

STRATEGIC POSITIONING



Mukayi Makaya makes a point during GL's annual strategy meeting.

Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Formed in March 2001, Gender Links (GL) is a Southern African NGO, headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa that promotes gender equality and justice across the fifteen countries of the region. Described in a 2005 external evaluation as a “small organisation with large footprints” GL has over the years broadened its reach through the establishment of country offices, and strengthened its organisational effectiveness to improve the delivery of results. This section of the report examines what makes Gender Links a truly Southern African organisation, and why this remains relevant. The report also reflects the findings of the recent DFID Programme Partnership Arrangement (PPA) evaluation on how GL has used flexible funding to strengthen itself institutionally. It concludes by summarising ways in which GL is adding value to gender equality work in the SADC region.

What makes GL a SADC organisation

Our vision: Unlike some NGOs that have developed a regional identity as they have grown or to better position themselves

for funding, GL has been a regional organisation from the outset. Our vision is: “Gender Links (GL) is committed to a region in which women and men are able to participate equally in all aspects of public and private life in accordance with the provisions of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development.”

Our geographical spread and governance: GL has ten registered offices in the SADC region, including the HQ, in South Africa. This gives GL a direct foothold in two thirds of the SADC countries, including a Francophone Office in Madagascar and Lusophone Office in Mozambique. GL's ten Board Members come from nine SADC countries. The Chairperson is from Zambia and Deputy Chairperson from Namibia. Other nationalities represented on the Board include Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique, Swaziland, South Africa and Zimbabwe. GL Chair Dr Muna Ndulo explains why GL remains relevant in the regional context:



Revisiting the challenges of governance in Southern Africa



GL Chairperson Dr Muna Ndulo runs a session on good governance at GL.
Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

The Southern Africa region, with the exception of a few countries, is reporting growth in GDP and increased flows of foreign Investment. However, given population growth and the number of people living in poverty the rates of growth averaging at 4% are not enough to dent the unemployment and poverty that exist. To often, the gains made in the GDP are not felt. High levels of inequality, lack of access to safe drinking water, health care, housing and food continue.

Progress in reducing poverty, improving people's lives and putting in place a foundation for more inclusive and sustainable growth has been minimal. Governments have by and large failed to convert the commodity boom and the GDP growth into the realisation of the dreams and promise of liberation and independence. The past cannot be a substitute for not coming up with policies that advance the progress of Africa, end inequality and violence against women. Colonisation was not only the African condition, it occurred in Asia, Canada and Europe as well. Poverty breeds the conditions that incubate crime, and violence against women. It follows that that we cannot hope to eliminate these evils without dealing with the conditions that breed the violence. As Aristotle puts it "poverty is the parent of revolution and crime."

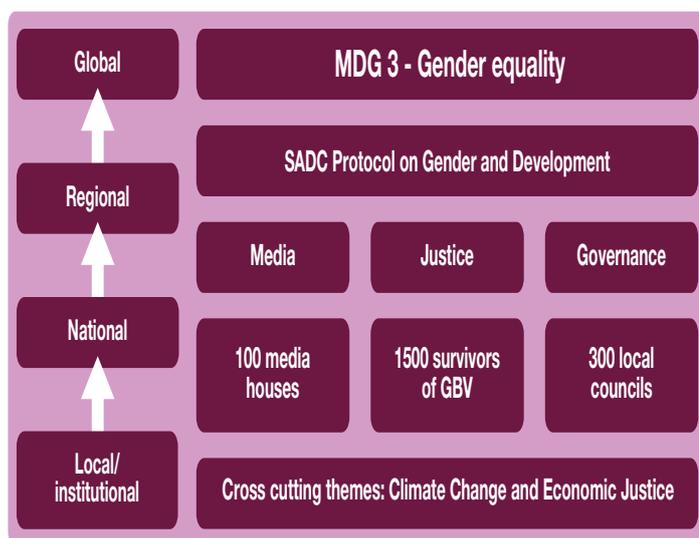
Our Programme of Action: The Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance that co-ordinates civil society activism around the Protocol provides the umbrella for GL's Programme of Action. GL's three core programmes - media, governance and justice - all seek to contribute to the attainment of key SGP targets: equal representation and participation of women in and through the media and in governance; and halving GBV by 2015. In the governance arena GL has chosen to focus on local government as this has been sadly

Social exclusion, income inequality, poverty and vulnerability to economic, social and environmental risks and violence against women can only be addressed by the adoption of policies that transform our societies into ones that respect the dignity of all human beings. Good policies can only come about through competent governance. It is time for Africans to demand merit in leadership and government appointments. No genuine democracy has been established which is not based on meritocracy. Only strengthening political, and economic governance in Southern Africa could significantly contribute to narrowing economic and social inequality.

