



Integrated, rights-based and developmental policy interventions are key to combating COVID-19 and its impact - Take Urgent Action!

Civil Society Statement on the

40th Ordinary Summit of SADC Heads of State & Government



The 40th Ordinary Summit, held virtually for the first time, occurs at a time of acute global crises, described as an “*existential crossroads involving a pandemic, a deep economic recession, devastating climate change, extreme inequality...*” SADC leaders and Member States, confronting these crises, are urged to reset the fundamentals of regional integration and move speedily towards a community upholding and respecting human rights, advancing and promoting socio-economic justice and building a strong, resilient and self-sufficient economies which serve all people.

We recognise that the inequalities and inequities within and between countries are structural and systemic, particularly gender, race and class based inequalities. It is vital that responding to the pandemic does not exacerbate and worsen these inequalities. The virus does not discriminate; however its impact will be felt disproportionately by the poor and vulnerable in our society. A regional emergency plan of action, supported by a SADC COVID-19 Relief Fund, is required which is integrated, regional/continental, multi-sectoral and multi-faceted in order to arrest the spread of COVID-19, mitigate against its impacts, providing a platform for a new social contract and making us less susceptible to future pandemics.

We urge all Member States to resist using the measures necessary to combat COVID-19 for narrow political gains or to roll-back civil and political space. A rights- and equity-based approach is essential in effectively combating the spread of COVID-19. Restrictions placed on society must be consistent with the UN Economic and Social Council Siracusa principles, based on scientific evidence, through the least restrictive alternative, subject to review and in line with the norms and standards of open and free society, which includes freedom of the press and respect for human dignity. Restrictions which target persons or groups unrelated to the public health necessity during this period must not be allowed by those in authority.

In this regard the entire civil society in SADC expresses deep concern and alarm at events unfolding in Zimbabwe. We call on the government of Zimbabwe to:

- 1) Immediately release all the trade union and CSO activists who are in detention for merely exercising the right to peaceful assembly and association**
- 2) Restore and uphold civic and political rights in accordance with that country's Constitution**
- 3) Commit to credible social and political dialogue with stakeholders and roleplayers to find appropriate responses and shared actions for sustainable recovery**
- 4) Address the justified concerns of health workers to provide protection against their risk of COVID at work**
- 5) Publicly disassociate from attempts at classifying of trade unions and CSOs in Zimbabwe as terrorist organisations**

The denial of basic human rights and freedoms in Zimbabwe is a matter of regional concern for all of us. We extend our full solidarity to the people of Zimbabwe and furthermore call on neighbouring states, particularly South Africa, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Zimbabweans and other non-nationals within their borders.

We reiterate our call to the government and people of South Africa to combat xenophobia and violence against Africans in that country. We urge all roleplayers in South Africa to act in accordance with their Constitution and in the spirit of solidarity which contributed immensely to that country's freedom from Apartheid tyranny.

We further urge SADC to activate the Mediation Reference Group to assist in supporting its response to the on-going instability in parts of Mozambique and to undertake the urgent development of a multi-stakeholder component of the SADC Early Warning Unit, as well as the civil component of the SADC Standby Force. We remind SADC that military interventions will not produce lasting peace or security and that an integrated and holistic response must be developed with the government of Mozambique as well as local stakeholders. In this regard we support a SADC fact-finding mission to Mozambique to engage all stakeholders coordinated with the support of the incoming SADC Chair, President Nyusi.

Our common goal is to mobilise our people, especially women and youth, in a movement against corruption, for improving public accountability and maintaining peace and stability throughout the region and in all spheres of society including food security, climate change, adequate nutrition and social wellbeing, as committed to in the Sustainable Development Goals. Special measures must be developed by Member States to prevent malfeasance, corruption and graft of COVID-19 relief funds and swift action must be taken were these are found to happen.

We further note with concern that decades of Structural Adjustment Programmes and neo-liberal policies on the continent have left us and our key public health services vulnerable and exposed to the COVID-19 pandemic and recurrent epidemics of cholera, typhoid and other infectious diseases due to inadequate investment in preventive health and safe water, sanitation, clean energy and other infrastructures essential for public health; weak testing and tracing capacity and services; inadequate staffing and training in public health; weak local production capacity for medicines, diagnostics and other essential health products and inadequate procurement management systems, weak protection against gender based violence, amongst others. Weak or severely limited community health systems

have also been exposed at this time of crisis, as have the vulnerability of migrant and refugee communities.

We call on Member States to carefully consider and take into account these reasoned calls as they deliberate on the next steps of our journey towards a SADC free, prosperous and inclusive Africa, underpinned by justice for all.

