

# OVERVIEW AND GOVERNANCE

## CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT



As I write this report on the eve of the 2015 Board meeting, women's rights organisations and activists are again joining hands to protest in front of Nigerian embassies against the abduction of 276 students from a school in Chibok by a fundamentalist Muslim group, Boko Haram. One year later, despite all the technology we now possess, these young women have still not been found. Theirs is a story of modern-day slavery, a damning indictment of the many instruments we now have declaring that women's rights are human rights.

2015 - the deadline for the 28 targets of the SADC Gender Protocol and the Millennium Development Goals - has arrived. Later this year, the United Nations will adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). Goal Five concerns gender equality. The specific targets move beyond MDG 3. Violence Against Women and Girls, the unwaged work of women, women's access to and control of resources feature for the first time. Instead of just calling for women's representation in decision-making, SDG Five calls for women's *effective participation* as well. There is a strong push from the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance, to mainstream gender into all 169 targets of the Protocol. At least 35 of the indicators under discussion concern gender equality.

The Alliance is prodding the governments of the SADC region to reposition for 2030 by strengthening the 2008 regional gender Protocol, and aligning it to the SDGs. In particular, the Alliance is campaigning for an implementation framework that includes specific targets and timeframes. The experience of the last seven years shows the value of targets. For example, in this period the proportion of women in parliament in the region has increased by five percentage points, from 18% to 23%. Yet in the five elections that took place in the region last year (South Africa, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and Namibia) women's representation remained the same in Malawi; declined in South Africa and Botswana; increased marginally in Mozambique and only increased substantially in Namibia (from 26% to 42%) thanks to the zebra

50/50 principle adopted by the ruling South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO). This shows again that women's rights to voice, choice and control cannot be left to chance. Deliberate and purposeful intervention is required.

### Women's rights and human rights



Since the 1993 International Conference on Human Rights in Vienna adopted the mantra "Women's rights are Human Rights" and set into place the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, an extensive body of normative texts has been adopted at international and regional levels to promote gender equality. These include the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which provides a solid, legally binding framework for the realization of a full range of women's rights and the integration of a substantive equality approach at all levels. Strides have indeed been made, and gender dynamics continue to undergo rapid social, political, and economic changes. Women are increasingly represented in almost every facet of social, economic, political, and civil life. In many countries women now have the right to own land and real property, to vote, and to stand for offices previously held only by men. It is generally accepted that the status of women in any country is an important indicator of the well-being of that country. In the words of Nelson Mandela, "As long as women are bound by poverty and... looked down upon, human rights will lack substance."

Despite these advances, progress has been slow and the situation of women is far from satisfactory. Numerous factors, ranging from cultural and political to economic and patriarchal, continue to undermine women's rights. To some extent the collision of three trends-globalization, urbanization, and climate change-has made the challenges facing women more complex and more shared than ever before. New threats such as the trafficking of women, climate change-induced migration, and landlessness have emerged, and old problems such as violence against women have intensified and become more pervasive.

In many parts of the world women still work more than men, yet are paid less, and positions of power in corporations and government remain predominantly male. Women and girls suffer the most poverty and illiteracy. Women are more likely to suffer abuse than men. Young women are trafficked, forced to work as sex slaves, and face the threat of HIV/AIDS infection. Women bear a disproportionately greater burden than men in the consequences of conflicts. There may arguably be more women in leadership positions, but this does not necessarily translate into gender equality or equal, active participation in decision-making.

While many countries have ratified international conventions and regional agreements guaranteeing women equal rights and protection from discrimination, these agreements have not given rise to better living and working conditions for women. The elaboration of declarations promoting basic rights and international accountability is inadequate on its own to ensure that women's rights become a reality. We cannot accomplish the goals of gender equality in health care, education, standards of living, security, and employment until we address the cultural and economic conditions that underpin inequality.

Gender inequality is deeply rooted in economic and social structures and mind sets that have become entrenched over centuries and generations. Until we develop strategies to transform societies by changing the conditions that are midwives to the ills we seek to eradicate, our efforts will continue to yield less than satisfactory results.

