

# Chapter 2

## United we stand- Coalition building



Members of the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance at the historic 2008 SADC Heads of State summit. PHOTO: COLLEEN LOWE MORNA

This chapter focuses on the Alliance's beginnings, its growth, the development of partnerships and how it managed to maneuver a diversity of views towards consensus.

### **A movement is born: coming together in partnership**

In 2005, the tenth anniversary of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and the 25th anniversary of SADC prompted several regional gender NGOs to reflect on whether women were any closer to achieving gender equality. The anniversaries also planted the seeds of the campaign for the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

As a collective pool of expertise in the areas of media, law, governance, economic justice, women's rights, gender and development, knowledge management, reproductive health rights and HIV and AIDS, the six organisations that voluntarily conducted a review of SADC government's commitment to gender equality, saw the merit of using the opportunity and platform presented by the audit process as a take off point to campaign for a transformed gender equality landscape in Southern Africa.

These organisations had expertise, regional and national 'footprints' essential for the beginnings of a cross border coalition. And, the existing partnership base within each organisation gave a high level of

visibility to the campaign from the outset; something that would have taken longer without this.

Early on in its development, the Alliance recognised that technical skills and expertise alone were not enough to mount a regional campaign that had as its main focus Southern Africa's male-dominated governments.

It needed political presence and muscle too, if it was to get its technical expertise through the right doors. Drawing on the experiences of members such as the Media Watch Organisation-Gender and Media Southern Africa (MWO-GEMSA) organisation in Mauritius and the Malawi NGO Gender Coordinating Network (NGOGCN) both of which had access to the highest political figures in their countries, Alliance members began to nurture and fortify their formal and informal political networks.

As the Alliance rolled-out its campaign, a "culture of learning" became a cornerstone of its work and it sought out other regional networks engaged in campaigns to learn from their experiences and to entice them on board as partners. Organisations such as Skillshare International and Action Aid were invited to early Alliance meetings, and during one of the sessions at its parallel meeting to the 2008 SADC Summit, successful networks/organisations campaigning for women's empowerment on the continent and globally shared their experiences. Networks and organisations such as Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR), African Women Economic Policy Network (AWEAPON), and CIVICUS were represented; some are now Alliance associates.

The growth of the Alliance's membership has been based on a set of agreed criteria. Membership has grown from six in 2005 to 41 in 2009 and the Alliance has been proactive in targeting new members – such as faith-based organisations and those that focus on economic justice - to broaden the profile, geographical reach and expertise as the campaign gathered momentum.



Swedish partners join in. PHOTO: COLLEEN LOWE MORNA

## Membership criteria for joining the Alliance

The full institutional guidelines for the Alliance are provided at **Annex B**. NGOs, CBOs or FBOs that are part of the Alliance must meet the following criteria:

- Must be registered and operating in a SADC country at community, national or regional level.
- Should be working in the field of women's rights and/gender as elaborated in all SADC documents, especially the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development and Addendum on gender based violence, as well as the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.
- Should either be led by women, demonstrate a gender balance particularly at decision making level or be striving to achieve this.
- Like-minded organisations from outside SADC may join as associates.
- Each member shall provide a profile of the organisation and the work it does
- Each member shall provide bi-annual updates on the progress being made in its work related to the Alliance.
- Other African organisations are welcome to be associates of the Alliance but cannot be members.
- Non-African organisations with similar interests that wish to be associates must be constituted in Africa and established by law in that African country. Such associates are expected to contribute financially and otherwise by lending support to a regional or national organisation.
- The members shall ensure that the work of the Alliance is known and supported in their countries and regions.

## Broadening partnerships

Spurred on by Norwegian Church Aid, one of the funders of the campaign, the Alliance reached out and continues to reach out to the Church. One of the most far reaching and best organised networks in Southern Africa, claiming millions of women members,

the Church is also still a bastion of patriarchy and therefore one of the key targets of the campaign. The following vignette by one of the faith-based groups in the Alliance illustrates the links between religion and gender equality.