The task is not an easy one. Mediocrity has not only taken root in all our institutions. In many of our countries political power is concentrated in the presidency. Parliaments are nothing more than talking shops with no discernible capacity to check the Executive. Politicians have no desire to build effective institutions that would promote accountability. Instead, the preoccupation on the modern African politician-accumulation of wealth at all costs is the only goal. There is an insatiable desire by the leadership to control the lives of citizens. The result is collapsed state institutions such as the police, the civil service, the army, prosecution system etc. Collapsed or weak state institutions cannot perform their basic security and developmental functions.

Good governance in the SADC region will depend on the development of political systems which reject authoritarian rule, promote the establishment of strong and accountable institutions, reject unaccountable governments, are inclusive, tolerant and give people a sense of ownership of the political process. Consolidating greater participation in political and economic decision-making requires determined long-term efforts and a huge investment in the development of institutions that can promote greater civil participation. - *Dr Muna Ndulo, Chair of the GL Board.*

neglected in regional gender advocacy efforts. As illustrated in the graphic, as a result of the work that spans all levels, in all or most countries, GL's plan of action (POA) makes strong and effective linkages from local, to national to regional to global level, where the SGP provides a regional road map to Millennium Development Goal Three. The Alliance is now campaigning for a stronger post 2015 SGP, in line with the soon-to-be adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Our partnerships: Described in one evaluation as a “small organisation with large footprints”, GL's work is built on a web of partnerships from local to regional to global level - 144 MOU's spanning all 15 SADC countries. GL provides the Secretariat for two major regional partnerships. The *Gender and Media Diversity Centre (GMDC)* that brings 47 media training institutions and Development Organisations around SADC, and the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance, a “network of networks” that comprises 15 national women's rights and gender justice coalitions, and eleven regional NGOs and interest groups such as Women in Law Southern Africa (WLSA); SAFAIDS, VSO RAISA Southern African HIV and AIDS programme; FOCISSA (a faith based network) etc.

Programme			Geographical location		
	Partners 2014	Partners 2013		Partners 2014	Partners 2013
Media Alliance	85	84	Angola	1	1
Governance	25	25	Botswana	13	12
Justice	4	3	DRC	5	5
Total	144	141	Lesotho	5	4
Type			Madagascar	14	14
Alliance National Focal Networks	15	15	Malawi	8	8
Alliance Theme clusters	11	8	Mauritius	9	8
Interest Groups	9	9	Mozambique	7	7
Local Associations & NGOs	7	7	Namibia	5	5
Councils	12	12	Seychelles	1	1
GMDC	47	46	South Africa	14	14
Media houses	38	38	Swaziland	6	6
Government	5	5	Tanzania	11	11
Total	144	141	Zimbabwe	13	13
			Africa-Kenya	6	6
			International	9	8
			Total	144	141

The annual Protocol@Work Summit and Barometer:

Each year, GL and the Alliance gather evidence of how the SADC Gender Protocol is being used to effect change at all levels and in all sectors - local government, national government, the media, civil society, community and faith-based organisations. These are held at district, national and regional level. In 2014, 1961 women and men participated in the summits in 13 SADC countries and the regional summit held in Johannesburg. The Alliance and its partners gathered 1859 case studies in English, French and Portuguese. These are housed in a database on the Alliance website, fostering peer learning and sharing across the region.

Our budget: GL's budget strongly reflects its regional character. Out of GL's total expenditure of R64 million in 2014, 41% went to regional activities and costs. The remainder is spread across the 15 countries of SADC, consistent with GL's approach of ensuring that

Country	2014 spend -R	Proportion
Total	64413118	100%
Regional	26255808	41%
Zambia	5310821	8%
Botswana	4673774	7%
Mozambique	4551606	7%
Zimbabwe	4522519	7%
Madagascar	3836663	6%
Lesotho	3668926	6%
Mauritius	3070752	5%
South Africa	2524833	4%
Swaziland	2499411	4%
Namibia	2423684	4%
DRC	557861	1%
Tanzania	374393	1%
Angola	142067	0%
Seychelles	0	0%