The lesson is that as we deal with the symptoms of the crisis-by ensuring that victims of gender violence and discrimination have access to the courts and receive the necessary support, by combating all forms of violence against women, working to make homes, villages, and cities safe for women, ensuring that women's rights are integrated into international and regional human rights protection systems, and ensuring

effective participation of women in decision-making bodies-we must contextualize the struggle in the conditions that produce the symptoms we seek to eradicate.

Economic conditions, poverty, male-dominated political party systems, and cultural norms impede the full participation of women in society and make it difficult for them to realize their full potential. In rural communities all over the world, women struggle with lower productivity, smaller farms, and less access to financing and farm inputs. When they have children the greater burden of bringing up children is on them. In times of illness, women are the primary caregivers and bail out inefficient or non-existent state health facilities. We need to create services that ensure these burdens do not fall only on women. We need to facilitate strategic research and planning to strengthen women's rights to use, control, and transfer land as well as access the economy. Access to Land is vital to the empowerment of rural women.

### **None but ourselves can free our minds**

One of the biggest challenges to gender equality-and indeed to the eradication of any form of discrimination, including racism, continues to be the stereotypes in traditional and popular culture and the media. The battle to change the mind-set is still far from won. Our educational systems bear part of the responsibility for producing mind sets that perpetuate negative attitudes toward women. Educational systems must therefore prioritize changing stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination. We also need to emphasize that gender equality is intrinsic to security and development. Unless women are able to exercise their human rights freely in societies where they live, true development will not take place.

We need to critically examine what has been achieved and what lessons have been learned. How do these inform the areas of research and activism? In the end we cannot accomplish the goals of gender equality without involving local communities and men; they need to be brought on board the struggle for a just and equal society. The goal should always be to ensure that women play a pivotal role in the management of their own affairs. Equality is ultimately a principle of human dignity for both men and women at all levels of political, economic, cultural, and social organization and structure. On our journey to the world of equality that we seek to establish, we need leadership at local, national, and international levels who share in the vision of a transformed society that celebrates inclusiveness, fairness, and the equal worth of men and women.

## GL strategy 2015-2020

GL constantly seeks to adapt to its environment. In 2010 we undertook a visioning exercise. This resulted in GL's Vision 2020, quoted at the beginning of this report. We wove the findings of an institutional evaluation in 2011 into our Strategy 2010 to 2015. In 2014, two donors (Sida and NEPAD) conducted evaluations of GL programme work. DFID conducted

an evaluation of its Programme Partnership Arrangement (PPA) in which GL featured as a case study. This raised important issues concerning the viability of our country offices, and succession planning. In 2015, the GL Board will adopt a 2015 to 2020 strategy, informed by the SDGs and our internal realities. The seven strategic pillars of GL's work remain valid:

1. Strategic positioning	GL will retain ten registered offices in the SADC region and ensure that statutory requirements are met. However, depending on funding, some offices may be scaled down to project sites.
2. Governance	Ensuring that GL has Board Members in all the countries where it has offices and that these exercise their fiduciary responsibilities.
3. Partnerships and networks	GL is formalising all its MOU's with key partners: 100 media houses, 400 councils; over 20 institutional lead agencies in the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance; and a range of media education and development organisations linked to the Gender and Media Diversity Centre (GMDC).
4. Programme of action	Going from breadth to depth through institutional work at local level and in the media. Developing three cross cutting areas of work-gender and climate change, economic justice and diverse gender identities.
5. Results for change	GL has developed sophisticated online M and E systems used to gather a range of data on outputs, outcomes and impact. Buoyed by its DFID PPA grant, GL is linking M and E to knowledge creation and learning through the GMDC, internal learning processes like the learning journey, exploring commercial book options, promoting dialogue and debate, as well as joining several DFID related learning groups.
6. Institutional effectiveness	Country coordinators have been promoted to managers and receiving training; staff, infrastructure and systems are being put into the country offices. Finance and HR systems are being upgraded. The GL website is being moved to a new, dynamic and interactive platform.
7. Sustainability and Diversification	GL has developed a four-part strategy that includes 1) a vigorous fund raising campaign, especially at country level 2) Diversification through GL Enterprises - GL Services; GL Cottages; GL Resources and the Gender Links Training Institute (GTI). 3) Achieving greater value for money through improved procurement practise and 4) Leveraging through smart partnerships and in-kind support.