## Why the Protocol is a key issue for the Church



*The church remains silent on abuse.*  
PHOTO: COLLEEN LOWE MORNA

The Protocol offers a political strategy for changing the attitudes of society towards gender equality. The Church as a key institution in society, is challenged to address itself to the social strategies, and to the analysis upon which they are based, as outlined in the thoroughly researched, documented and extensively discussed SADC Protocol on Gender.

A regional gender audit of churches carried out by Women in Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) in 2008 suggests that (patriarchal) Hebrew culture and tradition is still rife in the attitudes of the clergy. Different cultural contexts with different taboos

around sexuality also make it difficult to discuss gender issues in the Church.

The Church remains silent on harmful rituals such as widow cleansing, early teenage marriages, incest, and other abuses like marital rape, genital mutilation, among others.

There is also a major danger for the Church to divide life into what is spiritual and what is physical, the first being regarded as the Church's concern.

The Church is disturbed by the pain and suffering of women caused by gender inequality. The Church is called to fight oppression; the message of the cross inspires people to make sacrifices.

The time for action towards the Church's transformation for gender equality is now. The Church mother bodies in Zambia have been drawn together into a Task Force to promote Gender Equality; to participate and fight gender based violence within their own institutions and society. The process is fully supported by the Norwegian Church Aid office in Zambia. Such an activity should be promoted in the region in order to reform the Church into a change agent for gender equality.

To keep the Gospel alive, the Church should become aggressive to heal the wounds of oppression; to take advantage of the millions of women engaged in church service; to change the status quo towards a free and peaceful world for women and children.

– Reverend Rosemary Nsofwa, Zambia Council of Churches

## **Making choices- principles, management and operational structures**

From the beginning, the organisation's grouped loosely into a network campaigning for gender equality and women's rights across national boundaries, were clear that they would get far more accomplished if they worked in unison and with one voice.

With this aim in mind, the partnership that developed took the form of a coalition of distinct organisations that were prepared to pool resources (technical, financial, political) in a collaborative way to achieve a common cause. The organisations also agreed central coordination was important, since many had experiences of networks and partnerships that had fallen apart without it. Gender Links (GL) was selected to be the coordinator of the Alliance, a role it continues to play.

How to structure itself also has been an ongoing discussion within the Alliance. In 2006, a Steering Committee was constituted to provide overall leadership, including

fundraising, participation and representation of Alliance members in the coalition's work. This committee was to be elected every two years by members and its role was to "ensure that participation in the work of the Alliance and/or representation of the Alliance in various meetings involves as many members as possible, on a rotational basis and according to expertise and comparative advantage".

At its August 2008 strategy meeting, the Alliance reflected on the anticipated shift in its ways of working once the Protocol was adopted, and began to re-organise and fine tune its structures. The Alliance identified focal contact persons and organisations in each country and formally established six clusters each with a lead organisation as follows:

- Constitutional and legal rights: Women in Law Southern Africa based in Lusaka, Zambia with offices in Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

- Governance: Gender Advocacy Programme, based in Cape Town, South Africa.
- Economic justice: Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre Network (ZWRCN) based in Harare, Zimbabwe.
- Sexual and reproductive rights, HIV and AIDS, Southern Africa AIDS Information and Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS) based in Harare, Zimbabwe and Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Gender violence, GL based in Johannesburg, South Africa with satellite offices in Mauritius and Botswana.
- Media, information and communication: Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network based in Johannesburg, South Africa with the following country chapters: GEMSA-Botswana Media Women's Association (BOMWA) in Botswana; UCOFEM-GEMSA in the DRC; GEMSA Lesotho; Media Watch Organisation (MWO)-GEMSA in Mauritius; Federation for Women and Children Promotion / GEMSA in Madagascar; Gender and Media Malawi (GEMMA); GEMSA Mozambique; GEMSA Namibia; Gender and Media Swaziland (GEMSWA); Gender and Media Tanzania (GEMTAN); GEM Plus in Seychelles; South Africa Gender and Media (SAGEM) ; GEMSA Zambia and Gender and Media Zimbabwe (GEMZI).

