

#CSF2025



2025 CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

"Revitalizing the SADC We Want"
18th - 22nd August | Antananarivo - Madagascar



DECLARATION OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM OF 2025 #CSF2025

18-22 AUGUST 2025

ANTANANARIVO, MADAGASCAR



Southern African Civil Society Forum 2025, 18 – 22 August 2025 – Antananarivo – Madagascar

“Revitalizing the SADC We Want”

1. Executive Summary

The 2025 Civil Society Forum (CSF), held in Antananarivo, served as a critical technical and strategic convening for civil society actors across the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The forum provided a platform to assess regional integration progress, identify persistent challenges, and formulate concrete actions for intervention. Discussions were framed by significant regional advances, including the adoption of key strategies on Democracy and Governance, Economic Integration and Trade, Human Rights and Social Justice, Climate Justice, Energy and Green Development, Sustainability of Civil Society

Under the theme: “**Revitalizing the SADC we Want**”, the CSF convened to critically assess the state of the SADC region, to celebrate resilience, and most importantly, to chart a concrete path of action. This meeting is a direct response to the mounting challenges that threaten the very foundations of the peaceful, prosperous, and integrated SADC.

The CSF2025 recognized that the aspirations of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) remain unfulfilled and acknowledged challenging areas such as discrimination, inequality, shrinking of democratic space, climate catastrophe, and systemic injustice and declared that targeting these challenges requires a response that is equally intersectional, bold, and rooted in the principles of human rights and social justice.

In the discussions on the main pillars of the CSF2025, we, the civil society in the SADC region dedicated ourselves to the critical issues that define our present and will determine our future, as follows:-

1. We call for a radical overhaul of **education systems** to ensure basic learning for all, with a specific, non-negotiable commitment to girls' education and transformative gender education as the bedrock of true equality and development.



2. We call for the putting of **young people** and **children** at the centre of SADC's future, not as beneficiaries but as architects of policy, ensuring their meaningful participation in climate action, advocacy
3. We demand a **regional just energy transition** policy that does not perpetuate the prevailing injustices.
4. We condemn the rising tide of **anti-gender and anti-rights backlash** and committed to building robust, **intersectional movements** to resist it, understanding that our struggles for gender equality, economic justice, and civic space are inextricably linked.
5. We sound the alarm on the crisis of the **shrinking civic space** and **democratic backsliding** across the region, which stifles dissent and undermines our role as essential partners in governance and development.
6. We call for a model of **economic integration** that prioritizes **trade justice** and shared prosperity over corporate profit,
7. We demand **sustainable, equitable management** of our shared **water resources** as a fundamental human right.

CSF 2025 – Guiding Interventions

Transformation of the SADC Parliamentary Forum into a Regional Parliament: This represents a monumental step towards democratic accountability and regional integration. A directly elected or proportionally representative parliament would move SADC from an intergovernmental organisation to a more supranational entity with enhanced legislative and oversight powers, crucial for upholding human rights and ensuring people-centred policies.

- **Adoption of Strategies on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Women, Peace and Security (WPS):** These strategies signify a regional commitment to tackling the endemic crisis of GBV and recognising the pivotal role of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding. They provide a binding framework for harmonised legal frameworks, survivor support services, and the meaningful participation of women in security structures.
- **Approval of the SADC Mechanism for Engagement with Non-State Actors:** This mechanism is a foundational tool for structured and institutionalised dialogue between SADC organs and civil society. It moves engagement from ad-hoc consultations to a predictable, transparent, and impactful process, ensuring that policy formulation is informed by grassroots realities.
- **SADC as a regional block that catalyzes change** - must ensure that social, economic and governance efforts are effectively aligned with the interests of children and young people; put in place mechanisms that enable governments to partner with local organizations and CSOs to strengthen inclusiveness and

accountability in service delivery.

- **Strategic Partnerships** - The presence of strategic and long-term partners, including United Nations agencies including UNICEF, which have a national presence in all SADC member states as well as a strong regional presence.

Significance of Thematic Aspirations:

The aspirations outlined are the core pillars of the "SADC We Want." They shift the regional focus from purely economic growth to **equitable and sustainable development**:

- **Trade at the service of people & Tax justice:** Aim to reverse the extractive nature of trade and illicit financial flows, ensuring wealth generated in the region benefits its citizens through job creation and funded public services.
- **Just energy transition & Food sovereignty:** Address existential threats like climate change and food insecurity by promoting self-sufficiency, renewable energy access, and protecting smallholder farmers.
- **Expanded civic space & Free elections:** Are prerequisites for all other goals, ensuring citizens can hold power accountable without fear.
- **Access to resources & Local climate finance:** Focus on community resilience and equitable management of natural resources.
- **Inclusion of women/youth, LGBTIQ+ people & Respect for human rights:** Are cross-cutting principles essential for legitimate and effective development.