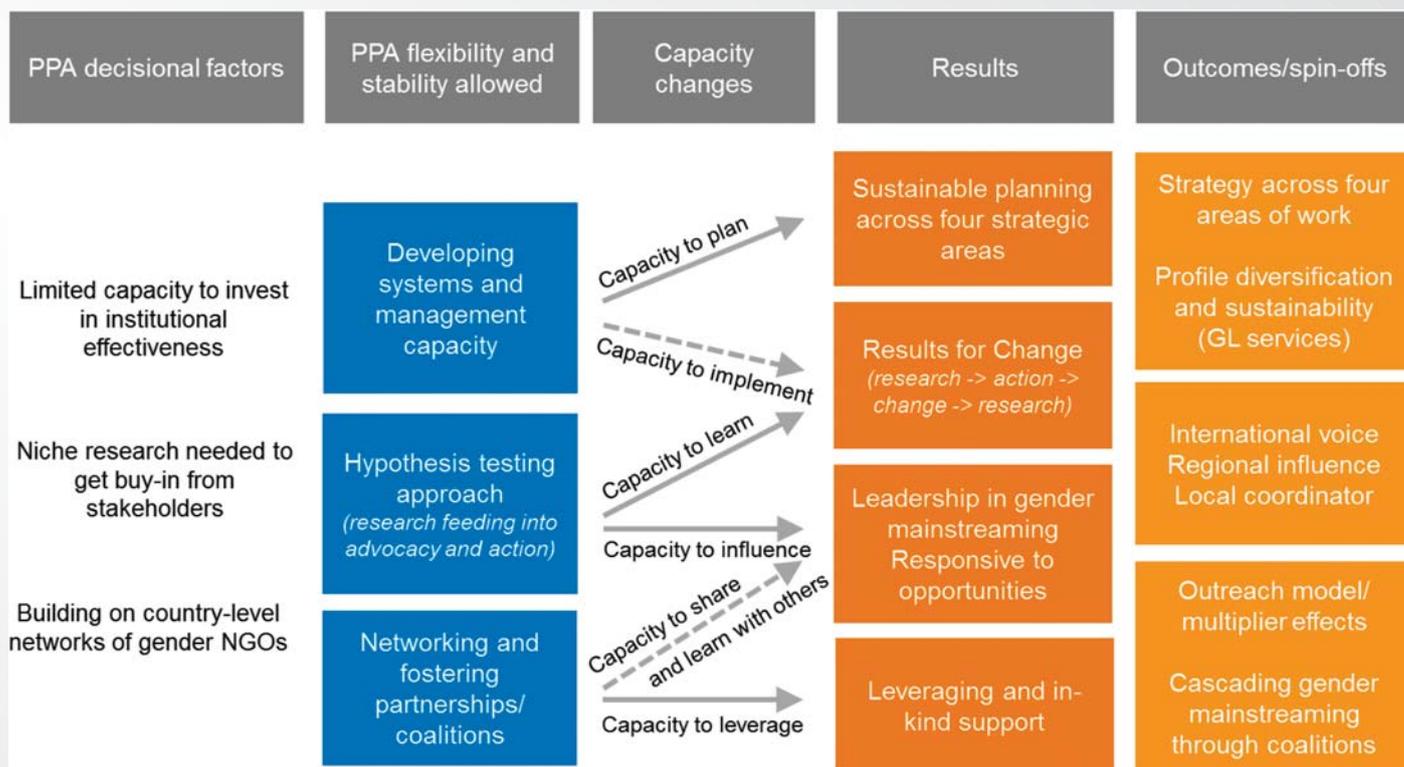
all regional work is rooted in-country. Significantly, although GL is based in South Africa, only 4% of its expenditure went to activities in the host country, ranking SA eighth out of 15 with regard to GL 2014 spend.

How GL has used strategic funding to strengthen its results framework

In 2011, GL became the only Southern based grantee of DFD's strategic and flexible Programme Partnership

Arrangement (PPA) Fund that is being evaluated as it comes to an end in March 2016. While this is a fund level evaluation, Coffey - the evaluators- provided profiles of their findings on the 12 organisations selected as case studies, including GL. Sections of the report quoted below provide useful insights into ways in which GL has used strategic funding to strengthen its institutional base and deliver more effectively on results as we move into the post 2015 era.

Causal chain from Strategic Decisions to Results for Gender Links



We found during the in-depth research that GL's decision around the use of PPA funds was driven by the willingness to reach out to a range of different stakeholders and beneficiaries and to make their work noticeable in a number of networks and platforms (being a local coordinator, with a regional influence and an international voice¹). As a research-based advocacy organisation, GL works with the assumption that advocacy should be supported by recent, specific and rigorous evidence, as a persuasion tool for governments and media stakeholders to commit to gender mainstreaming.