Alliance members believe that the post adoption phase of the Protocol campaign requires a much more structured way of working, including developing clear positions on thematic issues, and developing tools for monitoring and tracking trends, changes and developments. This approach also will allow each thematic cluster to 'lead' the debates, discussions and actions, based on a clear frame of reference and plan of action as highlighted in the cluster plans.

The composition of the Steering Committee was also reviewed in August 2008. Due to the launch of the thematic clusters, the cluster leaders and the overall coordinating NGO now constitute the Steering Committee. The tenure of the Steering

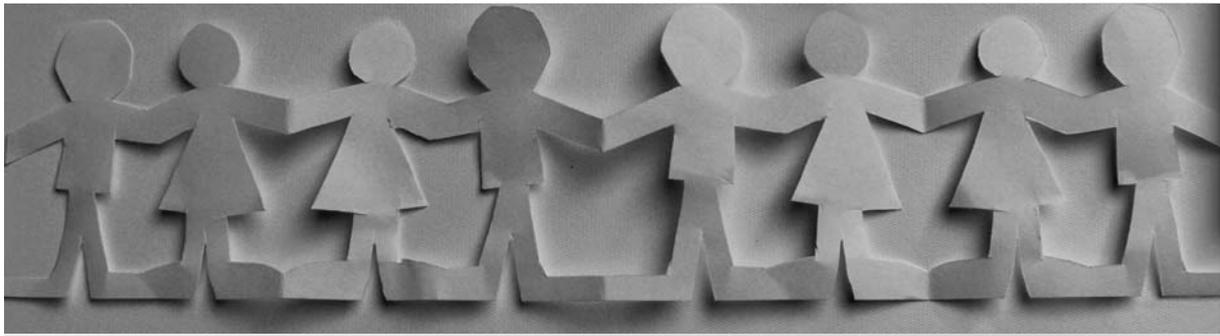
Committee is three years, to coincide with the medium term (3 year) plan developed by the members in January 2008, and its mandate is to manage the identified information, training, strategy development, and monitoring and evaluation activities at regional level which support the campaign.

For example, currently Gender Links, the overall coordinating NGO, has raised resources to produce IEC materials to support the campaign, including simplified versions of the Protocol in French, Portuguese and English, and pamphlets with local content and in the official local languages of SADC (for example Bemba, Creole, Afrikaans).

The lead NGO for a cluster, on the other hand, manages the regional activities on a thematic issue. Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA), which manages the Constitutional and Legal Rights cluster, for example, is responsible for mobilising members and resources to implement priority activities identified for 2009, namely a gender analysis of all SADC constitutions and selected laws, and lobbying for legal and constitutional reforms so that they are aligned to Article 4 - 11 of the Gender Protocol. Each cluster is expected to meet at least once a year and to hold a teleconference every quarter.

The Alliance's campaign, post-adoption of the Protocol in 2008, is guided by the mission that the coalition "promotes and facilitates the creation of gender equity and equality through lobbying and advocacy towards the achievement of the 28 targets of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development by 2015".

In other words, the Alliance's campaign is time bound and specific, and the take off points are the benchmarks and targets in the Protocol. This focus encourages the Alliance's members to mainstream the Protocol issues into their own activities, programmes and agendas for change, so that the cross border campaign takes root and is grounded in national processes, particularly at this ratification stage of the campaign.



### **Building the coalition - what Alliance members say**

“Gender Links (as overall coordinator of the Alliance) recognised the importance of collective negotiation and advocacy and thus consulted the women’s movement in the region, as far as possible, so as create space for collective ownership as well as action and advocacy at a national and region level. It was necessary for coalition building as the movement (women’s movement in the region) was not as strong as it was after the 1995 Beijing conference... The establishment of the SADC Gender Protocol Alliance led to a successful coalition building scenario in the region”.

