



**SADC Call for Action on Food  
Security in the  
Context of COVID-19**

August 2020

# SADC Call for Action on Food Security in the Context of COVID-19

Statement to the 40th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community

## **Preamble**

We the undersigned organisations, women's movements, networks representing rural communities, small scale farmers, environment protection, land and agrarian reform community activists and researchers are concerned about the deepening food insecurity in the region, exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We call upon governments of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to urgently step up efforts end hunger and to ensure that the right to food is guaranteed to every community and household across the region regardless of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, class or immigration status.

We welcome the incoming SADC Chair, His Excellency President Filipe Nyusi of the Republic of Mozambique and urge him to put the question of food security and nutrition at the top of his agenda of as Chair, including championing an agenda to rethink and transform our food systems; supporting special initiatives to strengthen cooperation between all stakeholders to urgently act on the burning question of food insecurity in the region.

We further call upon SADC to ensure and accelerate implementation of key regional protocols, declarations, decisions, policies, plans, and strategies that have a bearing on agriculture and food and nutrition security for the most vulnerable in our region. These include the SADC Charter of Fundamental Social Rights (2003), The SADC Gender Protocol (2013), the Dar-es-Salaam Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security (2004), SADC Regional Agriculture Policy (2014), SADC Regional Agricultural Investment Plan (2017-2022), the Africa Union Malabo Declaration (2014) and the SADC Food and Nutrition Security Strategy 2015-2025.

We commend the decisions of the 2011 SADC Council of Ministers and successive ones, to operationalise Article 5, 16A and 23 of the SADC Treaty and 'bring SADC to the people' through the establishment of a SADC institutional mechanism for engagement with Non-State Actors. However, we are concerned that nine years since this landmark decision, and notwithstanding several studies and rounds of consultations, we still do not have a final decision on formalising an inclusive and recognised mechanism for SADC's engagement with Citizens. Yet it is evident that there has never been any change globally that has taken place without the impulses of citizens. It is time to acknowledge the efforts and contributions of citizens and their formations across the region and in our national contexts. Any successful COVID19 food security recovery plan requires the collective efforts of citizens and governments; SADC can play a critical role in consolidating those efforts.

We emphasise the critical need for SADC Member States to ratify the 2018 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other People Working in Rural Areas which recognises *“the past, present and future contributions of peasants and other people working in rural areas in all regions of the world to development and to conserving and improving biodiversity, which constitute the basis of food and agricultural production throughout the world, and their contribution in ensuring the right to adequate food and food security which are fundamental to attaining the internationally agreed development goals, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”*

### **Context**

The SADC Regional Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic calls upon Member States to ensure supply chain access with consideration of gender, and, for those operations exporting within the region, continent and overseas, ensuring continued access to and cooperation from officials at ports, rail and border crossings so they can maintain their sales. We are however, concerned that the recommendations do not provide for support to the pivotal role played by smallholder, family and subsistence producers in the region's food security.

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the prevalence of acute food insecurity in the SADC region was at 30.6% (one in three of SADC's population of over 345 million); moderate and acute food insecurity together affected over half (53.6%) of the SADC's population. This figure is up from 45.3% in 2014 showing a consistent and rapid deterioration in food security over the past five years. According to SADC's own food security vulnerability analysis in 2019, the prevalence of hunger was 7.4% higher than during the severe El Niño-induced drought of 2016/17. Significant increases in the number of people food insecure were recorded in Zambia (144%), Zimbabwe (128%), Eswatini (90%), Mozambique (85%) and DRC (80%).

### **Recommendations**

We firmly believe that the challenges COVID19 has presented can be reversed, with political will and commitment to an overhaul of economic models that continue to fail to deliver prosperity for the citizens. Regional intergovernmental coordination and democratised engagement with community and social actors in the neglected sectors of rural development, land and natural resource rights, agrarian reform, small scale and subsistence farmers and fishers, farmworkers and landless/land-poor communities is of priority. Prioritising the goal of food security for all in the region would further engender equality, strengthen human rights, create opportunities across the food value chain for rural and urban youth and break the endemic cycle of poverty, hunger and precarity that the region is locked into. Furthermore, promoting food security and nutrition is critical in safeguarding the development of the region's children, who suffer from unacceptable levels of stunting and wasting. In order to respond to the immediate socio-economic hardships caused by the COVID19 global pandemic, as well as to build a new foundation for sustainable, resilient, broad-based socio-economic recovery, we believe that SADC needs an updated framework to accelerate commitments to end hunger by 2025. To this end, we call upon SADC governments to prioritise enhanced regional cooperation and radically expand people centred rights based public investment in the following areas:

