

# Chapter

# 3

## Right place, right time? Understanding regional processes



*Gender Protocol meeting in Gaborone, Botswana in 2007.*

PHOTO: COLLEEN LOWE MORNA

This chapter examines how the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance manoeuvred through the politics of an inter-governmental organisation like SADC, the creative tensions that emerged and the strategies the Alliance used to move its agenda through SADC processes.

## The right climate

Ever since the SADC Council of Ministers mandated the Secretariat in 1990 to explore the best ways to integrate gender issues into SADC's programme of work<sup>1</sup>, the sub regional body has put in place a number of initiatives and programmes to engage with gender and women's empowerment issues. Some of these initiatives are outlined below.

### SADC's early footsteps toward achieving gender equality

- **1990** Council of Ministers resolve to give priority to issues of gender and development and Eminent Persons commissioned to conduct a situational analysis on women in the region
- **1995** Post-Beijing Conference creates a task force to draft a regional Plan of Action
- **1996** Council of Ministers in Maseru approve that gender issues at the regional level be coordinated by the Secretariat, based in Gaborone, Botswana
- **1997(February)** Council of Ministers in Windhoek adopt a programme for the creation of a policy and institutional framework for the integration of gender issues into SADC
- **1997(August)** First meeting of SADC Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs (and Gender) takes place

A door was opened for the movement towards the SADC Protocol on Gender at the Council of Ministers 1997 Gender Strategy workshop which resolved that:

*SADC establish a policy framework for mainstreaming gender in all its activities by giving gender a specific recognition as an Area of Cooperation under Article 21(3) of the SADC Treaty and Protocol and*

*concluding a protocol on Gender and Development as provided for in Article 22 of the Treaty.*<sup>2</sup>

Further to the initiatives above, SADC's Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), which sets the policies, strategies and priorities for achieving the long-term goals of SADC for deeper regional integration and poverty eradication,<sup>3</sup> identifies gender as one of the crosscutting issues. The six priorities of the SADC Gender Programme as stipulated by the RISDP include: Policy Development and Harmonisation; Gender Mainstreaming; Institutional Strengthening and Capacity Building; Women's Empowerment Programmes including: Women's Human Rights; Women and Girl Child Education; Violence against Women and Children; Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights including HIV and AIDS; Women's Economic Empowerment; Media and Information; and Women in Politics and Decision Making; Communication, Information Sharing and Networking; and Monitoring and Evaluation.<sup>4</sup> Many of the issues included in the Women's Empowerment Programmes formed the basis for the Articles of the new SADC Protocol on Gender.

The Alliance's knowledge of these initiatives, and of the Article providing for a Protocol on Gender in the SADC Treaty, provided the moral and political tools needed to push through a half-open door. Eight years after the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action was seen as more than enough time for SADC to begin to make good on its promise to put in place a binding regional instrument to achieve gender equality and women's human rights.

The regional climate was also pre-disposed to the Alliance's engagement with some 14 countries for a Protocol on Gender through a regional process, because of another sub regional institution's efforts to strengthen the dimensions of gender equality and women's human rights in its work.

The SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF), established officially in 1996, spearheads the participation of Member States'

Parliaments in regional integration of the community and in contributing to a conducive environment of peace, democratic governance, gender equity and the quest for human rights to prevail.<sup>5</sup>

SADC-PF's programme to engender the region's Parliaments is informed by the then Declaration on Gender and Development, and its Plan of Action which was adopted unanimously at the SADC Parliamentary Forum Plenary Assembly in 2001 has set in motion activities to create a "critical mass" of gender-sensitive male and female legislators in the region. Foreword, Strategies for the SADC Parliamentary Forum in the New Millennium – Engendering SADC Parliaments, SADC-PF, 2001.

Legislators are key stakeholders to ensuring that the international and regional commitments signed become the bases for national laws on gender equality and women's human rights. The Alliance's link with this entity through its Secretariat's executive, gave added muscle to the regional impetus to push for a Protocol.