*Elsie Alexander, Botswana National Focal Point, Member Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF)*

“The Alliance network is interdependent, it is a considerable asset, and with the dedication of each and everyone, we will make a success of our objective by 2015”.

*Ialfine Tracoulat: FPFE Madagascar and Alliance Focal Point*

“For me more than anything else, the Protocol process was a lesson in engaging SADC... Despite the long road that the region travelled towards the signing of the protocol, there is better understanding of these processes, and organisations are better placed to undertake lobbying activities at the national and SADC level”.

*Patience Zirima, Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC)*

“The road to the adoption and signing of the Protocol was not an easy one; a number of hurdles were encountered and some were easy to surmount, while others took a longer time. It was also important that the Alliance as the coordinating body develop strategies that were powerful and engaging to the policy makers to draw their attention to take cognisance of the issues that were presented”.

*Abby Taka Mgugu, Women’s Land and Water Rights in Southern Africa (WLWRSA)*

“For me and the entire nation, elevating, accelerating and advancing the SADC Declaration of Gender and Development to a SADC Protocol on Gender and Development was the biggest challenge. The campaign right from the onset seemed to have been halted, as it was difficult to measure progress on a regular basis. At some point it looked liked all battles had been lost against gender equality and equity in the region, until such time when, Gender Links called many civic groups in the region under the umbrella of the SADC Protocol Alliance... Since then, we have had an aggressive campaign on the Protocol”.

*Sarry Xoagus-Eises, Alliance Focal Point Namibia*

## Managing differences

The growth and maturity of civil society activism for gender equality and women's empowerment in the region that has evolved from the Alliance's Protocol campaign is built on a foundation whereby the Alliance tries to practice what it preaches. Its guiding principles, for example, are "equality, fairness, transparency, linguistic and geographical representation", and in 2008, these were expanded to include "democracy, ethnic and religious diversity, and accountability".

The Alliance translates these principles into methods of working together such as: valuing the voices of the different members, creating space for sharing ideas and constructive dialogue, acknowledging and valuing diversity, and efforts are made in workshops/meetings, to design processes that will ensure effective participation, frankness and experiential learning.

One example of democratic participation within the Alliance is when a member raised serious concerns about whether the Protocol campaign advocated for a set of women's human rights standards that were lower than those that existed in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights Optional Protocol on Women.

The member was asked to put this position in writing and circulate it to all members for their comments, including the SADC Gender Unit. A teleconference of the members and partners (including the SADC Gender Unit) was set up to discuss the issues, with the member who had raised the concern leading the discussion. After hearing several perspectives, a middle ground was reached with a position to continue with the campaign but with a stronger lobby on the areas where the Alliance had not laid emphasis before.

### **We did not always agree!**

From the outset, the process of coming up with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development was a negotiated one between different stakeholders and groups. The art of harmonious negotiation with others was one of the first lessons that members of the SADC Gender Protocol Alliance had to learn in getting the SADC Gender Protocol off the ground.

In the parallel civil society meeting during the 2005 SADC Summit, the newly formed SADC Protocol Alliance pledged to broaden ownership of, and to get support for the elevation of the 1997 Declaration to a protocol, through concerted consultations at national level. Early on in this process, the Alliance met the divergent views of civil society; and, the art of balancing different interests not only of governments, but of those working in the same gender activism landscape, began.

Those who participated in the 2005 meetings strongly supported the elevation of the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender to a protocol, while other gender equality and women's rights organisations in the region believed there was no need for a SADC Protocol after the African Union (AU) had adopted the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. These organisations felt that some groups had started to put pressure for the SADC Protocol without adequately consulting or including them.

As a way forward to ease this tension, the Alliance sought to bring into the earlier drafts of the SADC Protocol the same language used in the AU one. We believed that since the SADC Heads of State had already adopted and started to ratify the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the proposed SADC Protocol should not have weaker language. This would compromise the gains achieved in the AU Protocol and other international instruments like CEDAW.