### **Strengthen the ecosystem of support for smallholder, family and subsistence farmers**

- Centre agricultural policies on supporting the smallholder, family and subsistence farming sector, with particular attention to the use of climate resilient agro-ecology methods and strengthening indigenous farming systems of knowledge.
- Expand access to land for smallholder, family and subsistence farming with particular focus on millions of households that currently have less than two hectares of farmland.
- Support land redistribution programmes with inputs, extension services and markets particularly for women and young people.
- Establish comprehensive public financial support programmes for rural small scale, family and subsistence farmers.
- Engage local businesses to support small scale, family and subsistence farming in strengthening local food value chains that are accessible, equitable and gender inclusive and environmentally friendly;
- Protect and promote the rights and participation of rural women food producers across the value chain, acknowledging that women provide over 50% of the agricultural labour force--frequently as unpaid contributing family workers--and are key in subsistence and household food production that improves nutritional outcomes in communities.
- Regulate the growing and excessive control of agribusiness transnational corporations in the region's food systems and value chains, including in input provision (seeds, fertilisers), and crack down on exploitative and anticompetitive business practices that dispossess and squeeze out local small farmers and markets

### **Invest in the role of women in food security**

- Put women and girls at the centre of the recovery efforts in the agricultural sector particularly by supporting rural women and women farmers' organisations and involving them in policy dialogue and decision making at national and regional levels.
- Adopt gender based right to food and nutrition framework in all future reviews of SADC food and nutrition policies and strategies.
- Adopt a participatory approach involving rural women in the development of mitigation and adaptation strategies to the effects of climate change.
- Eliminate gender, racial and ethnicity and class discriminations in the allocation of agricultural resources particularly land, through special programmes for female headed households which in some countries are over half of all households.
- Eliminate discrimination, violence and harassment of women cross border informal traders; acknowledge the undervalued under-estimated role of women informal cross border traders in food security and intra-regional trade through dedicated support measures.
- Reduce and redistribute the unjust burden of unpaid labour placed on women in food provisioning, particularly through public services such as energy, water, sanitation; innovative labour-saving technologies and social protection programmes.
- Food security policies should adopt concepts from feminist political ecology that strive for a balance between care and social reproduction, replenishment of natural resources and food and nutrition security.

### **Involve youth in agriculture**

- Establish specific and structured policy and support programmes for rural youth to provide access to means of production such as land loans, quality seeds and technical support.
- Expand free vocational training and education in agriculture, sustainable food production, natural resource management and related areas, particularly targeting the large proportion (20-30%) of young people currently not in employment, education or training (NEETs).
- Support the development of youth farming organisations and cooperatives, with particular focus on young women; support the establishment of a SADC wide networks and exchanges for youth in agriculture.
- Expand and improve free and low-cost internet connectivity services to rural areas to support access to information and markets, training and farming programmes for young rural women and men, and sharing best practices on farming innovations to fight climate change.
- Create job funds at the national levels to encourage local businesses and farming enterprises to hire and upskill young women and men in diverse farming related occupations.

### **Rebuild sustainable indigenous food systems**

- Defend seed sovereignty through the promotion of quality, locally produced and indigenous seed varieties to avert the impact of climate change; rebuild sustainable indigenous food systems that eliminate waste of resources, soil and water depletion due to inefficient industrialised food production systems
- Prioritise the use of agro-ecology approaches by agricultural extension services and increase the number and gender of extension service workers, with particular focus on rural youth.
- Value the contributions of indigenous knowledge systems in food security, nutrition and health, as well as socio-cultural development and SADC heritage. In particular acknowledge the role of women in indigenous food, farming, conservation and biodiversity knowledge systems.
- Include learning about indigenous knowledge systems in school curricula at primary and secondary levels.
- Reallocate land to sustainable farming in order to transition out of intensive monocropping industrial agriculture in favour of production models that are resistant to climate change, support biodiversity, reduce scarce water consumption and prioritise local food needs.