Once knowledgeable of all the regional bodies and SADC entry points that could facilitate the goal of upgrading the 1997 Declaration on Gender and Development to a Protocol, the Alliance also had to build the knowledge of its institutional and individual members. "The early IEC (Information, Education and Communications) materials (produced by the Alliance's coordinating organisation, Gender Links) began to make us aware 'why' a Protocol," said Alliance member Emma Kaliya of Malawi. Once the Alliance's members had the knowledge, they were able to use this to give the "SADC Gender Unit strength to move the agenda".

1. Into the Future – Gender and SADC, A Report of the SADC Gender Strategy Workshop (January 1997) and the Ministerial Workshop on Gender (February 1997)
2. Into the Future – Gender and SADC, A Report of the SADC Gender Strategy Workshop (January 1997) and the Ministerial Workshop on Gender (February 1997)
3. 2006 SADC Consultative Conference: Sub-theme on Cross-Cutting Issues, published by the SADC Secretariat, Botswana
4. <http://www.sadc.int/gender>
5. Strategies for the SADC Parliamentary Forum in the New Millennium – Engendering SADC Parliaments, SADC-PF, 2001
6. Foreword, Strategies for the SADC Parliamentary Forum in the New Millennium – Engendering SADC Parliaments, SADC-PF, 2001

## Developing a relationship with the SADC Gender Unit

Bringing together national organisations working on gender equality and women's human rights issues to work on a common goal regionally is no easy feat. And, engaging a regional grouping of States to think and act in unison to develop and commit to a more binding regional instrument to uplift the legal, political, economic and social status of half of the region's citizens – women – also seemed, at the start of the process, a Herculean task.

But giant footprints are often built by small, steady steps. And in this campaign, one of the first steps was to forge a working relationship with the unit within the SADC secretariat responsible for moving the region's gender equality and women's empowerment agenda.

From the very beginning of the movement towards a Gender Protocol, women civil society groups and the SADC Gender Unit (GU) became instrumental allies to each other.

This relationship between civil society organisations and the SADC Gender Unit began in 2005 when hands were joined in a collaborative effort to put gender equality in the spotlight in the run up to and during the SADC Heads of State Summit in Botswana that year. The SADC GU had plans to put two key commendations before the summit: (a) that the target of women in decision-making is increased from 30% to 50% in line with the African Union's (AU) decision; and (b) to elevate the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development to a protocol.

Consultations between several civil society groups and the SADC GU in early 2005 led to the idea of independent audits of various aspects of the 1997 Declaration, which then could be used to bolster the GU's recommendations to the Heads of State. Thus began a relationship where gender activists became the strategic allies who gave the SADC GU the independent strength and knowledge it needed throughout the Protocol process.



*Head of the SADC Gender Unit Magdeline Mathiba-Madibela (left) and Botswana gender activist Elsie Alexander.*  
*PHOTO: COLLEEN LOWE MORNA*

The SADC GU brought to the process the institutional support of the SADC Secretariat; an understanding of the legal and administrative steps necessary in SADC for developing a protocol and getting it onto the agenda of SADC summits; the mandate to convene at regional level key players such as the ministers responsible for gender and women's affairs and the ministers of justice; as well as a direct link to influential national decision-makers through the SADC structures within national governments' structures. While the Alliance, on the other hand, brought the research, IEC, media, monitoring and evaluation technical expertise; a wealth of knowledge on gender equality and women's human rights across a diverse range of areas; campaign, lobbying and advocacy skills; and a reach to the voices and perspectives of women across the region who often are not seen and heard by governments.

As strategic allies, the Alliance, representing civil society, and the SADC Gender Unit, representing governments, formed a relationship based on mutual cooperation, a clear understanding of what each partner could bring to the process, and on a healthy balancing act of knowing the distinctive roles of each ally - while the SADC Gender Unit works to strengthen the efforts by Member States to achieve gender equality, the Alliance on the other hand, works to keep the SADC Gender Unit as part of the regional bureaucracy, as well as the Member States, accountable to the equality, equity and human rights entitlements of the region's female citizens. The success of this relationship sought to challenge the way of engagement between civil society and state actors and to even reconfigure in terms of civil society engagement specifically.