We present this document as the Apex Alliance's actionable agenda, with support from partners spanning the region's civil society landscape, for the revitalization of the **SADC WE WANT**. We call on Member States to carefully consider these reasoned calls as they deliberate on the next steps of our journey, as SADC, towards a free, prosperous and inclusive **SADC** underpinned by social justice for all.

KEY POLICY POSITIONS OF 2025 SOUTHERN AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

1. Girls' Education and Gender Equality

We call on SADC and Member States to:

- ✓ Prioritize the provision of education to vulnerable populations especially rural girls and children with special education needs to mitigate against poverty and their direct dependency on the environment through charcoal burning among others.



- ✓ To build sovereign economies, SADC member states must decolonise education financing by scaling up domestic resource mobilization through progressive taxation, negotiating for debt cancellation, and reducing tax revenue loss through illicit financial flows.
- ✓ Lead in championing the establishment of a UN Framework Convention on Sovereign Debt and finalization of the UN Tax Convention.
- ✓ Go beyond championing debt restructuring by advocating for debt alleviation, especially for countries in the south that are impacted negatively by climate change resulting from carbon emissions by the global north.
- ✓ Lobby for a process of coming up with an alternative development financing bank to the IMF and the World Bank that will serve the interests of developing countries.
- ✓ Demonstrate solidarity for gender and disability inclusion by ensuring that all countries establish either independent ministries or directorates of gender and inclusion.
- ✓ Involve stakeholders (Government, Civil Society and the Community) in the design of education policies in order to ensure the inclusion of everyone in the education system.
- ✓ Allocate at least 20% of national budgets to education, with a specific portion ring-fenced for gender-responsive infrastructure and teacher training.
- ✓ Invest in capacity building and specialization for teachers.
- ✓ Monitor the implementation of laws and policies to ensure that education plans and programs are delivering results

2. Social Protection Systems for Strengthening Human Capital - Child-Centered

We call on SADC and Member States to:

- ✓ Establish and expand universal child grants in all SADC member states.
- ✓ Integrate child protection components into all social protection programmes
- ✓ Establish a Regional Solidarity Fund for Social Protection to support Member States with the greatest financial difficulties, ensuring that no child is left behind due to national budgetary constraints.
- ✓ Strengthen data collection to identify and reach the most marginalised children.
- ✓ Implement national social protection systems in line with international standards that guarantee universal coverage for children.

3. Children and Early Childhood Development (ECD) in SADC

We call on SADC and Member States to:

- ✓ Adopt, ratify and domesticate the SADC Protocol on Children, targeting parliamentarians and relevant ministers.
- ✓ Document and share best practices in ECD service delivery from within the region to guide policy development.
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- ✓ Prioritize Early Childhood Development (ECD) by placing it on the agenda of the SADC Council of Ministers and Heads of State Summit. Specifically, we urge:
- ✓ Include ECD and inclusive education in the SADC Education and Training Protocol, along with an implementation strategy or additional protocol that addresses inclusivity.
- ✓ • Establish ECD directorates at both the SADC Secretariat and national levels to improve leadership, coordination, and integration of ECD into Education Management Information Systems (EMIS).
- ✓ • Allocate 5–10% of national education budgets to ECD and inclusive education, per UNICEF and the Tashkent Declaration recommendations.
- ✓ • Investment in age-appropriate, inclusive ECD infrastructure and facilities.
- ✓ • Recruit and train qualified pre-school, special needs, and inclusive education teachers to meet a 20:1 learner-teacher ratio.
- ✓ • Provide quality initial training and continuous professional development for teachers, emphasizing competency-based, blended, and inclusive pedagogical approaches.
- ✓ Collaborate between Ministries of Education and disaster management departments to ensure ECD learning environments are disaster-resilient, contingency plans are in place, and data systems are established for effective emergency response.

4. Anti-Gender and Anti-Rights Backlash in SADC

Main Challenges:

- ✓ Anti-rights movements are increasingly well-resourced and coordinated across the region, eroding democratic institutions and limiting the freedom of expression, assembly, and association of vulnerable groups.
- ✓ Anti-gender rhetoric is coopting African traditional, religious, and family values to advance conservative agendas and legitimize discriminatory practices.
- ✓ Democratic backsliding and rising moral conservatism disproportionately impact the most vulnerable groups, especially women and youth, and sexual and gender minorities.

We call on SADC and Member States to:

- ✓ Adopt legislative reforms to ensure comprehensive social inclusion without discrimination on any grounds – including sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics.
- ✓ Create coalitions at national and regional level to defend the most vulnerable groups, including women and youth, LGBTIQ+ people, migrants, and sex workers.
- ✓ Develop a regional early-warning and rapid response system to track and counter anti-rights and anti-gender backlash.
- ✓ Support the safe collection of data and the production of scientific knowledge to counter disinformation and promote the rights of vulnerable groups, including LGBTIQ+ people.
- ✓ Strengthen security and legal support for human rights defenders under threat, especially women and LGBTIQ+ people.