Following the elevation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development into a Protocol (28 targets to be achieved by 2015), GL made a strategic decision in terms of shifting its focus on the implementation of the Protocol. As part of GL's PPA decisional process,

the organisation decided to allocate PPA funds to the development of its systems and management capacity, the development of its research capacity to test specific hypothesis that could enhance gender equality and the establishment of GL as a coalition leader that can rely on partners' capacity to implement the Protocol in the SADC region.

Need to invest in institutional effectiveness - to ensure sustainability. GL's PPA investment decisions included the earmarking of approximately half of PPA funds for institutional effectiveness, "As this is the area that often suffers in project-only funding, and yet, is key to sustainability." GL PPA Annual Report (2013-14) As part of its decision to reach out to a range of different stakeholders, GL deemed that ensuring the sustainability of its work would benefit from investments in planning and management tools that would subsequently enable the organisation to be considered as a 'reliable' actor

in the sector. Income diversification was a key result from GL PPA investment in planning across the organisation's four strategic areas: by firstly ascertaining funds from other sources (including in-kind support and partner contributions), GL could then allocate PPA funds as required between its four programme areas, ensuring they delivered GL's strategy. *"The PPA is our budget glue. Here is what we want to do, here is the budget and here are the gaps. We fill them with PPA funds."* GL CEO interview, December 2014.

Strategic research investments to get buy-in from stakeholders - *to advocate more effectively.* In terms of its strategic positioning, GL decided to use the PPA funding to ascertain its capacity to seize opportunities to work with/ influence governments and its ability to be at the forefront of new thinking in gender mainstreaming. Using a flexible approach to the use of PPA funds, GL was motivated to break new grounds as part of its holistic approach to gender (e.g. Gender and Entrepreneurship work, Gender and Climate Change workⁱⁱ).

Mainstreaming of media and investment in coalition work - *to disseminate and encourage uptake of gender mainstreaming best practices.* Finally, using the media as a cross-cutting tool in its work, GL decided to use the PPA to fund (1) its media work, a hard to fund area although a key area to enhance women's voice and (2) its media usages, for instance to publicize findings from research and to create momentums on online platforms. (Google Hangout sessions, Online forums, Gender Links News Service, videos, etc.).

Major capacity investments included:

- Investment in new staff (finance officers, country managers, media officers), to support country offices and develop GL media work;
- Investment in financial system upgrade, to improve accounting and reporting across the headquarters and the country offices;
- Investment in planning (time and human resources), to design a five year strategy across GL's four areas of work;
- Investment in new country offices (five new countries including a Lusophone office in Mozambique), to expand GL presence and the implementation of the Protocol across the SADC region;
- Investment in the recruitment of a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) manager, to strengthen M&E systems and evaluating the impact of PPA funding;
- Investment in building M&E systems (e.g. online surveys, media self-monitoring tool) and participation in SALP learning group;

- Investment in research capacity (Gender-based violence research, trainingsⁱⁱⁱ and partnership work with Diakonia^{iv}), to ascertain the quality of GL's research outputs and enhance buy-in from local and national governments;
- Investment in capacity building (workshops, trainings and Annual Summit), to train local officials on gender mainstreaming and enable cross-learning among governments and coalition partners (Annual Summit); and
- Investment in media solutions (online platforms, tracking of publication mentions and advocacy results), to support the dissemination of GL work and assess GL's outreach.
- Examples from GL's usage of PPA funding that was not previously clear in Annex G of the 2014 Annual Report includes:
- Investment in Alliance work (meetings, coordination work, trainings), to enhance the capacity of coalition partners and secure in-country support for GL's activities.

The results of these investments were:

- Improved efficiency in terms of financial management and donor reporting;
- Enhanced understanding of M&E and VfM, integrated as part of GL strategic framework 'Results for Change' and leading to evidence-based advocacy;
- Improved ability to respond to research and capacity building opportunities, such as a request from Botswana to conduct the Violence Against Women baseline research or the opportunity to establish a peer learning initiative around costing with governments in the SADC region;
- Stronger message around GL work communicated to governments and partners as a result of strategic planning across its core programmes, resulting in synergy effects across programme areas such as Justice and Governance;
- Increased visibility of GL work through the Alliance and the Annual Summits;
- Improved capacity to track advocacy impacts through the use of media tools;
- Improved capacity to secure additional funds, such as resources allocated by councils for gender work, Netherlands government FLOW fund^v for Governance and Justice work, and selective consultancy work; and
- Increasing recognition of GL work through the use of its PPA-funded tools across the sector; raising GL's profile as an 'unmissable' leader in the SADC region and as an influential actor internationally. *"GL is the over performing child in school that always does its homework ahead of everyone."* External partner interview, December 2014.

