

# Assessing the impact of Covid-19 on youth: Lessons for the lockdown Generation

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# Summary

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) region is made up of 16 States: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kingdom of Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Among the different regional institutions which are present throughout the continent, the SADC is one of the biggest when it comes to the number of member states, their number of inhabitants and GDP.

Like other regions of the globe, the SADC nations are being impacted by Covid 19 regardless of the global pandemic's quite late arrival in Africa. The Southern African governments have adopted numerous stances to handling its impacts, with different extent of success.

This research report focuses upon the young people and Covid 19. Intensifying the voice of the youth during this difficult time remains critical given that the younger generation makes up nearly 40% of the SADC population. Although half of the youth could potentially be unemployed in Southern Africa, over half of the workforce engages in the informal economy, from which youth, in particular females account for nearly 70%. Moreover, it is expected that by 2050 Africa shall have the highest proportion of youth across the world.

Youth are equally or more at risk to the impacts of Covid 19. As we envisage a post-pandemic era, the work of youth shall be required to recover and build a more resilient world. Hence, investing in young people is investing the future of Southern Africa.

This research report will cover the following areas:

1. Regional overview of the impact of Covid 19 on youth in the SADC region
2. Factors contributing to intergenerational inequalities and key lessons for youth
3. The role of youth in formulation and implementation of post Covid-19 recovery measures
4. Emerging industries and opportunities for youth
5. Policy recommendations for inclusive mitigation and recovery measures

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## Research Findings

As this research report has found, solving the problems of youth exclusion, and in particular youth economic exclusion, represents an even more difficult task than hitherto following Covid 19.

This research report has concluded that policy makers should recognise that artificial kinds of youth consultation shall merely increase the feeling of exclusion among young people. A plethora of positive and innovative responses could well be gathered by bringing youth to the discussion table and giving them the opportunity to share their ideas and views of what has worked well and what has not from the perspective of the younger generation. Policy makers have a responsibility to allocate additional resources to critically evaluate the outcomes of policies and programmes.

This research report has suggested that young people should strive to formally organise themselves in such ways that their voice and needs are heard. In addition, it adopts the view that the SADC has a duty to ensure that political or State violence does not turn into a tool to continue with the status quo.

## 1. Regional overview of the impact of Covid -19 on youth in the SADC region

The Covid 19 global pandemic has created extraordinary challenges and prompted remarkable social changes around the world. This section discusses the implications of COVID-19 and related implications for children and young people living in the SADC.

### **Impacts of educational institutions closures**

Because of the restrictions and lockdown measures which has been established in Southern African countries, a lot of children have been affected in terms of their formal education. The closures of educational institutions are bringing adverse impacts when it comes to the learning of many young people, particularly as the education systems as well as institutions of many SADC countries do not have adequate infrastructure to assist the educational requirements of students during restrictions on movement. Moreover, in a number of these countries, school nutritional programs are offered by States. With schools shut down, there is limited access to such programs that a lot of students rely upon. In fact, studies have linked bad nutrition with poorer educational results in students as well as worsened health implications.

The shutting down of educational institutions in difficult times may increase the likelihood of young students being exposed to abuse, exploitation as well as violence. During restrictions placed on movements, child and social protection services should be considered as 'essential services' and be adequately equipped to assist students with proper digital education platforms as well as free hotlines to account for any happenings of violence. Moreover, it is important for States to empower parents on how to easily educate young people regarding the threats and preventative measures regarding the pandemic.

In fact, youths from disadvantaged households in Southern African countries are additionally more prone to achieve worst results through distance learning because of the problems they face in getting access to the internet, electricity as well as digital tools like PCs. It is therefore important that States and private sectors work collaboratively with educational institutions in order to offer both the teachers as well as students with the appropriate resources for easier distant learning experiences and to make sure that learners appreciate and digest the materials provided. In many parts of the Southern African nations, television and radio education broadcasts could prove better learning tools as contrasted to e-learning. As these nations start to reopen their educational institutions post-Covid 19, the advantages of classroom learning compared to distant learning

should be considered.

### **Mental, physical as well as social effects of limitations on movement**

The Covid 19, with its presence in virtually every country in the world, is bringing about a significant amount of uncertainty and fear in young people. Initiatives that have been taken to prevent the spread of the virus, in particular limitations placed upon freedom of movements and physical contact as well as quarantines, are more prone to contributing to more loneliness, depressions as well as a number of behavioural problems. Such effects are more evidenced in poorer countries where there are a restricted number of social-structural structures to assist young people.