5. Economic Integration and Trade Justice

Challenges:

- ✓ Reliance in bilateral than multilateral ways of trading.
- ✓ Weak capacity to negotiate trade agreements
- ✓ Weak institutional capacity to implement the trade agreements.
- ✓ Trade agreements without clear provisions for workers
- ✓ Trade policies that benefit elites rather than creating decent jobs for the youth.
- ✓ Illicit financial flows draining resources;

Recommendations for Action:

- ✓ We strongly call for the reform of national tax authorities and international agreements to curb profit shifting and illicit financial flows.

- ✓ We advocate for trade policies that protect and promote small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and informal cross-border traders, particularly women.
- ✓ Push for binding clauses on labour rights in line with international labour standards in trade agreements.
- ✓ CSOs to continue to monitor and engage with our governments to influence the text of the trade agreements

6. Youth Participation in Climate-Sensitive Policies

Main Challenges:

- ✓ Youth climate movements and organizations are often fragmented, working in silos on similar issues. This dilutes their collective voice and impact at the regional level.
- ✓ Youth are systematically excluded from decision-making spaces on climate and environmental policy.
- ✓ Policies are often top-down without considering intergenerational equity.

Recommendations for Action:

- We advocate for the formalization of youth climate councils at national and local government levels with a direct reporting line to environmental ministries.
- ✓ Promote and fund green entrepreneurship and skills training in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and circular economy models for young people.
- ✓ SADC Members to support youth-led litigation and advocacy for climate justice and the recognition of the right to a clean environment.
- ✓ We call on member states to meaningfully engage youth and young people are involved in the ongoing review processes of the National Climate Action Plans such as the NDCs and National Adaptation Plans and Frameworks being developed towards the Fund Responding to Loss and Damage.
- ✓ Continued capacity building and strengthening for youth and young people as UNFCCC climate change negotiators.

7. Civic Technology Development for Children and Young People

Main Challenges:

- ✓ Infrastructure and Connectivity: Rural areas remain under-connected, limiting access to digital platforms and opportunities.
- ✓ Education systems not equipping youth with digital skills;
- ✓ Donor Dependency - Lack of investment in local tech innovation ecosystems.
- ✓ Contracting foreign innovative technological initiatives;



Call for action:

- ✓ Member states to strengthen TVET & Digital Skills - Expand initiatives like S4YEEE to include civic-tech modules and digital safety in youth training
- ✓ Member states Promote blended learning (digital + in-person) in rural areas.
- ✓ Member states and CSOs to encourage private sector funding and in-kind contributions to sustain donor-backed programmes.
- ✓ Member states to leverage private sector networks to launch innovation challenges or youth civic-tech incubators.
- ✓ Member states to incorporate youth in policymaking via digital participatory tools and forums.
- ✓ CSOs to advocate for government budget line items dedicated to youth civic-tech and employability.
- ✓ CSOs to campaign for public investment in digital infrastructure to ensure affordable and reliable internet access for all, especially in marginalized communities.
- ✓ CSOs lobby governments to adopt and capitalize on local initiatives and innovations

8.Civic Space in Crisis and Democratic Backsliding in the SADC Region

Main Challenges:

- ✓ Restrictive NGO laws; censorship and internet shutdowns; intimidation and violence against journalists and activists; and the use of defamation and cybercrime laws to silence dissent.

We call on SADC and Member States to:

- ✓ Adopt a robust model law to protect civic space, fundamental freedoms-speech, association and protest. No draconian laws targeting civil society organizations.
- ✓ Provide spaces for all-inclusive political dialogue to usher in pluralistic, democratic dispensations.
- ✓ Foster the unconditional and immediate release of victims of political persecution in affected member states.
- ✓ Foster the unconditional return of all exiles facing political persecution in affected member states.
- ✓ Establish a SADC-wide civic space monitor to track legislation and incidents in real-time and issue alerts.
- ✓ Launch strategic litigation to challenge repressive laws in national and regional courts.
- ✓ Intensify advocacy for the ratification and implementation of the African Charter

on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

- ✓ Capacitate CSOs to use available channels and fora to denounce violation of human and labour laws.

9. Water Resource Management in SADC

Main Challenges:

- ✓ Water scarcity is exacerbated by climate change.
- ✓ Pollution of water sources from mining and agriculture.
- ✓ Poor maintenance of water infrastructure and transboundary water conflicts requires intense cooperation.

Recommendations for Action:

- ✓ Advocate for the universal adoption and implementation of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) principles at all levels.
- ✓ Campaign against the pollution of water sources by holding corporations accountable and strengthening environmental regulations.
- ✓ Promote traditional and innovative water conservation practices and technologies, especially in drought-prone areas.
- ✓ Call for community-led management of water resources, investment in climate-resilient infrastructure, and stronger governance of shared river basins.

