

Chapter

7

Tools of the trade- Skills, capacity and environment



Kubi Rama (foreground) working with GEMSA members in Zambia on a press release during the 2007 Heads of State summit. PHOTO: COLLEEN LOWE MORNA

This chapter covers the skills members of the Alliance gained through their participation in the campaign for the Protocol and the various approaches taken to build these skills such as learning by doing and learning from each other.

Building skills and learning on the campaign trail

"I have seen how people can wield an amazing amount of power. This (Alliance) process has resulted in women within SADC claiming their own agency."
Kubi Rama, Deputy Executive Director, Gender Links

The Alliance can be best described as a 'learning' coalition of organisations and individuals. This has translated into a collective that recognises that growth, change and transformation must be informed by reflection, dialogue, skills building, expert inputs and sharing of knowledge. Opportunities have been created to support this approach to learning, and can be categorised into three distinct areas: formal approaches, peer learning and on the job learning.

Skills Building — Formal approaches

Skills-building training within the Alliance emerged from identified needs, the relevance of the skill to the members' work situation, as well as their role in advancing the Alliance's vision. All the formal skills building undertaken by the Alliance so far has been integrated into Alliance meetings.

One of the success stories has been the training on how to engage the media. The focus of this training was on how the power of the media can be harnessed to champion the transformation of gender relations in and through all forms of media. In January 2008 during the Strategy Review Meeting held in Johannesburg, South Africa, Alliance members were trained to appreciate the role of the media and on how to write opinion pieces for use by the media.

In this training, Alliance members developed story ideas to put the Protocol provisions into context and relate them to the lived realities of women and men in SADC. These opinion pieces were published in a news supplement that was produced in time for the April 2008 SADC Poverty Conference held in Mauritius. Below is an extract of an editorial plan developed for the supplement:-

| SADC SUPPLEMENT EDITORIAL PLAN | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| STORY | WRITER | PHOTO |
| Overview | | |
| Gains and key issues | PM | File |
| Imagine what life will be for a seven year old girl that grows up with the Protocol | Nonhlanhla | Girl child |
| Opinion/editorial: SADC should draw on its history of fighting oppression to overcome the forces of culture and tradition that threaten the Protocol. The Protocol is consistent with <i>Ubuntu</i> - a particular Southern African editorial | Rev Nsofwa | SADC flags |
| Constitutional and legal rights | | |
| Comparisons of constitutional provisions in different SADC countries; what difference these have made | Emilia | |
| Disability- why it needs to be explicit in the Protocol | Siza | Disability group in Swaziland that she works with |

| SADC SUPPLEMENT EDITORIAL PLAN | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| STORY | WRITER | PHOTO |
| Constitutional and legal rights (continued) | | |
| Cohabitation is a reality in Southern Africa. If we fail to recognize this we will bury our heads in the sand and many women will be the losers. Why was this dropped, why this needs to be brought back into the Protocol? Interview with a woman in such a relationship who has been dispossessed. | Nyasha | |
| Governance | | |
| With all the different models for rapid increase in women's political participation in SADC there is no excuse for not achieving 50% | Sarry | 50/50 march pics from the region? Lesotho? |
| Women's political participation at the local level- water campaign | Asseny | Water campaign in Tanzania that will be used as example |
| Productive resources and employment | | |
| How gender equality would help to address the food deficits in the SADC region | Abby | Women and farming |
| Credit making a difference to rural women- from the small time to the big time (Portuguese) | Sophia | Group she works with in Moz. |

The methodology for writing the opinion pieces for publications sought to build the research and writing skills of the members, and also provided the impetus for members to develop analytical skills whilst communicating ideas to a potential diverse

group of people. This training exercise also provided space for Alliance members to pool together their expertise, experiences from different countries, and their passion for the cause. It also is not often that gender activists find time to sit, reflect and write.

Writing opinion pieces: learning the ropes

The use of opinion pieces created a learning curve for me and members of the Alliance as the process was able to draw public attention to the issues around the SADC Gender Protocol and made an impact that prompted people to take action. The opinion pieces also created recognition of the process and women's issues at the relevant levels as they were able to capture the attention of local, national and regional leaders, who in most instances paid very little attention to the issues of women despite having acceded to/ratified a number of protocols, treaties and conventions that were meant to promote and protect women's rights.

The opinion pieces I and other Alliance members produced were based on ideas, and supported by facts, which were accurate, as they were based on studies that the members had done. The articles produced made strong arguments in support of the issues that were being discussed and flagged at both the national and regional levels.

The pieces took advantage of the fact that the member states had to mainstream gender into all the activities of their implementation plans. (RISDP 2003). Thus the opinion pieces provided highly valued information that reminded the policy makers, as well as international cooperating partners, of their earlier commitments on the subject of women and gender mainstreaming in the region.

The articles were used as advocacy tools and centred on the issues that both the Alliance and the governments had in common. The opinion pieces did not focus solely on the difference between the women movement and the government in as far as women's rights are concerned, but capitalised on the already agreed principles based on the existing policy frameworks at national levels... 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', while still continuing 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!!!