While state and civil society relations are inherently conflictual, the Alliance recognised that it had to balance its watchdog role against being able to work from within. The Alliance and the SADC GU understood clearly that they had the same goal – the upgrading of the 1997 Declaration to a Protocol. Keeping their eyes together on this prize was far more important than letting tensions become power brawls.

## SADC Taskforce on the Gender Protocol

This symbiosis found its most concrete expression in the formation by the SADC GU of a task force comprising senior officials of the Troika (the past, present and future chair countries of SADC) and two civil society representatives in 2006. The SADC GU approached the Alliance to nominate two members to sit of the Task Team. The Alliance chose Colleen Lowe Morna, Executive Director of GL, then also chair of GEMSA, and Lois Chingandu, Executive Director of SAFAIDS.

Participation on the task team gave the Alliance early on some key insights into how SADC works, and helped the coalition to engage with government representatives in the drafting of the Protocol. The team's terms of reference were as follows:

- Finalise the road map for upgrading the SADC Declaration into a Protocol.
- Plan strategically and advise SADC Secretariat, Member States and Civil Society on the implementation of the Road map.
- Provide support in the resource mobilization efforts to fast track activities at member states and civil society levels.
- Engage in advocacy and lobbying activities with SADC Executive Secretary, Chair of SADC Council of Ministers/ Summit-(Both current & incoming), senior officials and other strategic stakeholders.
- Provide technical input in the drafting of the template / and draft protocol.

- Engage in technical backstopping of all the activities undertaken.
- Provide leadership in soliciting for a consensus and buy in with the members states and other stakeholders, senior officials and Ministers of Gender.
- Spearhead the meeting of Senior Officials and Ministers on the Draft Protocol.
- Report to the rest of the member states and other stakeholders on the progress on a regular basis.