10. Gender Equality

Despite the lofty commitments, women remain the majority of the poor, the dispossessed, the landless, the jobless, those missing from decision-making those living with HIV and AIDS and experiencing gender violence. Contradictions between Customary and Statutory law result in legal gains being effectively undermined. Research showing that women lack a voice, from the bedroom to the boardroom, is corroborated by media monitoring studies showing that despite comprising over half the population women constitute less than one quarter of the views and voices in the news.

Several other forms of exclusion intersect with gender to compound the misogyny associated with patriarchal norms. These include (but are not limited to) race, class, ethnicity, the rural/urban divide, age, disability, occupation (especially sex work), sexual orientation and gender identity. Women with disabilities, indigenous women and LGBTI persons experience multiple and intersecting layers of discrimination, violence, stigma and exclusion.

We call on SADC member states to:

- ✓ Enshrine gender quality, bodily integrity, voice and choice in all their Constitutions, and to ensure that these Constitutions take precedence over customary law.
- ✓ Domesticate Model Laws on Ending Child Marriages, GBV and Femicide and develop a model law on safe abortion.
- ✓ End gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practices through advocating for more stringent penalties, educating leaders, engaging men as allies, securing funding, implementing the SADC GBV model law, training religious and traditional leaders, media engagement, and supporting re-entry to school for affected girls. Addressing misinformation, TFGBV, and data privacy: Develop SADC-wide legislation criminalizing technology-facilitated gender-based violence, create a regional data protection framework, and ensure transparency and protection for vulnerable groups, including LGBTIQ+ people.
- ✓ Repeal outdated colonial laws that deny citizens their human rights through, among others, criminalizing homosexuality and gender diversity, abortion and sex work.
- ✓ Develop model laws to prevent harmful practices against sexual and gender minorities, including intersex genital mutilation, conversion therapy, and hate speech.
- ✓ Harmonize national laws with international and regional commitments, ensuring consistency between domestic frameworks and instruments such as the Maputo Protocol and Resolutions 275 and 552 of the African Commission of Human and People's Rights.
- ✓ Recognize LGBTIQ+ rights as human rights in SADC frameworks and ensure meaningful participation of LGBTIQ+ activists in decision-making processes.
- ✓ Launch a Gender Inclusivity Barometer, including disaggregated data on LGBTIQ+ populations, to measure how inclusive SADC and civil society spaces are in policy, funding, and participation.
- ✓ Mainstream comprehensive, age-appropriate, and gender-sensitive sexuality education into national school curricula, with adequate teacher training and monitoring.
- ✓ Strengthen rural outreach by ensuring that SRHR services, including maternal health, contraception, and safe abortion where legal, are accessible and affordable in remote areas.
- ✓ Recognize women's care work, remove taxes on sanitary products, promote equal education and economic opportunities with intersectional approaches, adopt and address social and cultural barriers to women's land ownership.
- ✓ Institute quotas for gender responsive procurement.

- ✓ Ensure the equal participation of women and girls in all their diversity in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).
- ✓ Develop a costed SADC Gender and Climate Action Plan and update environmental protocols to ensure gender considerations.
- ✓ Increase women's participation in climate decision-making, build a pool of women negotiators, and advocate for gender-responsive national actions aligned with UN frameworks.
- ✓ Advocate for SADC Countries to adopt Gender National Actions in line with the LIMA work programme on Gender¹. (currently only)
- ✓ Map, track all the available funding mechanisms for climate financing and track how much of these funds are investing in gender responsive priority areas in Climate Action-Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Climate Investment Funds (CIF), The Fund Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF); (ii) other global donor funds, such as the Global Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Fund (GEEREF).
- ✓ Include women in just energy transition discourse, build capacity of women's rights organizations on energy issues, support gender-responsive investments, and enhance community capacity on smart agro-ecology with cross-learning exchanges.
- ✓ Work with the Tana25 group formed during the SaFCNGO Forum to advocate for gender and climate justice.
- ✓ Conduct research and develop action plans on the intersections of between climate change, women's unwaged work and GBV.
- ✓ Mandate gender-responsive ICT policies, establish regional monitoring for press freedom and online safety,
- ✓ Invest in affordable broadband and energy access,
- ✓ Support gender-focused subsidies, and protect journalists' safety, especially women and LGBTIQ+ media workers.
- ✓ Mandate transparency and accountability in how states and corporations handle personal data; create a Regional Data Protection Framework aligned with human rights principles.
- ✓ Conduct and disseminate research on ethical, gender aware use of AI.
- ✓ Increase women's political participation through electoral law reviews and reforms, gender parity in political party constitutions, engaging regional gender ministers and caucuses, and domestication of UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.
- ✓ Enforce quotas calling for 50% women in all areas of decision-making, while creating an enabling and safe environment for women politicians through mentorship, networking,

¹ Currently only Zimbabwe and Zambia have these.

sensitization, addressing Violence Against Women in Politics and supporting women in office.

- ✓ Review and revitalize the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development in line with the post 2030 agenda.