But we hit another set of tensions, this time with governments. Any attempts to retain some of the language and rights issues in the AU Protocol were resisted by government stakeholders - more especially issues such as marital rape, women using their maiden names after marriage or combining their maiden surnames with those of their husbands.

If we were to see the Protocol adopted by the Heads of States, we had to drop the insistence on strong language and go along with the negotiated process. A strong case however, could be made that the push towards weaker language should not be accepted, because governments had already committed to this language and issues when they signed the AU Protocol. To now demand that the issues be removed and the language changed, was seen as sabotage to the process.

As the Alliance sought to enforce the credibility of the constitutional states in the region by pushing for language and issues in the Protocol to achieve fairness and social and gender justice, the rules of the game in the negotiations with government were no longer fair, and friction entered the process.

This friction was deeply rooted in the power relations endemic to civil society-government relations. At times in a bid to flex their power, governments excluded civil society from some of their processes, leading to a fixation of particular interests by both groups. Political participation had to be forced out of the power holders throughout the process.

The SADC Protocol Alliance members, therefore, had to learn tolerance throughout the negotiations with governments for the Protocol which brought to the fore the collision between those clinging to traditional cultures and those seeking more socially inclusive societies based on gender equality and justice.

The relationship between the Alliance and governments throughout the process was a fragile power relationship where concessions had to be made. Fortunately, in the interest of rendering or providing legitimacy to public institutions, the frictions were ironed out by seeing the process as an opportunity to achieve a balance between diverse interests.

*Matrine Buuku Chuulu , Women and Law Southern Africa (WILSA), Zambia*

Throughout its development, participation has been central to the Alliance's effectiveness and consensus building. And, a regular flow of information and frequent communications facilitated this participatory process.

In an interview, Lois Chingandtu, Executive Director of the Southern Africa AIDS Information and Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS), noted that the regular communications within the Alliance contributed to the success of the Protocol campaign. The Alliance, she said, ensured that there was constant and robust communication between all Alliance members about processes and developments in the campaign. This was done mainly through the use of the new technologies - e-mail, e-mail discussion forums and teleconferencing.

## **Challenges- making the rules of engagement work**

As the Alliance grows, savors its success and prepare for the next hurdle of ratification and implementation of the Protocol, it must grapple with how to keep the momentum, sustain the passion and keep all members on board. All of these challenges bring to the fore issues of internal commitment and accountability within the collective.

The overall coordinating NGO has increasingly felt the pressure of "carrying the load", and the role of the Steering Committee and cluster leaders is now more central to the way the Alliance must work. Also, accountability for delivery in the model rests squarely in members' hands. "We rely on the good faith of members to do what they have committed to do, and follow

through on this," said GL's executive director, Colleen Lowe Morna, at the Alliance's March 2009 strategy meeting. "We cannot be responsible (as the overall coordinator of the Alliance), for going around to each country getting members to deliver. This approach of course has its own short comings, particularly where the commitments have financial implications and may put the reputation of the partnership/organisation at stake when there is no accountability."

Delivery at the national level is shaped by factors outside the Alliance's control. For one thing, gender activism at the national level has many more players, and countries are at different stages of awareness, public discussions and government implementation of regional and international gender equality instruments. So while some Alliance members have succeeded in mainstreaming the Protocol issues into the national women's movement agenda and making it a rallying point for other ongoing activities, others have not.

This unevenness poses challenges of legitimacy and credibility, because the Alliance's operations and rules of engagement are premised on all members grounding the issues at national level through links with their peers, mobilising their respective constituencies on the issues, and feeding back the national temperament to the regional level. This is y critical at this point in the Alliance's growth, because unless there is a strong lobby nationally, there will be no significant movement of the Alliance's ratification and implementation agenda.

Another challenge is how to get members to do what they say they will do, given that the Alliance works on the basis of mutual accountability, with no sanctions for non compliance. This is a sound stance given the guiding principles, but problematic where contractual obligations go beyond Alliance members and involve third parties who require strict compliance with terms and conditions, especially in the case of funding for the Alliance's work. This issue was discussed at the March 2009 strategy meeting, and accountability measures

based on mutual trust were re-emphasised. These will include regular reporting, and increasing the role of the Steering Committee to address some of the leadership and management challenges.

