists to change this picture to one where as women, we can define for ourselves who we are; by making positive life choices. Mira reminds us that, we may not choose where we come from, but our choices will determine where we go.

The word 'Mira' is rich with meaning. For us, it means wonderful women making positive life choices.

Our logo is a thumbprint. It represents the maze of pathways and possibilities we face on our journeys. Mira helps us navigate this maze in our teen years to ultimately make our mark in the world! Each one unique. Each one beautiful.

At our second session we looked at beauty. What is our identity? How do we remain true to it in a world of stereotypes and social expectations? I remember the palpable connection many of you made with Lupita N'yongo as we listened to her share her own story of identity and beauty at the Essence Awards.

After listening to her, you ladies ploughed through reams of magazines, deciding for yourselves what you considered positive portrayals of women. You put together collages (pictures) ranging from high powered women in suits in the boardroom to women in high heels strutting their stuff to Afro chic beauty.

The stars aligned in our favour for our third session, because the movie Black Panther in which Lupita featured, was on circuit. We were all feeling the Wakanda vibe. But, I will never forget how after the movie, we walked uphill from Maponya Mall in Soweto in the scorching heat to a nearby venue

for a group review of the movie. We were desperate for water by the time we reached the top of the hill, and there was none! This is what inspired the Mira water bottles you now have.

Ha! Then came the yoga session *ko kasi papa*, because the collages of beautiful women you put together would be incomplete without inner beauty - the most important kind. We focused on the relationship with self, our bodies, family, and especially with boys. We had interesting discussions about boundaries. Is sexting - sending a nude selfie to a boy you like - okay? How far do you go with him? We went through the long list of the secret questions in the box that you asked, and tried our best to guide you in making choices that will lead you to your best life.

In session 5, we learned the Danger of a Single Story from the author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. We founded Mira to dispel the story of the black South African woman in particular whose only known story is that of a beneficiary of a social grant. There is much more to her than this. The challenge for us was to write our own stories because nobody can write about us better than we can. For as long as we leave it to others to tell our stories, we will be insignificant.

Then came June 16. We couldn't celebrate Youth Day without Sarafina! As we reflected on our painful history, we also had an opportunity to reflect on the challenges facing youth today. Most of you listed, drugs and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, poverty and unemployment. The challenge was, as today's youth what is your role in society today. Yesterday, Simba our guest from Teen Entrepreneurs touched on this from a business perspective - I'll come back to this.

We moved on to Book Club in the July session when we reviewed a book called 'An Image in a Mirror'. A story of twins separated at birth and growing up in two different countries. One in South Africa, and another in Uganda. We learned about identity, xenophobia, friendship, love, and how sisterhood connects us all, no matter our differences.

August was Women's month, and the session was most unusual. First we had a male keynote speaker, and secondly he was only 17! Ntando Makwela wowed you ladies with his remarkable achievements, and dared you to dream big! You each received a copy of his self published book titled "The Dynamic Kid: 9 Keys to Unlock your Future". In it he gives a step by step plan to being deliberate about planning your future. I hope you will continue to draw inspiration from this book.

In September, we had a most engaging career talk with you ladies snapping your fingers in excitement and going 'hth hth' every time that certain

charming student from UJ was sharing his varsity life. I hope that beyond his charm, you will remember how he moved from getting 14% in Maths in grade 10 to over 80% in grade 11 and matric. I hope you also remember why he did it - because he didn't want to be like Malome Dodo. Kani moved from failing maths to an A by choosing to spend hundreds of hours writing past exam papers! Bottom line - his choices determined his future.

Then Khanyi, also at UJ, shared with us how she went from being one of the top students from a high school in Daveyton with a number of distinctions in her matric year, to being a mother in her first year of varsity! And how that changed her life in a way she was unprepared for. Her choices determined her future.

Now here we are at the Rainforest Boutique Camp Site. In this beautiful setting for beautiful people like you. I have seen the sisterhood grow from when we first met. The care I saw yesterday on the hike was heartwarming. As some were battling to walk up - or down - others saw the need and came to the rescue. You really are living the Mira values.

We know that money makes the world go round. We cannot live without it, otherwise we go hungry. But we learned yesterday from Sis J our guest from Heartlines, that we have to earn our income honestly. Dishes at home, or "an exchange with Siphoh" as Regomoditswe calls it. Which one? Not only did you learn about an honest income but you came up with some original ways of saving money. We strive as Mira to enable you make positive life choices for yourselves.

Simba broke down entrepreneurship for us. We know we don't have to wait for someone to find solutions to our problems. Yesterday, you ladies identified problems in your community; and came up with impressive solutions to them. A community garden; a security company and a *kota* business. Importantly we learned that you don't have to be rich to become an entrepreneur. For under R200 you can start a profitable community garden in six easy steps! All you needed was to be guided to making your choice of business. We hope we have been able to do that, but you are the judges!

So with that, I'm going to ask you to take 15 min to answer the questions on the board about your experience of Mira. After that we will come back for closing.

Closing

This is one of my favourite quotes by Michelle Obama, “We should always have three friends - one who walks ahead who we look up to; one who walks beside us every step of the way; and one who we reach back for after we’ve cleared the way”.

Although we have come to the end of the Programme, this is hopefully not the end of the bonds and relationships formed. The original idea with Mira was to give an opportunity to as many girls as possible in 12 months, so that they can also be empowered to make better choices for their lives. Many of you have expressed disappointment *gore ha go n’a* Mira next year. We are looking at ways in which we can continue to support and guide you in other ways and will communicate this early next year; while giving the opportunity you have had to others.

For now, I congratulate you for your commitment throughout the year. Some started the Programme but dropped out. Getting to this point is in itself an achievement you can be proud of - and there’s a certificate to show for it.

A few thank you’s. First to Jacob and his team here at Rainforest, for hosting us and all the unseen work they’ve done to make our stay enjoyable.

Second, to Mosuetsana for her on-the-ground help at school throughout the year.

Third, to my dear cousin Boitumelo and her bestie, Sheila for catering from their hearts with love. Even on those cold winter months they continued to volunteer their Saturdays to make sure we were fed.

Then, a big thank you to the sister every step of the way Mosima who has been there from day one and has been a big supporter in many ways.

Last but not least, to my dear husband who has been there even before day one when the thought to form Mira was born. I cannot thank you enough for what you have done for me and the Mira Gs. You have been an all rounder from photographer, to IT support, to driver. Quite frankly, this would never have been possible without you!

Mondo Mazwai  
Founder