11. Education financing in the SADC

Main Challenges:

- ✓ **Inadequate Public Investment:** Despite the global benchmark of allocating 20% of the national budget or 6% of GDP to education, most SADC member states fall short. Competing priorities, narrow tax bases, and illicit financial flows continue to starve our education systems of essential resources.
- ✓ **Inequitable Distribution of Resources:** Even when funds are allocated, they often do not reach the most marginalized. Disparities between urban and rural schools, a lack of targeted funding for children with disabilities, girls, and those from poor households. This perpetuates inequality and exclusion.
- ✓ **Over-reliance on Household Contributions:** The gap in public funding is being filled by out-of-pocket expenses from parents—for uniforms, books, levies, and unofficial fees. This places a crushing burden on the poorest families, leading to school dropouts, increased child labour, and the criminalization of poverty.

Implications for Our Region:

- ✓ **A Learning Crisis:** Overcrowded classrooms, underqualified and demotivated teachers, and a lack of basic learning materials have resulted in poor learning outcomes.
- ✓ **Deepened Inequality:** Education, which should be the great equalizer, is instead cementing social and economic divides. We risk creating a lost generation.
- ✓ **Threatened Regional Stability and Integration:** A poorly educated youth population is vulnerable to unemployment, political instability, and social ills. This undermines the very goals of regional integration, peace, and shared prosperity outlined in SADC's Vision 2050.

Recommendations for Action:

We urge a paradigm shift from cost-cutting to smart investment. We call on SADC Member States and regional bodies to:

- ✓ **Prioritise Domestic Resource Mobilization:** Commit to and implement the 20% budget/6% GDP target for education. This requires political will to strengthen tax systems, combat illicit financial flows, tack action on debt and reprioritize education in national budgets.

- ✓ The SADC region should enhance domestic resource mobilisation to ensure the availability of resources for public services like education.
- ✓ SADC members states to work together for debt relief and debt cancellation and to support efforts towards a UN convention on Debt
- ✓ Education should continue even during emergencies, education budgets should be protected, and ring fenced and not be diverted to boost military budgets.
- ✓ Optimal financing models to be developed to guide the SADC member states and ensure that the education budgets are ring fenced and are not subject to abuse.
- ✓ The education budgets no matter how small need to be protected against corruption so that the most marginalised are reached.
- ✓ Promote participatory and inclusive budget processes that actively involve women, young people, and representatives of marginalized communities in order to achieve a more equitable allocation of resources that directly support education for all, inclusive learning environments, and gender-sensitive infrastructure.
- ✓ Adopt a transformative approach to gender in education policies and practices in order to challenge and change deeply entrenched gender norms and power imbalances in education systems.
- ✓ No child should be excluded or discriminated against. Guarantee education as a human right without discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, disability or social background.

12. Gender transformative education and Youth engagement in the SADC advocacy

Main Challenges:

- ✓ No Gender-Transformative Curricula: Our systems often stop at "gender-sensitive." We lack curricula that actively challenge harmful stereotypes, promote positive masculinities, teach comprehensive sexuality education, and highlight the contributions of women and LGBTQI+ individuals in history and science.
- ✓ Unsafe Learning Environments: Schools remain sites of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, corporal punishment, and bullying based on SOGIE (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression). This unsafe environment disproportionately affects girls, young women, and gender-nonconforming youth, hindering their participation and learning.
- ✓ Policy-Implementation Gap: SADC has progressive protocols, like the Protocol on Gender and Development. However, national implementation is weak,



underfunded, and lacks robust accountability mechanisms, leaving these transformative commitments on paper.

We call on SADC Member States, Development Partners, and our own civil society to:

- ✓ Revolutionize Curriculum and Pedagogy: Mandate the review and redesign of curricula and teaching materials to be explicitly gender-transformative, inclusive, and relevant to the realities of all young people. This includes integrating comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) at all levels.
- ✓ Invest in Safe Schools: Enforce strict codes of conduct and establish safe, confidential, and youth-friendly reporting mechanisms for all forms of violence in schools.
- ✓ Train teachers and administrators on gender-responsive and inclusive practices.
- ✓ Support the development of youth-led advocacy and ensure their meaningful participation in all stages of policy design, monitoring, and evaluation not just consultation.

15. Prevention and Response to Statelessness within the SADC Region

Main Challenges:

- ✓ Discriminatory Nationality Laws: Several SADC member states still have gender-discriminatory nationality laws that prevent mothers from conferring their nationality on their children on an equal basis with fathers. This creates a high risk of statelessness for children, especially when the father is unknown, stateless, or unable to pass on his nationality.
- ✓ Gaps in Birth Registration and Documentation: Widespread lack of birth registration, particularly among rural, remote, and refugee populations, creates a high risk of statelessness. Without proof of place of birth or parentage, individuals cannot prove their entitlement to a nationality. Administrative barriers and costs further exacerbate this.
- ✓ Failure to Protect Children Born in Territory: Not all SADC countries have fully implemented safeguards in their nationality laws to grant nationality to children born in their territory who would otherwise be stateless. This is a critical protection gap that leaves generations vulnerable.
- ✓ Lack of a Formal Statelessness Determination Procedure: No SADC country has a dedicated, accessible procedure to identify and grant protection to stateless persons. This leaves them in a legal limbo, unable to access education, healthcare,

formal employment, or legal recognition.