## **Coalition building - what the Alliance did right**

In a SWOT analysis conducted at the March 2009 meeting, members cited the following actions taken by the Alliance as key to the successes achieved:

- Seized an opportunity as a collective to come together and maximise their presence and influence in an unfolding regional process aimed at accelerating gender equality.
- Took steps to create a strong identity and attract like minded organisations and expertise to buy into the process (the name and logo of the Alliance, visibility and impact).
- Built on the momentum of the campaign through directed and targeted membership drive (faith based institutions, gender and economic justice organisations).
- Developed a model to strengthen and grow the Alliance through a negotiated process of defining the mission, vision, principles and operational modalities.
- Used successive meetings and teleconferences to modify operations and strengthen accountability mechanisms
- Clearly defined leadership and management structures, and subsequently decentralized structures for better effectiveness.
- Continuously engaged constructively on challenges, and seized opportunities to develop new partnerships that have added value and brought new perspectives into the Alliance.
- Provided solidarity across borders and shared resources (technical, political, financial) to support the campaign.
- Identified the strengths and comparative advantages of the members and strategically positioned them to maximise their potential.
- Periodic sharing of successes and frustrations through periodic forums for internal reflection, and feedback to each other.

## Lessons learned



- A strong coalition for cross border organising evolves when members consult together to identify the need, frame the issues, and develop a distinct and negotiated identity.
- Continuous reflection on issues of mandate, leadership and management of the coalition are important for building transparency and commitment among the coalition's members.
- A model of operation that is flexible and not heavy on rules allows for creativity and innovation.
- Developing a good working model at regional level does not necessarily translate into a good national model; some time should be invested in developing a national working model that responds to the uniqueness of each situation.
- Accountability mechanisms must be reviewed periodically to take into account the dynamic nature of campaign processes and the roles and responsibilities of the membership.
- Membership criteria should be open and flexible to allow for partners and 'friends of the campaign' that may not want to be fully involved, but who can lend important support to the process, such as political influence.
- A good internal information and communication strategy is essential.
- Mobilising support beyond the national or regional sphere of a campaign is critical for movement building, and creates a stronger collective of voices that can open other doors of influence.
- One of the most important value-added dimensions of coalition building is the pooling and sharing of technical, political and financial resources.
- There is merit in carefully identifying partners so that the coalition reflects a broad representation of organisations that bring the voices and perspectives of a wider constituency of women and men to the campaign.
- Mechanisms for conflict resolution, continuous feedback and sharing are essential; diversity must not only be managed but also harnessed.

## Checklist



- ✓ Does the coalition have strategies and resources to build a shared understanding of the issues and purpose for collection action among its partners?
- ✓ Has space been created for constructively engaging on the campaign's identity, approach, mission, vision and operations?
- ✓ Is there room for periodic review of the fundamental glue (mission, operations) that holds the coalition together?
- ✓ Has the leadership been negotiated from the beginning, and structures for effective leadership debated and agreed upon? Is there space for periodic review?
- ✓ Are there accountability and transparency mechanisms in place? For example, periodic reporting, information on resources shared with all partners?
- ✓ Is there an effective mechanism for conflict management and resolution; are members periodically using it to share diverse views and differing opinions?
- ✓ What cross-border activism strategies are in place for building solidarity among members?
- ✓ Are there tangible benefits for partner organisations involved in the campaign, i.e. capacity building, shared resources, etc.?
- ✓ Are members sufficiently motivated and informed of all events and processes as they unfold? What mechanisms are in place for addressing members' differing information needs, particularly across borders?
- ✓ Are members' talents, influence and power acknowledged and harnessed at every opportunity, that is, are members at the centre of the coalition and driving it?
- ✓ Is there a communications strategy for networking the coalition's members and for supplying a steady flow of information to and from the members?