



Pat Made and Emma Kaliwo of the Gender Co-ordination Network in Malawi

Partners lift each other as they climb

By Patricia A. Made

Many people regionally and internationally marvel at how much Gender Links (GL) has accomplished in its young life-span of six years. With a small staff of some 11 people at its Johannesburg-based office, the volume of research, training, policy, campaign and lobbying work leaves some wondering if there is a magic formula at play. It is bottled in the form of partnerships and networks. Since its inception GL has worked with over 40 media NGOs; media training institutions and gender advocacy groups in 14 SADC countries

One of its first partnerships, which is still strong and thriving, is the **African Gender and Media (GEM) Initiative**. An alliance between GL, the **African Woman and Child Feature Service (AWC)** based in Nairobi and the **Africa office of Inter Press Service (IPS)**, a global news agency based in Rome, Italy, this partnership gave rise to the GEM name and concept. These three organisations have worked together in producing GEM newspapers and inserts at several international conferences as well as in different bilateral formations.

On the media front, GL's partnership with **the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)** has been strategic in its work to advance gender equality in and through the media. MISA is a membership organisation with national chapters and offices in 11 countries of the SADC region and a coordinating Regional Secretariat in Namibia that promotes and defends media freedom, pluralism and diversity. GL and MISA jointly conducted the Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS) and subsequently conducted National Action plan workshops in twelve countries of the region on corrective action and have undertaken several more research and advocacy programmes.

Two other partnerships that illustrate how GL has managed to spread its wings and work across Southern Africa are the **Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network and the Media Action Plan (MAP) on HIV/AIDS and Gender**. **GEMSA** was launched at the historic Gender and Media Summit in 2004, and is an umbrella organisation of individual bodies and institutions that seek to "make every voice count, and counting that it does". The formation of this network is at the core of the finding in the organisational evaluation that GL has played a leading role in creating a gender and media movement in the Southern African region. And **MAP** puts GL, along with GEMSA, MISA, the Media Monitoring Project, PANOS-Lusaka, UNAIDS and SAFAIDS squarely in the heart of the media's governance den with its aim to ensure that 80% of all newsrooms have HIV and AIDS and gender policies by 2008.

GL serves as coordinator of the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance and is a member of the global 50/50 campaign. The GL Executive Director is a member of the UN Expert Group on Gender and the Media. In South Africa, GL serves on the Presidential Working Group for Women and is a member of the One in Nine Campaign. GL has a long standing partnership with the City of Johannesburg that includes gender training; planning and running joint women's rights campaigns.

Partnerships are a tricky business. The terrain of "who is who" and "who will do what", not to mention the thorny issue of "who holds the purse", are all contested issues. Partnerships work when the partners know how to define what they bring, and what they want to get out of a partnership. GL has done both, helping it to forge partnerships in the most unlikely, but strategically rewarding places, like its alliance with **the City of Johannesburg**.

This long standing partnership with the City of Johannesburg started with GL's early work on the Sixteen Days of Activism campaign in which each year the City has been a key partner, hosting events, launches, stock taking sessions and in the latter years serving as a hub for the cyber dialogues. In 2004, the City and GL co-hosted a major event to commemorate "Ten Years of Herstory" as part of celebrations of the ten years of democracy in South Africa. In August 2006, at the initiative of the City, and as part of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the women's march against pass laws in South Africa, GL and the City conducted workshops in all eleven regions on developing an action plan to implement Johannesburg's gender policy; including mainstreaming gender in the 2010 World Cup.

The list of partners goes on and on. Each has a place in GL's achievements. GL never produces a publication nor takes a bow without acknowledging its partners. When partnerships become trying, as they often do, it is important to remember: there are no losers in a partnership. Borrowing from the phrase of another movement for equality and justice, it is important to remember that in a partnership, everyone is "lifted as we climb."



Board member Pinkie Mkgwe (right) at a Southern African Protocol Alliance Meeting