Key Emerging Challenges and Opportunities:
Summary of DAY 1

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Background: Global Crisis

- Globally, Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and left-leaning organisations are struggling to make their voices heard
- Organised opposition to racism, sexism and other issues are on the decline
- In this context, the crisis the women's movement in this region is not surprising, but still needs to be addressed
- An old movement is meeting with new challenges such as HIV and AIDS

Conceptual Challenges

- <u>Feminism</u>: we do not have the same idea of what feminism is
- This lack of clarity (and in some cases disagreements) leads to the movement being de-politicised; a focus on gender rather than the more transformative elements of women's rights struggles
- <u>Gender Mainstreaming:</u> a good strategy but has lead to another strategy that is confusing and ensuring that men's concerns are taken on board

Conceptual Challenges

- <u>Patriarchy</u>: the face of patriarchy keeps mutating to take on different forms
- Patriarchy is reorganising itself to block the successes of the women's movement
- To address this we need to think about research to look at how patriarchy is reconfiguring itself

Structural and Institutional Barriers

- <u>Pace</u>: how long does it take – is the pace fast enough?
- <u>Space</u>: what is the structural architecture of the institutions that we seek to enter
- Our strategies had tended to over-emphasise the public over the private, and the public space is also very difficult to penetrate
- In addition, in public institutions, there are too few women to make an impact

Structural and Institutional Barriers

- We have seen a reversal of gains that the women's movement has made in the past- e.g. there are fewer women in elected positions
- Women are influencers rather than decision-makers

Socio-political Barriers

- The macro-economic environment is a difficult one: women are getting poorer
- In part, this is because governments that pursue policies that they have little control over and these policies have negative effects on women
- The larger economic strategies and the institutions that govern them such as NEPAD, do not take seriously issues of women and gender seriously

Socio-political Barriers

- The way we have been looking at governance in the region doesn't examine accountability strongly enough
- Governance programmes look critically at the efforts of women rather than all decision-makers (including men)
- There has been an expectation that women should change the environment yet the society is made of both men and women; e.g. in terms of political power
- In broader discussions, it is also clear that the broader discussions around development are 'engendered' – e.g. MDGs

Substantive Issues

- Despite accession to many instruments and legal frameworks, women are still facing substantive inequalities
- We have not tackled the roots of women's oppression, especially regarding sexual and reproductive rights

Substantive issues

- The women's movement does not generate enough knowledge in this region- most of those who write are men, with biased perspectives
- In terms of knowledge production, women are largely written and talked about, and these conversations exclude the people who should be generating this knowledge
- Women should have the capacity and tools to document their experiences and stories

Substantive Issues

- There are very few mechanisms to infuse militancy needed to tackle the difficult issues
- False dichotomy: focusing on our difference makes us forget the points of convergence. For example:
    Rural/urban; public/private, local/Western
- Despite these dichotomies, poverty and AIDS are issues of commonality rather than difference

Substantive Issues

- Slow efforts towards domestication of commitments
- Cooptation of activists who have gone into public institutions as part of gender machinery
- There needs to be support for those who join these institutions to ensure that their efforts have impact
- Women need to have autonomous movements that are not partisan

Opportunities

- The international rules and regulations and frameworks are in place
- All SADC member states have ratified CEDAW
- There is now a home-grown protocol (to the African Charter on Women's Rights) and a number of SADC states have ratified it
- The Brazzaville Declaration of March 2006 – Universal Access
- This symbolises some level of political commitment
- We can use these commitments as lobbying tools
- We have moved from 30% to 50 – 50
- We need to use these instruments to quicken the pace of change

Opportunity

- We have women and leading feminists in senior office
- This have positive benefits: we can support them and exploit this
- The donor environment: there is money to support strengthening gender equality but we need to harness the funds and support
- Young people: they are present and interested and they need to be engaged and taken on board, especially in capacity-building initiatives
- This conference presents an opportunity for us not to lose the space
- Media presents interest and we have the capacity to engage the media