## Good governance

In January 2013, GL registered its new Memorandum of Incorporation, as required by the Company Act that governs GL in South Africa. This requires that Board members be re-elected every three years. GL has maintained a healthy balance between retaining institutional skills and memory on the Board, and constant renewal to ensure freshness and vigour. Board composition remained stable in 2014.

Exco met three times, and the Board conducted one online discussion on critical issues in the year under review. These covered staff and board matters; renewal and succession planning; oversight of financial matters and successful fundraising at both regional and country level; rationalisation of our diversification portfolio; oversight

of country operations through Country Board Members' reports and the annual board meeting dates for 2015.



GL prevented any possible losses through strictly enforced internal control procedures which include a Zero Tolerance for Corruption Policy covering fraud, bribery and conflict of interest. Non adherence to these policies at GL results in disciplinary action which may include termination of contract/ employment. This is spelt out clearly in the GL Code of Conduct that all staff and consultants sign. Though no financial losses occurred in 2013, GL terminated<sup>i</sup> the employment of two country staff (working with funds other than DFID) for non-compliance with the requirement that all advances be reconciled within 48 work hours of completion of activity or return from

a business trip. The Director of Operations acted immediately on reports from a Country Manager and the HQ internal auditor on these issues. GL immediately recovered affected funds from terminal benefits.

The anti-corruption policy accompanies all GL staff and consultants contracts. As part of the annual work plan, GL schedules orientation/re-orientation sessions on policies, the anti-corruption being one of the most emphasised. Policies are available for ease of reference on the GL website/intranet. GL encourages its partners to adopt and institute the same policy within their own organisations.

For timeous detection of errors, risks and weaknesses, and to support proactive correction, GL now has an internal audit function. This function carries out systematic reviews in all areas of GL work and provides assurance to GL's governing body that all approved systems, policies and processes are adhered to.

Gender Links continues to entrench accountability and transparency in all its practices. GL subscribes to and publishes its information with the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). GL has established a mechanism on its website for partners to raise complaints and feedback. GL also encourages and acts on information from whistle blowers, internally and externally. During the year under review, GL investigated a whistle blowing complaint concerning one of its country offices. Although GL found no evidence of malpractice, the complaint prompted several systems improvements in country offices, including Minimum Standards for Country Office Guidelines and an internal audit.

### Succession planning

2015 is a major year for GL externally and internally. As we count down and reposition for the post 2015 agenda, so we undertake some of the most far-reaching leadership changes at GL. In October 2014, GL's long serving Deputy CEO Kubi Rama stepped down. She continues to be closely associated with GL work. I take this opportunity to thank her for her sterling contribution.

As part of GL's restructuring efforts in anticipation of a lower budget this year and next, Director of

Operations Miso Dhliwayo handed over to our new Head of Finance and Administration, Bhekiwe Ncube. The Board thanks Miso for laying many important foundations for good financial practise at GL, and welcomes Bheki to his crucial tasks.



Kubi Rama (left) and Miso Dhliwayo.

Photo: Gender Links

As I write, we are preparing to conduct interviews for an Executive Director. GL's founding CEO Colleen Lowe Morna will be handing over the management of the NGO to a successor, after a thorough executive search. As part of the exit strategy, Colleen will spend a few years strengthening knowledge management at GL and applying her mind to "turning a wealth of knowledge into wealth" through the GL Services portfolio. Words would not suffice to express this Board's appreciation for Colleen's exemplary hard work and dedication over the last fifteen years, in which she has built this organisation from two to sixty staff in ten countries. The Board will find an appropriate moment and way to do so; in the meanwhile, we look forward to a smooth handing over of the baton; to growth and renewal. As the GL anthem goes: "no looking back as we are carrying on, and shall continue with a sense of pride!" *2015: yes we must, and yes we can!*

**Dr Muna Ndulo**  
Chairperson, May 2014

<sup>i</sup> Termination of employment communication (Aaron and Laurentia)