We urgently call on SADC Member States and the SADC Secretariat to:

- ✓ Urgently ratify the AU Protocol on Right to Nationality and the eradication of Statelessness, and domesticate its provisions in line with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, particularly the obligation to protect every child's right to a nationality
- ✓ Implement the SADC Road Map on the eradication of statelessness by adopting national action plans with clear timelines, dedicated resources, and meaningful participation of affected communities and civil society.
- ✓ To ensure that all children born in SADC, regardless of the status or circumstances, are registered at birth and guaranteed the right to a nationality, in accordance with regional and international obligations.
- ✓ Ensure Universal Birth Registration: Invest in and strengthen decentralized, accessible, and free birth registration systems, including for refugee and migrant children. This is the first and most crucial step in preventing statelessness.
- ✓ Establish a Regional Framework: Develop and adopt a SADC Regional Action Plan to End Statelessness. This plan should include the establishment of national statelessness determination procedures, the systematic mapping of stateless populations, and a commitment to accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions.

13. Forced Evictions and the Energy Transition

Key Challenges

- ✓ Weak land occupation and ownership rights: Many communities, especially indigenous and rural ones, hold land under customary or informal tenure systems that are not legally recognized by the state. This makes it easy for governments to label them as "illegal occupants" on land designated for mining concessions.
- ✓ Prioritization of Investment Over Human Rights: Governments, eager for foreign direct investment and mining royalties, often fast-track licensing for mining companies without conducting proper community consultations or human rights impact assessments. Economic interests consistently trump community welfare.
- ✓ Inadequate Legal Frameworks and Lack of Enforcement: Even in countries with laws requiring Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and fair compensation, enforcement is weak. Legal systems are often inaccessible to communities, and corruption allows companies to operate with impunity.

Recommendations for Action For Civil Society Organizations

- ✓ **Document, Publicize, and Advocate:** Systematically document cases of forced evictions, including testimonies, photos, and videos. Use this evidence for targeted advocacy at national, regional (SADC Tribunal, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights), and international (UN special rapporteurs) levels to name and shame perpetrators.
- ✓ **Community Paralegal and Legal Empowerment:** Train community members on their legal rights, national laws, and international frameworks (e.g., the African Charter, UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights). Establish community-based paralegal networks to help residents navigate legal systems and challenge evictions in court.
- ✓ **Strengthen Community Organizing and Solidarity Networks:** Facilitate the formation of strong, representative community committees to negotiate with companies and governments.
- ✓ **Build cross-border solidarity networks** between communities facing similar threats from mining across SADC to share strategies and amplify their voice.
- ✓ **Call for urgent review and update** of existing renewable energy policies, such as the Renewable Energy Action Plan and Electricity Act, across Southern African Countries. These policies should create a structured framework that empowers local stakeholders.
- ✓ **We call for tax incentives, reduced bureaucratic hurdles and increased access** to grants and subsidies must be provided to support local communities access to energy sources.

For SADC Member States to:

- ✓ **Legally Recognize and Formalize Customary Land Rights:** Reform national land and mineral laws to legally recognize customary land ownership and communal tenure. This gives communities a stronger legal standing to negotiate and refuse displacement.
- ✓ **Strengthen and Enforce Regulatory Frameworks:** Ratify and domesticate regional and international human rights instruments. Mandate robust, independent HIAs and EIAs for all mining projects. Establish clear, transparent, and accessible grievance mechanisms for communities to seek redress for harms caused by mining operations.

- ✓ Ensure Mandatory Fair Compensation and Livelihood Restoration: Enact laws that guarantee that compensation is not just monetary but includes in-kind restitution and a comprehensive livelihood restoration plan.

14. Women Political Participation (WPP) in SADC

SADC has emerged as a global leader in advancing Women's Political Participation (WPP). It stands as the only region in the world to have consistently increased women's representation across all indicators of political leadership from parliamentary and cabinet positions to local government and party structures. This remarkable achievement is largely due to the region's steadfast commitment to the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which set an ambitious 50% target. While celebrating this progress, the journey towards full and equal participation continues.