The COVID-19 pandemic gives us an opportunity to build back better, more inclusive, resilient and effective socio-economic systems by:

- Ensuring that measures designed by Member States in response to COVID 19 are rights- and equitybased and prioritise access to comprehensive prevention and care services, placing those most in need at the centre of the respective measures.
- Ensuring that the necessary health resources are pooled and shared between Member States in a coordinated manner to increase and improve local production and procurement of essential health equipment, therapeutics, pharmaceuticals and vaccines.
- Ensuring access to information on cases, and to safe water, soap, face masks and for water, food and income support for those affected by quarantine provisions.
- Ensuring that responses to the catastrophic impacts of COVID-19 should be developed and implemented in consultation with CSOs as well as the most representative employers' and workers' organizations
- Ensuring that all, including migrants and refugees, have access to public health services and dignified treatment, preventing stigmatisation and discrimination.
- Ensuring the provision of adequate Personal protection Equipment (PPE) such as surgical masks, gowns and gloves, and infection protection for all health care professionals and workers, including community health workers.
- Involving communities fully in the planning and roll-out of public health campaigns and measures
- Ensuring effective oversight, transparency and accountability in all loan negotiations and agreements related to financing COVID-19 responses, particularly with multi-lateral and private lending institutions
- Removing barriers that impede sustained access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services during the COVID-19 crisis, including restrictions on movement for people who need critical services such as contraceptives, post abortion care or HIV medicines.
- Ensuring continued access to the full range of planned and budgeted health services, including SRH services for adolescents and young people. Earmark ample resources to prevent stock-outs of essential medicines including anti-retrovirals (ARVs) and make arrangements to counter trade limitations in commodities due to border closures.
- Putting measures in place to detect and deter price-gouging and other profiteering practices by merchants of essential medical goods and pharmaceuticals
- Instituting heightened safety measures for patients in waiting areas at health centres and facilitate provision of non-restricted COVID-19 screening and testing services by persons living with HIV, tuberculosis or silicosis, and other immune-suppressing conditions.

Furthermore we urge SADC and Member State to:

- Put in place a comprehensive social protection and income guarantee schemes to support small scale farmers and the informal economy to avert the very real dangers of a loss of income and falling livelihood opportunity for the already vulnerable and precarious sectors of society. A Universal Basic Income Grant for poor and vulnerable groups, informal workers, migrants and unemployed, is also essential to prevent a human catastrophe.
- Put in place mitigation strategies for both domestic burdens, economic hardship and increased gender based violence that need to be implemented in conjunction with civil society and faith-based organisations.
- Engage effectively with small scale farmers, producers and vendors to tailor support to the sector and that such support needs to extend across the region through SADC wide regulations and funding.
- Special attention must be given to the situation of migrant workers many of whom are particularly vulnerable and continue to be excluded from social protection schemes. Public health measures and health care services for prevention and treatment of Covid19 should be available for all workers and their families, whatever their residence status.
- Ensure food supply is maintained, prioritising procurement from smallholder farmers to local markets, roadside stands and informal shops. Additionally, COVID-19 regulations must consider smallholder farmers and support farm workers to enable them to produce and sell food even when local markets are shut.
- As SADC and the AU, ensure that border closures in the region do not disrupt food value chains, while protecting all those involved against risk of infection. While food production and support are considered essential services, other related restrictions will likely cause backlogs at border posts, which will require actions such as the 'fast lanes' for maize exports from South Africa to Zimbabwe already being implemented.
- Expand and strengthen national and SADC grain reserves to ensure regional food security, particularly in times of crisis; and food processing and storage facilities should be brought closer to farms.
- Ensure access to information particularly to those living in rural communities and take active measures to ensure greater digital democracy by reducing data costs.
- Ensure that all migrants, undocumented nationals and residents are treated fairly during this time of crisis. Governments are urged to treat all within their borders equitably in line with need and not to discriminate in providing support to the entire population.
- Allocate and spend *at least* 20% of their national budgets on education and 15% on health. Governments can raise additional funds to sustainably finance education through domestic and innovative financing for education, and by taking decisive action to prevent revenue lost to [debt and harmful tax incentives](#).
- Ensure education systems are inclusive, equitable and transformative. SADC member states should take firm action to provide quality inclusive education for all children (including those with disabilities) and ensure [no child is left behind](#) by applying a gender and inclusion lens at all stages of planning, budgeting and expenditure.

- Prepare proper infra-structure and support to ensure that schools are provided with the necessary protective materials to keep all learners and teachers safe until such a time that there is no longer a threat of the virus.
- Put support measures in place to prepare learners from working class communities and in particular rural youth for schools reopening.
- Ensure that each rural household has access to electricity, free data and devices to access educational programmes.
- Minimise the inequality in access to education, through transforming the educational system in order for all children to have equal access to quality education.
- Make public the scientific basis for measures taken in the epidemic and set up a public commission in each country and SADC wide involving states, civil society, professionals, domestic private sector and WHO to review the response to COVID to identify lessons learned , improvements and investments to prevent and more effectively respond to any future pandemics.
- As a region form alliances and contest interests that undermine the solidarity of the region by strengthened unity and common action.

In support of these demands Civil Society in SADC hereby commits itself to the following actions:

Continue to build social solidarity and support the local grassroots efforts to raise awareness, respond to the needs of communities and contribute to national and regional level efforts to contain and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on all our communities, particularly women and marginal groups

Develop, strengthen and share knowledge and information with communities, vulnerable and marginalised groups, and create a common portal and repository of local, national and regional efforts to combat COVID-19 in all 16 SADC Member States

Promote sector specific coordination and response efforts focused on migrants, small scale farmers, small and cross border traders, women, youth, children, persons with disabilities and those living with HIV/AIDS, etc to more effectively communicate and engage with these sectors

Promote accountability and transparency in government efforts, particularly in ensuring the protection of human rights and the rule of law

#END#

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