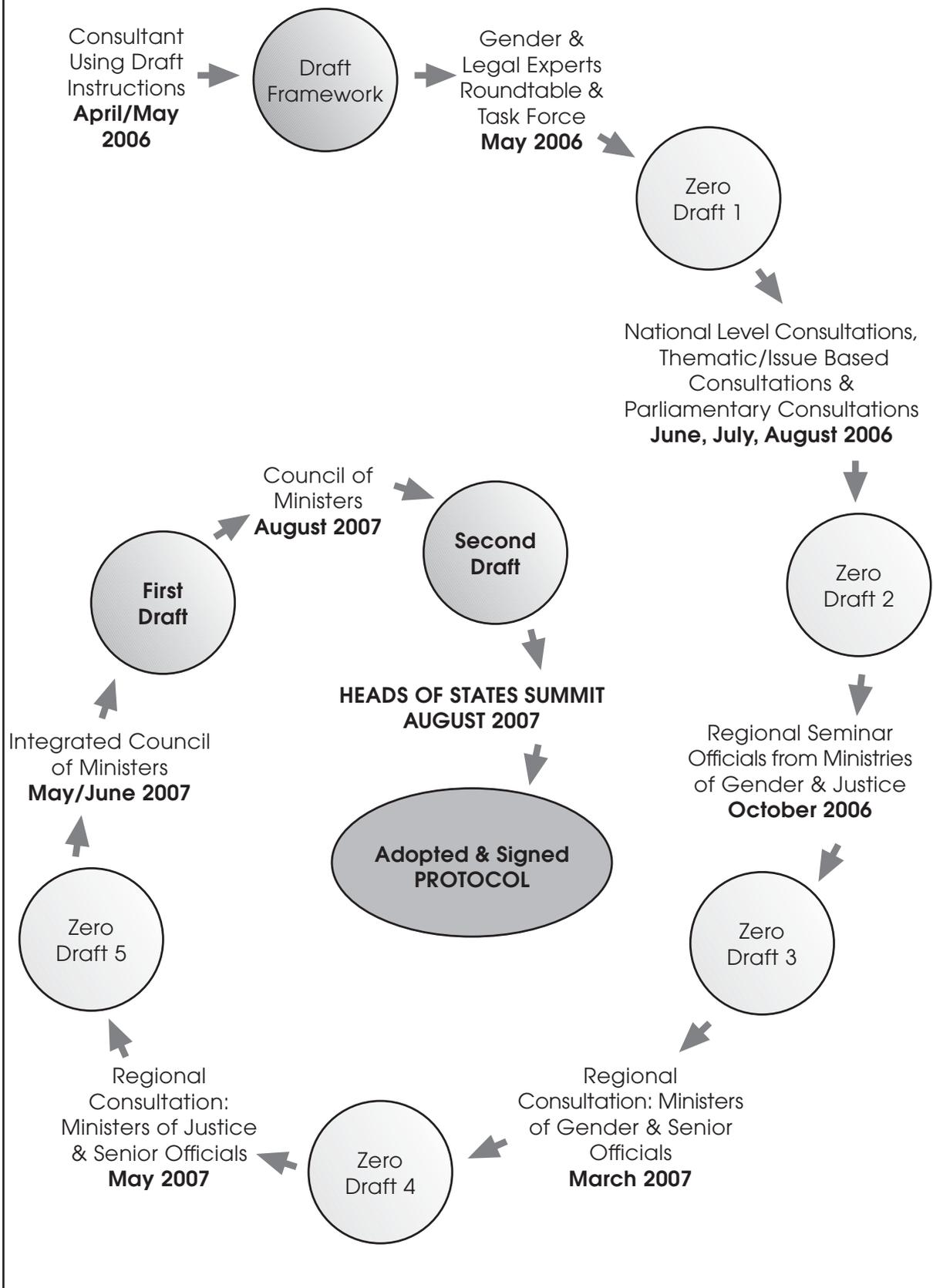
## Understanding the system

Successful lobbying on any issue depends on knowing **who, what, when, where** and **how**. Through its engagement with the SADC Gender Unit and SADC-PF, the Alliance was able to understand and navigate the process of getting a Protocol before the Heads of States to sign.

At its first meeting in Gaborone, Botswana in March 2006, this team drafted the legal drafting notes for the Protocol based on the 2005 audit, which had yielded an overview summary paper called "*Rationale for the Elevation of a Declaration to a Protocol.*" This meeting also mapped out the process for the adoption of the Protocol (see Figure one). In the end, there were two more steps to the process. After the heads of state sent the draft back for further work following the Lusaka summit in August 2007, the SADC GU convened a consultative meeting in Livingstone, Zambia, in December 2009 and a meeting of SADC Gender Ministers in Namibia in April 2008.

What the chart shows however is the complexity of SADC processes and the need to understand them to be able to make a difference. All too often NGOs arrive at inter governmental summits and expect to be able to influence outcomes without realising that the leg work takes place much earlier, and that those with the real power are the senior officials.

**Figure one: Roadmap presented at the First Task Team Meeting in March 2006**



These lessons grew out of early assumptions by the Alliance's members, many of whom were engaging in regional gender activism with SADC for the first time. One of these assumptions, according to Lois Chingandtu of SAfAIDS, was that civil society could control or at least determine the pace of the process, and the style of drafting key documents.

"There were clear differences in the work style between governments and civil society. At each meeting as civil society we expected that this should be a quick job – we review the Protocol and then it should move on to the Heads of States. Meanwhile from the government side, this was only the beginning of the process," said Chingandtu. "So we had a meeting to review what we were calling the first draft. Then we were called back again to another meeting to meet with the Parliamentary drafters from the different countries.

"They were not concerned about the content; they were focusing on the language as these were drafting specialists," Chingandtu recalled. "We went back and forth about language, because as civil society we wanted things direct and they would say that 'this kind of language will not pass with the Heads of States'. You are being too prescriptive...and governments don't want to be prescribed to."

The Alliance's members also soon realised the fallacy of assuming that ministers responsible for gender and women's affairs are the key target group for advocacy and lobbying. The Alliance had to quickly learn how to talk to the unconverted - the men who held the power to move the Protocol forward.