We call on member states to support Interventions to Increase Women's Participation Further in order to:

- ✓ Strengthen and Enforce Quota Laws: Move beyond voluntary party quotas to enact and strictly enforce legislated quotas (e.g., Frelimo (50%) and OTM-CS (30%) Constitutions in Mozambique) for all elected and appointed positions.
- ✓ Combat Violence Against Women in Politics: Enact specific laws criminalizing including online abuse and intimidation and establish robust protection systems and reporting mechanisms for victims.
- ✓ Provide Targeted Campaign Financing: Establish public funds and incentives that offer direct financial support, resources, and training to women candidates to level the playing field against male opponents.
- ✓ Engage Civil Society, Traditional and Religious Leaders: Partner with influential community leaders to challenge harmful patriarchal norms and publicly advocate for women's right to lead.
- ✓ Launch Strategic Media Campaigns: Work with media houses to eliminate gender bias in coverage, promote positive images of women leaders, and hold media accountable for sexist reporting.

15. Climate Action and Just Energy Transition

For SADC, Climate Action and Just Energy Transition are inseparable from the goals of poverty eradication, economic development, and energy security. The path is fraught with challenges, but the cost of inaction continued climate vulnerability, energy poverty,

and economic

By leveraging its abundant renewable resources, pursuing a people-centered approach, and securing international support as a matter of climate justice, SADC can not only overcome its challenges but can emerge as a global leader in building a sustainable and equitable green economy.

We urge SADC members states to:

- ✓ Develop National Just Energy Transition Investment Plans
- ✓ Mainstream Climate Action into National Policy
- ✓ Strengthen Regional Cooperation (SADC Secretariat Role)
- ✓ Accelerate Deployment of Renewable Energy.

16. Strategies for Surviving the Retrenchment of Global Support

The civil society landscape in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region is increasingly constrained by shrinking civic space, characterized by government-imposed restrictions, harassment of activists, and a notable retrenchment in global donor support. Funding challenges are acute, with donor priorities shifting away from advocacy toward service delivery, leaving CSOs in the region, where over 70% rely on external aid, struggling to sustain operations amid economic pressures and reduced global support. This has led to innovative survival strategies, such as local resource mobilization and digital advocacy, but overall, it threatens CSOs' ability to address issues like human rights, identity and gender rights, gender-based violence, and sustainable development.

As CSO we commit to collaborate in exploring strategies that help us to:

- ✓ Move away from relying solely on support from development partners
- ✓ Actively pursue avenues of home-grown funding, and explore non-traditional funding sources, including social enterprise initiatives.
- ✓ Create collaborative networks and strategic partnerships to scale the impact of the work through shared resources.
- ✓ Ensure inclusion of historically marginalized and underfunded communities, such as intersex and transgender people, in resource mobilization, support, as well as inclusive policy development.

To further address these challenges and bolster civil society's role in regional development, we call on SADC member states to:

GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR
EDUCATION
www.campaignforeducation.org

 **GENDER LINKS**
FOR EQUALITY AND JUSTICE

CRINSA
Child Rights Network for Southern Africa

Other
THE OTHER FOUNDATION

 **TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL**
the global coalition against corruption

 **SOUTHERN AFRICA TRUST**
INFLUENCING POLICIES TO END POVERTY

 **WaterAid**

 **Wosso**

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL 

- ✓ Protect and expand the civic space by holding each other accountable to repeal or amend restrictive legislation targeting CSOs, such as those limiting foreign funding or imposing burdensome registration requirements, to align with international human rights standards.
- ✓ Enhance Domestic and Regional Funding Mechanisms by developing sustainable funding models and allocating national budgets focusing on advocacy and community-based initiatives to replace shifting donor priorities.
- ✓ Foster Partnerships and Capacity Building by Strengthening operational partnerships between SADC, member states, and CSOs through formalized inclusion in regional bodies, such as joint monitoring of civic space under SADC's regional integration frameworks.
- ✓ Promote Inclusive Monitoring and Accountability and Adopt regional protocols for transparent donor engagement and CSO sustainability, including annual audits of funding impacts.

17. Inclusive Service Delivery in Southern Africa – Overcoming Corruption and Discrimination in Education and Health

The civil society landscape in the SADC region is marked by active engagement in advocating for equitable access to essential services, amid persistent challenges of corruption and discrimination that hinder inclusive delivery in education and health sectors. This was underscored in a side session at the 2025 Civil Society Forum (#CSF2025) in Antananarivo, Madagascar, hosted by Transparency International Zimbabwe and Transparency International Initiative Madagascar, focusing on "Overcoming Corruption and Discrimination in Education and Health." The session highlighted how corruption exacerbates inequalities, particularly for women, girls, and marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and rural populations. According to Transparency International's reports, corruption in these sectors manifests through bribes, illicit fees, nepotism, and sextortion, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups who rely heavily on public services.

Policy Recommendations for SADC Member States

The following policy recommendations aim to promote inclusive, corruption-free education and health services. As civil society actors in the region we call on SADC Member States to:

- ✓ Prioritise universal access to quality, affordable, and inclusive health services, while strengthening governance and combating corruption in the health sector to ensure transparent, efficient, and equitable allocation of resources.
- ✓ Scale up investments in inclusive, quality education by addressing inequalities and eliminating barriers such as discrimination and corruption in resource allocation,



while strengthening financing, skills development, and digital learning to advance SDG 4 and unlock the region's social and economic potential.