GL's value add

- **Strengthening the women's movement:** GL is presently one of the few organisations coordinating the gender sector in the region post Beijing. These coordinating efforts are critical to enhancing VFM, especially given the financial pressure that the sector is under.
- **Strengthening civil society:** The Alliance is the designated voice of the gender sector within the SADC Congress of NGOs (SADC CNGOs). The Alliance works with SADC CNGO in arranging parallel events and advocacy campaigns linked to the SADC Heads of State Summit, such as the HOS coming up in Botswana in August. The Alliance case study has been shared several times as a best practise in working at regional level, understanding and influencing regional processes.
- **Research, evidence and documenting processes:** GL is well-known for its efforts to document and disseminate information and good practise, through nearly 700 events around the region every year; a comprehensive website, and growing presence on social media.
- **Making effective links from the ground through to regional policy level:** GL is using the SADC Gender Protocol as the framework for gender action plans in 400 councils across ten SADC countries. The Centres of Excellence for Gender in Local Government in Southern Africa are forming a regional network that represents a powerful force for advocating change on the ground. Each year GL and the Alliance administer the Citizen Score Card rating government performance on the SADC Gender Protocol to over 8000 citizens. This annual accountability exercise, coupled with the summits, has resulted in the SADC Gender Protocol being one of the best known and applied, SADC instruments.
- **Lighting the way on the post 2015 agenda:** GL through the Alliance is providing critical leadership on the post 2015 processes in the region at a time when there is a leadership vacuum on gender issues (Zimbabwe, as chair, does not have a Women's Ministry; the post of head of the SADC Gender Unit is vacant; Botswana, which will be taking over the chair of SADC, is not yet a signatory to the SADC Gender Protocol).

- **A critical but cooperative relationship with SADC gender ministries that leads to regional policy positions:** GL has managed to walk the tightrope between being critical of governments through the annual Barometer, lobbying and advocacy on critical gender justice issues and working closely with many SADC gender ministries, for example on measuring violence against women. These efforts at national level are then used to influence regional policy positions - for example the statement by SADC gender ministers on measuring VAW in preparation for the 57th CSW: "We, the ministers responsible for gender/women's ministries, commend Member States that have developed comprehensive indicators for measuring the extent, causes, effects and responses to VAW/G and encourage remaining member states to do the same."

"Gender Links showed us that NGOs really have the power - through unity - to ensure the ratification of the Protocol, including popularising it by printing it in different languages for ease of distribution. It is refreshing to see an organisation such as Gender Links taking the lead in such important matters, spearheading the process and ensuring that the Protocol works. With the costing of the Protocol project we can see that Gender Links is on top of the game - 'the time is now!' - *Magdeline Mathiba Madibela, former Head of the SADC Gender Unit.*

"The SADC Council of NGOs (SADC CNGO) recognises the Alliance as a key and strategic partner. SADC CNGO also considers GL as an expert or reference organisation on gender. They are the "architect" on gender." - *Abie Ditlake, SADC CNGO.*

"There are so few active and productive regional women's networks. Gender Links is exemplary in this. It is a pathfinder not only in reaching out, but also in providing all of us with credible information. Do accept our sincere congratulations." *Nikhule nize nikhokhobe!*" - *Mam'Zanele Mbeki.*

"The local government sector will be leading the implementation of the SADC Gender Protocol by 2015 as results of this relationship. Gender Links has the expertise and finances whilst AMICAALL Namibia has the human resources, infrastructure, knowledge of the local government operations and systems." - *AMICAALL Namibia.*

ⁱ As per GL's vision of their organisation.

ⁱⁱ GL is currently leading a campaign for an addendum to the Protocol on Gender and Climate Change, a cross cutting theme in all its programmes.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bond courses on International Aid Transparency (IATI) and Value for Money (VFM).

^{iv} Working with Swedish partner Diakonia to strengthen skills on climate change.

^v ZAR 22 459 937, approximately GBP 1.3m, committed as part of FLOW 1 in 2014.