"The changes made to the document (the eight draft of the Protocol) by the Council of Ministers in 2007 also pointed to the challenges of articulating gender issues in a way that is accepted by all," said Patience Zirima of the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC). "What I understood eventually was that Council of Ministers, who meet just before the Summit of Heads of State and Government to review such documents,

can and did change some sections of the draft Protocol, despite it having won the approval of Ministers of Gender and Justice. Council of Ministers made massive cuts in the document, in this case I believe because other key stakeholders in different ministries were not tuned in to the whole process.

"So in the different governments, gender may be delegated to Ministries of Gender or other machineries, but anyone involved in the process believes they have a stake in all issues to do with gender more than with any other issues. At the Senior Officials meeting, we (the Alliance) agreed that one way to get past such problems is to ensure that all parties, including members of the Council of Ministers, need to make an input into the process and that any misunderstandings are removed before presentation to Summit," Zirima said.

Zirima adds that the Alliance also had to confront its assumption that a comprehensive, detailed document on all gender equality and women's human rights issues would sway government officials. More homework was needed on the contents of other regional Protocols. "It was also here (2007 Council of Ministers meeting in Lusaka, Zambia) that the cliché on gender being a cross-cutting issue rang most true. Council of Ministers cross-referenced the Protocol to other existing protocols and documents on Education, Health, HIV and AIDS, Culture and Peace processes, to address these overlaps, thus putting in the forefront the need for us to understand how processes in the region are interlinked," Zirima said.

Besides learning by the old-fashion way of 'trial and error', the Alliance collected information on how SADC works through its participation in informal and formal meetings with the SADC Gender Unit and other SADC structures. The Alliance also kept a steady stream of information flowing between its coordinating structure and the SADC Gender Unit using new media and visits to the SADC Secretariat anytime members of the Alliance's coordinating structure travelled to Botswana on work assignments.



*Sheila Tlou, then minister of health in Botswana, and Magdeline Mathiba-Madibela at the Botswana Protocol meeting. PHOTO: COLLEEN LOWE MORNA*

The SADC Gender Unit was the strategic facilitator in the process towards the Gender Protocol. But it was the Ministers responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs who became not only key stakeholders in the Protocol process at the national level and regionally as the Committee of Ministers responsible for gender in the SADC region, but also champions for the Protocol's adoption as the process progressed. These ministers became the primary lobbyists among their colleagues in the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, the SADC Council of Ministers, and national Cabinets chaired by Heads of States.

Another group of champions evolved from the government representatives on the SADC Taskforce on the Gender Protocol. "The three representatives of government sitting in that task force had already bought into the Protocol...they did not want it to fail," said Chingandtu of SAfAIDS. "They also saw it as their own process and product.

This is something important for the future for success. When the document went back to the country level, they were involved in pushing their own colleagues at the country level to say 'you must support that document because I have seen it, as I sit on the task force. I was involved in drafting that document. It was not a civil society document'."

The Ministers responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs and other allies within government showed just how important insider champions can be to such a process after the 2007 Council of Ministers in Lusaka, Zambia watered-down the Protocol tabled before them into a toothless document by deleting some articles and changing the language in others to make state's compliance almost optional. The Ministers responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs quickly re-grouped and engaged with civil society to salvage their last agreed version of the document, before the 2007 summit, putting the process back on track.

“Because of the close consultations that had occurred leading up to the 2007 summit between governments and women’s human rights and gender equality groups in the Alliance, even governments were concerned with the changes made to the Protocol by the Council of Ministers in Lusaka, because by this point, governments, through the national machineries, had come to own the document,” said Emma Kaliya from Malawi. “So it was not difficult to get the sectoral ministers on board to question what had happened and to pick up the process again.”

Through its understanding of the strategic power of the sectoral ministers in this process and their influence with the secondary stakeholders (Ministers of Justice, officials in Foreign Affairs, etc.), the Alliance was able to tactically focus its lobbying efforts.