- ✓ Take bold, coordinated action to eliminate corruption in public service delivery and foster an enabling environment where health and education systems serve all citizens equitably, without discrimination.
- ✓ Strengthen Legal and Institutional Frameworks by enacting comprehensive anti-discrimination and anti-corruption legislation that explicitly addresses extortion and discriminatory practices in service delivery, aligning with international standards like the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and AU Agenda 2063.
- ✓ Establish collaborative mechanisms between anti-corruption agencies, human rights institutions, and equality bodies, including mandatory training on ethics and gender-sensitive approaches to reduce impunity
- ✓ Enhance Transparency and Accountability in Resource Management by adopting digitalized procurement, registration, and budgeting processes to minimize opportunities for bribery and diversion of resources.
- ✓ Promote Inclusive Reporting and Access Mechanisms by developing safe, confidential, and gender-sensitive reporting channels for corruption victims, including localized Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres, to address underreporting due to stigma.
- ✓ Foster Regional Collaboration and Data-Driven Monitoring through SADC frameworks, establish learning fora to share best practices on anti-corruption in service delivery, integrating CSO input for regional protocols on gender-responsive policies.
- ✓ Collect disaggregated data on corruption's impacts on marginalized groups to inform interventions, and condition international aid on robust anti-corruption safeguards, addressing illicit flows that drain resources.

18. Inclusive Service Delivery in Southern Africa – Overcoming

Corruption and Discrimination in Education and Health

The civil society landscape in the SADC region is characterized by robust advocacy for strengthened regional justice mechanisms to address escalating crises, conflicts, and accountability gaps, as highlighted in sessions at the SADC Civil Society Forum. Drawing from discussions at the 2025 Civil Society Forum in Madagascar under the theme "Revitalizing the SADC We Want," and parallel calls from coalitions like the



Coalition for an Effective SADC Tribunal, civil society organizations (CSOs) emphasize the urgent need to revive institutions such as the suspended SADC Tribunal, dissolved in 2011 after rulings against member states like Zimbabwe, to ensure access to justice for individuals amid widespread human rights violations. Key points from these sessions include the Tribunal's potential to handle cross-border issues like human trafficking, election rigging, and violence against women and children, which exacerbate regional instability. Conflicts in SADC countries, such as the insurgency in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado (with armed groups destroying schools, hospitals, and churches in February 2024) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, where the Allied Democratic Forces killed over 200 civilians in June 2024 and gender-based violence cases doubled in Q1 2024 compared to Q1 2023), have displaced 7.3 million people in DRC alone and contributed to relentless civilian suffering. In Zimbabwe, over 160 opposition members, journalists, and activists were arrested ahead of the August 2024 SADC Summit, while in Eswatini, impunity persists for extrajudicial killings from 2021-2024, including the 2023 murder of human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko. Additionally, a severe El Niño-induced drought affected 68 million people (17% of the region's population) needing aid in August 2024, compounding economic and social rights violations.

Policy Recommendations for SADC Member States:

Civil Society in the SADC region to advocate for inclusive transitional justice to heal societal divisions, call on SADC Member States to:

- ✓ Revive and Strengthen the SADC Tribunal by reinstating the Tribunal with full jurisdiction for individual and non-state actor access, reversing the 2014 revised Protocol that limits it to state disputes, to align with the SADC Treaty's principles of human rights, democracy, and public participation.
- ✓ Integrate Transitional Justice into PCRD Frameworks by amending SADC's draft PCRD framework to fully incorporate the 2019 African Union Transitional Justice Policy, emphasizing African norms, traditional justice systems, and redress for post-authoritarian legacies such as systemic corruption and dissent suppression in some member states, as well as Include provisions for mental health and psychosocial support for survivors.
- ✓ Enhance Accountability and Monitoring Mechanisms by establishing inclusive, decentralized oversight bodies in collaboration with the African Union, involving CSOs in monitoring human rights violations, with mandatory reporting on incidents like arbitrary arrests and impunity in some member states.
- ✓ Develop actionable national implementation guidelines for PCRD, including economic and social rights protections against land dispossession and poverty, to



prevent violence recurrence and foster societal healing.

- ✓ Foster Regional Collaboration and CSO Engagement by promoting hybrid peacemaking models that merge regional norms with accountability, as seen in calls for SADC to prioritize human security in responses to crises like Mozambique's insurgency.
- ✓ Encourage member states to facilitate CSO participation in summits and policy dialogues, ensuring proactive measures against violations such as enforced disappearances and election-related repression, to build resilience and equitable justice across borders.
- ✓ Hold each accountable and foster solidarity in the region's foreign policy positions, ensuring not only declarations of positions on global conflicts, but those in the SADC region and on the African Continent.

End