Because writing an opinion piece does not guarantee publication in the targeted news papers, the other authors and I had to undertake high level research before writing the piece. The level of research undertaken provided facts and figures to show the authenticity of the issues that were being flagged for public consumption and monitored by elected officials... Thus, the engagement processes using the opinion pieces, ensured that the Alliance helped to put the issue on the political agenda!

Abby Taka Mgugu, Director Women's Land and Water Rights Southern Africa (WLWRSA)

Peer learning

Platforms for Alliance members to learn from each other have ensured that the rich organisational and individual experiences form the basis of mutual learning and support throughout the process. These opportunities have arisen in many ways,

including joint implementation of activities, planning together, joint advocacy, direct lobbying of officials, and sharing of valuable information on developments that have implications for the growth of the Alliance and its work.



Namibian Alliance members learn from each other. PHOTO: COLLEEN LOWE MORNA

Learning from peers: What Alliance members say

"I got good experience on working together with GEMSA Mozambique and other organisations, where I learned how to implement (activities), translating (ideas) from theory and practice."

Azarius Muchanga, Christian Council of Mozambique

"Setting up an alliance/coalition for economic justice. Developing advocacy materials for our programmes."

Naome Chimbetete, Zimbabwe Women Resource Centre and Network

"Being empowered to speak confidently about the Protocol to a range of role players – including Ministers."

Keabonye Ntsabane, GEMSA/BOMWA

"I learned how to push for important issues with our governments."

Emma Kaliya, Malawi NGO Coordination Network

"We have learned how to produce our own material as women and to document our knowledge and experiences."

Loveness Jambaya Nyakujarah, Gender Links

"Gender Links has woken me up to a new challenge, the Church and women's rights."

Rev Rosemary Nsofwa, Zambia Council of Churches

Learning on the job

The relevance of all the training/learning opportunities created through the Alliance, is the impact this has on the work members undertake in their own careers and in other activities beyond the Alliance. The feedback from members on how they use the expertise they have learned include using the strategic planning skills and tools in their own organisations, training on gender issues and sharing strategic information on the Protocol with partners. For example, Azarius Muchanga, of the Christian Council of Mozambique noted: "I share what I have learned at church. I sensitise people at church, university and community level. I, together with other organisations, organise some workshops where we address people on gender issues, especially as regards the empowerment of women."

Other feedback from Alliance members on how they apply what they have learned includes sharing strategies on campaign coordination, network

building, research, lobbying and use of media with other organisations "through informal settings... and in workshops, as examples of best practices and lessons others can use to implement effective campaigns", says Patricia Ann Made, ZWRCN and Gender Links Board Member. And, Claire Mathonsi of the Gender Advocacy Programme (GAP) in South Africa, which spearheads the 50/50 campaign, says what she learned "has added value to what I do already".

Alliance members' experiences demonstrate that if the learning opportunities provided are targeted and experiential, this approach builds a reservoir of skills that open new doors for activists to advance an initiative. For example, Emma Kaliya, Chairperson of the Malawi NGO Coordination Network, says: "It is very easy now to push for any agenda with governments and the general population after going through this process which took almost three years."

Lessons learned



- A knowledge building process in the coalition needs to be multifaceted, and periodic review of the needs of the members is essential.
- Innovative ways of learning need to be explored, for example mentoring each other. The feedback from faith-based institutions that are in the Alliance, on the inspiration they have received from their participation, is encouraging. Reverend Nsofwa of the Zambia Council of Churches, for example, speaks of a far reaching process that has begun in her church to address gender equality and women's empowerment in the church, and she credits her exposure to the Alliance with providing guidance in many aspects of the work she has undertaken to train members of the church on gender.
- Linking formal structured training to other processes, such as planning meetings, has proved effective, helped in managing costs, and is designed to link proposed actions to training that has been designed.
- A structured feedback mechanism on the learning within the Alliance needs to be periodically documented, reviewed and the lessons integrated into further training.
- Designing training so that it serves a number of purposes is the key to making a lasting impact. For example the training on engaging with the media produced a concrete product (news supplement), built a good information base on the issues under discussion, built the research skills of the members, provided the base for a good advocacy tool, and paved the way for strengthening the writing skills of the activists involved.

Checklist



- ✓ What informs the training being undertaken for members? Is it designed to produce a number of outcomes (direct and indirect)?
- ✓ What opportunities have been created to utilise the skills and expertise within the membership? What steps have been taken to provide incentives to members who provide expert input and support?
- ✓ Are there ways of linking one training process with another, to ensure that learning building blocks are well established?
- ✓ What follow up support is provided for members once training is complete? Is there a well structured feedback mechanism on how the training has been utilised?
- ✓ How well designed are training opportunities so that there are spaces for peer learning and sharing, including mentoring?
- ✓ What mechanisms exist for replicating good practices in experiential learning?



Learning by doing. PHOTO: COLLEEN LOWE MORNA