For example, at the regional level, the SADC Gender Unit was lobbied to keep the Protocol on the agenda of the SADC ministerial and Heads of States meetings,

and to ensure that the Protocol went through all of the sub regional organisation’s legal processes.

Nationally, the Alliance’s members worked flat out with the national gender machineries to hold national consultations among civil society groups and other governmental departments and ministries working on issues of health, education, economics and finance, HIV and AIDS, gender-based violence, women in politics and decision making, vulnerable groups, agriculture, food security, housing, among others.

Information flows between the national consultations and regional initiatives were consistent giving the Alliance a strong voice and intelligence that enabled it to be proactive and to strategise as a coherent, lobbying force.

“We had constant meetings at the regional and national levels which continuously gave the Alliance information to feed into the process, and this helped us to move with speed,” Kaliya recalled.



Emma Kaliya speaks out. PHOTO: TREVOR DAVIES

## Engaging Regional Processes: What the Alliance Members Say

"The (December 2007) meeting made me realise some of the mistakes we made mostly out of ignorance of the process and a failure to understand the reluctance by societies to accept 'change' that is necessary with women's empowerment, change of attitude and change of behaviour. In the articles I had written around the Protocol, I paid little attention to issues of process that are important if women are to engage effectively with SADC and took for granted that issues raised in the document are acceptable to all. As the region moves towards ratification and implementation, these lessons should not be lost. Women's organisations and key stakeholders now realise the need to understand SADC processes in order to be more effective. There is need for example to understand issues to do with ratification, domestication and then implementation of the Protocol".

*Patience Zirima, Southern African Research and Documentation Centre*

"It was important that the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance developed a position paper right from the beginning on their basic demands in respect to the issues. This became an important reference point as the negotiations progressed and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development evolved through nine drafts to be signed in August 2008. This was a negotiated process with negotiations happening at national level in the consultations and at regional level through the senior officials responsible for gender and women's affairs, the ministers of justice, the council of ministers through to the heads of state".

*Emilia Muchawa, Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association*

"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 and for them to take cognisance of the issues that were presented.

"It was known that most governments in the region paid lip service to women's issues while the practices were different: there was a gap between policy and practice, but the Alliance decided to devote its energy to urge governments and member states to 'walk the talk' and were able to continue its engagements with the policy makers. This process also assisted the two parties to move away from 'talking at one another' to 'talking to one another'. This approach in most cases has proved difficult for civil society which raises issues with the policy makers in a confrontational way!"

*Abby Mgugu, Director Women's Land and Water Rights Southern Africa*

## Managing creative tensions

Re-negotiating roles and mandates between governments and civil society organisations involved in the Alliance was a delicate balancing act throughout the five years of activism for a SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

Because of the structural, financial and human capacity limitations of many of the national machineries on gender in SADC countries, and even in the SADC Gender Unit, the Alliance often found itself not only with the hands and feet to do the

lobbying and legwork needed both regionally and nationally, but also with the research and knowledge capacity to bring strong arguments, insights, data, and the voices and perspectives of women on a variety of issues, to the process. The Alliance also was able to highlight trends and identify new areas and issues that may have fallen off the radar of SADC's regional gender framework and programme, such as the sexual exploitation of women and girls in the region through trafficking which has taken a stronger root in the region since 1997.

While this expertise was a source of strength for the Alliance, it also was a weakness in that one of the greatest lessons of successful lobbying is to know when to push and follow from behind. The holder of knowledge and technical expertise seldom wants to fade into the shadows. But the constant reminder that it is governments who sign Protocols and who drive the Protocol process in a sub regional structure like SADC helped the Alliance to constantly review its role, and to devise strategies to put its energy, passion, and ownership of the Protocol in the right place.

While there were times at the beginning of the process when the Alliance ran ahead with its armoury of information, skills, research capacity and mandate to advocate on behalf of its constituency of women, it quickly learned to slow down, take a back-seat and transfer its speed by putting its knowledge and skills into governments' hands. This posture led some governments to include Alliance members as part of government delegations to key meetings, which provided the Alliance with first-hand, insider information on the Protocol process and red flags along the way.