### **Public financing for food security**

- SADC should stop the net capital outflows of gains from its vast natural resources and considerable wealth to urgently operationalize the Agriculture Development Fund that is to support the implementation of Regional Agricultural Investment Plan.
- The Agriculture Development Fund should have a dedicated Food Sovereignty and Nutrition Fund aimed at supporting the sustainable production of diverse foods by smallholder, family and subsistence farmers with particular attention to women farmers and farming cooperatives, and targeted at creating employment opportunities and skills building in sustainable agriculture for young women and men. Smallholder, family and subsistence farmers, particularly those in food production, should be the beneficiaries of the largest part of these Funds.

- SADC Member States should ensure that they have open, transparent monitoring and reporting frameworks accessible to the public to show how funds have been allocated and the impacts on achieving the right to food for all, gender equality, youth empowerment, and supporting smallholder, family and subsistence farming. Public investments and agricultural finance should have clear gender equality/women's empowerment benchmarks at the SADC level which governments should monitor and report on.
- Increase overall national budget allocations to meet existing Malabo Declaration commitments to invest in (i) food security and nutrition rooted in frameworks of sustainable food systems and community-based food sovereignty, (ii) fighting climate change and natural resource depletion, (iii) eliminating inequalities in access to the means of production, (iv) supporting the care economy, social reproduction and reproductive justice (v) ending gender, class, race, ethnic and other forms of discrimination and inequality, and (vi) empowering the region's youth with education and skills, decent work and livelihood opportunities (v) building rural development and infrastructure including access to the internet, access to health, water and sanitation, housing and education.
- SADC Member States should reverse the corporate capture of agricultural input support programmes which now prioritise increasing agribusiness profits rather than food security and nutrition, environmental sustainability and biodiversity, small scale producer welfare and equity in the allocation of public resources. Create fiscal space for public investment by ending unjust tax policies, tax avoidance and evasion, capital flight and illicit financial flows. Further SADC countries should mount coordinated efforts within intergovernmental forums towards measures such as debt cancellation, unfair trade and investment regimes and international financial transparency.
- SADC should reject the imposition of IMF/World Bank austerity conditionalities, particularly as regards cutting public spending for critical public goods and services such as health care, education and training, rural transport and infrastructure, water and sanitation, agricultural subsidies and support. Public reinvestments in these areas will rapidly reduce economic precarity and food insecurity and support COVID19 response measures.

### **Institutional frameworks and regional cooperation**

- SADC Member States should recognise the right to food in all national legislative frameworks and strengthen SADC emergency and long-term policy and programme coordination around achieving the right to food, food security and nutrition beyond issues of trade and overall agricultural output.
- SADC should put in place a centralised multi-stakeholder food security and nutrition information system to strengthen data, knowledge, learning and information sharing on best (and worst) practice around food security and nutrition. This could be in the form of an online portal that collates data from research institutes, national statistics offices, intergovernmental agencies, NGOs, small scale farmer associations, community based organisations and other civil society formations.
- Fast track the implementation of a SADC wide universal social protection floor consisting of "basic social security guarantees which secure protection aimed at preventing or alleviating poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion. These guarantees should ensure at a minimum that, over the life cycle, all in need have

access to essential health care and basic income security" as per the UN definition.

- SADC should aim to be a continental and global leader in creating participatory, inclusive consultative mechanisms around food security, nutrition and sustainable food systems, particularly by putting small-holder farmers, subsistence farmers, rural women, and marginalised groups at the centre of this mechanism. We reiterate our call for SADC to urgently operationalise Article 5, 16A and 23 of the SADC Treaty and 'bring SADC to the people' **through the establishment of a SADC institutional mechanism for engagement with Non-State Actors.**

While COVID19 has been extremely disruptive we believe it is an opportunity to address many weaknesses in the region's food systems that have become structural and endemic. The new SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan should be an instrument to transform our food systems towards models of food security that end hunger and secure citizen's rights to development and self-determination. Achieving these goals must be people and State driven, rather than left to market or external forces. We commit our resources, energies and knowledge to support policies and programmes to work with relevant SADC organs, Member States, and all likeminded stakeholders to turn this dire situation around for the long term. The time is now. More often blessings are hidden in misfortune.

Signed:

- Rural Womens' Assembly
- The Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN)
- The Sam Moyo African Institute for Agrarian Studies (SMAIAS)
- Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale farmers Forum (ESAFF)
- Trade Collective
- South African Women in Dialogue
- Peoples Dialogue
- Network of African Business Women – Zimbabwe
- African Women in Agribusiness Network – Malawi
- African Women in Agribusiness Network – Tanzania
- Graça Machel Trust
- Southern Africa Trust
- Mandela Institute for Development Studies (MINDS)
- The Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment (CAPSI)