"We also had to learn the negotiating art of using the process of consensus on each and every point. If we reached consensus on a point, language or issue raised in the Articles that have come to form the Protocol, we moved," Kaliya said. "After the 2007 summit in Lusaka where Council of Ministers changed the document, when we started the negotiations to get back on track, we strategised as an Alliance through consultations on what we could compromise on, what was non-negotiable and what we could live without. We compromised on some issues, but we gained a lot on others." The inclusion of 28 targets in the adopted Protocol with key targets in the areas of decision-making, education, HIV and AIDS, media, information and communications, gender-based violence, among others, was a huge gain for activists who now had the basis to measure governments' performance more uniformly and for strengthening evidence-based advocacy for governments' delivery on and accountability to gender equality and women's human rights.

Overall, the greater good of the Protocol



Building consensus at the 2007 Lusaka Heads of State Summit. PHOTO: COLLEEN LOWE MORNA

was paramount to all players, and therefore agreements and compromises were used to create conditions which enabled peaceful relations to be established between different stakeholders.

But the creative tension between the Alliance and governments was not the only one to be managed. The Alliance soon met resistance from unexpected quarters – the regional civil society sector.

There was little, if almost no recognition of the gender agenda in the SADC regional NGO community, and the Alliance found little space in the parallel meetings organised by the SADC Council on NGOs at SADC Summits. So, the Alliance had to fund raise and organise its own meetings during the summits which provided opportunities to lobby officials, gather intelligence, engage the media and plan its way forward.

Rather than dividing time between trying to convince governments to adopt the Protocol on Gender and persuading regional civil society groups working on human rights, political rights and other issues to swing their support to the Alliance, women’s human rights and gender equality NGOs, with the support of faith-based and HIV and AIDS and reproductive rights groups, forged the campaign on their own.

“We were organised and we pushed an issue in unity. Even those who were not with us admitted that we were highly organised, while at the same time accusing us of high-jacking the SADC space,” Kaliya recalled. “We had an agenda and we needed to fulfil it.”

### **How the Alliance engaged in regional processes**

The Alliance’s three-year campaign for the SADC Protocol on Gender provided fertile ground for many lessons on lobbying and advocacy at the regional level. The campaign also highlighted the power dynamics between governments and civil society, and brought to

the fore the patriarchal attitudes that reside in decision-makers at all levels – one of the unseen, but fundamental deterrents to international and regional instruments moving from paper to implementation and change.

The following is a summary of some of the steps the Alliance took to engage the regional processes of SADC:

- Gained a good grasp of the political context and worked this to its advantage at every possible opportunity.
- Obtained knowledge of the SADC entities, frameworks, policies and programmes on gender equality and women’s human rights that opened the door for the push towards a Protocol on Gender.
- Used this knowledge to engage the SADC Gender Unit and the SADC-PF in discussions and to form strategic regional alliances.
- Strategically engaged the sectoral Ministers responsible for Gender and Women’s Affairs as the key stakeholders.
- Gained representation on a regional Taskforce of Experts on the SADC Protocol
- Used several strategies outlined in the SADC Framework for Advancing Gender Equality in the region to advance the lobbying efforts for a Protocol on Gender
- Lobbied at the national and regional levels, with a strong focus on the national
- Linked the national-regional-national chain of lobbying and consultations through steady information flows to the Alliance members using the new media and teleconferencing
- Provided technical expertise and knowledge to governments on women’s human rights and gender equality issues
- Stayed on message and focused on a women’s rights and gender equality agenda even in the face of a hostile civil society environment at national and regional levels
- The Alliance held parallel meetings while the Heads of States were meeting to strategise around further

- lobbying and advocacy mechanisms.
- An impromptu march outside the Sandton Convention Centre where Heads of States met for the Summit in August 2008. The idea of the march was borne out of the fear that the Protocol might yet again not be signed at the Heads of States Summit meeting; in the same way that it was not signed in Zambia. Several things were planned in addition to the march such as press releases and interviews with key mainstream media. The march is an example of how the Alliance claimed its space at the decision-making table.

## Lessons learned



Alliance members learned a great deal about how inter-governmental processes work and how best to influence these. They learned that on some days they would be welcome and other days they would not. They learned never to make any assumptions or to trust any one of the myriad processes that have to be followed before decisions are taken by regional bodies. But they also learned about their own power and strength, drawn from skills, expertise and sheer persistence. The lessons can be summarised under the two sub-heads, SADC processes and civil society muscle as follows:

### SADC processes

- SADC governments determine the pace of all SADC processes. Only governments had the mandate to decide when and how the process would move, and they had the “authority” to determine the content and language of the final Protocol.
- A relationship with the SADC GU did not guarantee civil society’s entry into all of the SADC processes on the Protocol. The Alliance had to put this condition on the table for the SADC

GU to negotiate with governments for civil society to be present in regional consultative processes on the Protocol.

- Relationships had to be built at the national level with not only the ministries responsible for gender and women’s affairs, but also with justice ministries and with the ministries that housed the SADC desks within countries – all were important to the Protocol moving forward.
- SADC’s commitment to gender equality and women’s rights is only as strong as the commitment and buy-in from the national governments grouped in the regional entity. A strong national activism on the adoption of the Protocol therefore, was more critical to the campaign than support from the regional Secretariat, since the lack of support from several national governments could derail the regional agenda.
- Without an official accredited status with SADC, the Alliance could



*MISA gender expert, Jennifer Mufune, at an Alliance meeting. PHOTO: TREVOR DAVIES*

not be present in the official meetings of the annual SADC summits and had to rely on others to be its eyes, ears and voices among the senior officials and Heads of State.

- It is important to have knowledge of all other regional Protocols and a strategy to address whether or not gender equality and women's rights have been effectively integrated into the language, commitments and actions of these documents.

### **Civil society muscle**

- Civil society organisations working on women's human rights and gender equality issues can leverage their engagement with SADC as an institution and with SADC governments by using their research, communications and lobbying expertise.
- The technical expertise of civil society can motivate and strengthen national machineries to act.
- The political understanding of how governments work and knowledge on regional frameworks, structures, policies and programmes on gender equality and women's human rights can be strategically used to lobby regional entities and national governments for change and transformation.
- Knowing when to push and when to take a back-seat helps to achieve ownership of an issue and process by the key stakeholders who are the drivers of sub regional processes.
- Evidenced based advocacy achieves maximum impact in a campaign aimed at governments.
- It is important to build consensus on what to compromise on, who to speak to and when, and on how to make hard choices on rules of engagement with the state and sub regional bodies.
- A consistent message and a critical mass is critical; states cannot ignore civil society when it has a strong and focused presence.

### **Checklist**



- ✓ Are there champions in the sub regional institutions/ organisations or in high-level political positions at national level that can be valuable and strategic allies in pushing your agenda?
- ✓ Are there key policy instruments and frameworks in the sub regional institutions/organisations that commit the region to advancing gender equality and women's human rights?
- ✓ Has the policy framework for advancing gender equality and women's human rights been translated into a programme of action with specific activities, targets and measurable outcomes?
- ✓ Do the gender equality and women's human rights policies and programmes provide the space and opportunities for engagement between civil society and governments?
- ✓ What sub regional institutions/ organisations are pivotal to advancing the gender equality and women's human rights agenda?
- ✓ Are there structures within the sub regional institutions/organisations tasked with coordination, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the regional programme of action to advance gender equality and women's human rights?
- ✓ Do the structures have the capacity and resources to effectively carry out its mandate?
- ✓ Is it strategically placed within the sub regional institution/organisation to move the gender equality and women's human rights agenda?
- ✓ Is there a precedent of the structure relying on civil society for technical expertise?
- ✓ Who are the key, primary and secondary stakeholders in moving the gender equality and women's human rights agenda through regional processes?
- ✓ How are these stakeholders constituted at the sub regional level? What are their roles at the national level?