Stress as a result of homebound orders may impair the immune system of developing young people and make them more likely to contract infections. Youth who find themselves into more sedentary lifestyles have a greater risk of getting non-communicable chronic illnesses such as hypertension as well as diabetes, which has in fact today become an increasing problem in the poorer SADC countries. Since youth who have AIDS have greater likelihood of getting mental illness, in particular depression, having to face a pandemic such as COVID-19 may worsen already existing mental problems.

Limitations placed upon movement have rendered it hard for young people who live in Southern Africa to have easy access to health services. Given that more budget as well as additional healthcare services like telemedicine and virtual support have been dedicated in an attempt to handle the global pandemic, basic counseling services together with other kinds of mental health assistance should continue to be available to young people. Allowing youth to participate in some kind of outdoor physical activity shall also help to improve their mental as well as physical well-being.

In the Southern African region, the rates of unemployment among young people are very high. Even those youths who have a job depend upon the informal sector to obtain money. In nations like Zimbabwe which were already facing problems of food insecurity prior to the global pandemic, preventative measures now put in place are aggravating extreme poverty and hunger for the youth relying upon the informal sector. States are hence recommended to offer food subsidies for young people and set out measures to help the informal economy.

## **Impacts of human rights violations and restrictions on access to services for vulnerable young people**

Covid 19 is worsening social-structural inequalities, in particular for vulnerable youth and those in financial difficulties. As SADC nations are setting out public health measures in an attempt to contain the pandemic, young females who engage in sex work, street youths as well as informal workers have greater chances of being subject to police violence. Moreover, young sex workers could obtain less chances of being able to safeguard themselves given that many have children so that they need to have money to feed their families and have greater likelihood of being subject to police brutality. Accounts of States improperly applying emergency powers to disproportionately attack vulnerable citizens have also been noted.

Restricted access to contraceptives could also propel risky sexual experiences as well as unwanted pregnancies, these already being long-standing issues in Southern Africa before limitations on movements imposed due to the global pandemic. Moreover, fear linked to getting Covid 19 is discouraging young people from going to public hospitals.

As restrictions on movement limit individuals within their houses, an increasing number of young women in SADC countries are being subject to gender-based violence. Legal just like mental assistance services must be easily accessible to young people who require 'crisis response' interventions.

The emergence of the global pandemic has caused social stigma as well as discriminatory conducts. Caregivers should be empowered to offer relevant information to young people regarding stigma and oversee the information which young people have regarding the global pandemic. Continuous support services are moreover required to support young people who have or are recovering from the global pandemic to face its stigma and its myriad detrimental effects.

Following the global pandemic, there have been fewer opportunities for youth led and youth serving organizations to petition for the government to work closely with the youth and to devise strategies which are inclusive of the younger generation.

That said, organisations such as the Amnesty International, the Advancing Rights in Southern Africa (ARISA), the Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC) and the Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN) have not shielded away from their usual work.

Moreover, the Africa Unite may be seen as a best practice organisation in Southern Africa. This

represents a cohort of young human rights defenders who are engaged in constructing peaceful, open-minded and beneficial communities via a conflict mediation programme in vulnerable communities like in the Western Cape province of South Africa. The organisation hence works with a wide range of community stakeholders such as educational institutions, religious leaders, civil society, trade unions, law agencies, etc to build a dialogue on essential factors which contribute to conflict in the community, giving way for greater participation and resilience.

## **Food insecurity**

In Southern African nations, sanitary measures promulgated to limit the global pandemic have hampered national economies and deeply affected citizens' lives. The sudden shutting down of companies has caused a lot of individuals to unexpectedly become unemployed, with the food and health security of many families under risk. It has been estimated that over 200 million individuals may suddenly find themselves into severe food insecurity due to the effects of the Covid 19 global pandemic, a number of who shall be SADC residents. In addition, a large number of youths in SADC are orphaned with HIV/AIDS and, with Covid 19, they are more likely to face the effects of increased financial difficulty.

In the "Synthesis report on the state of food and nutrition security and vulnerability in Southern Africa" from the SADC Secretariat, data from 13 out of the 16 SADC Member States demonstrates that nearly 51.3 million inhabitants shall lack access to food they require to lead a healthy and proper life between January and March 2021. This amount to a 25% rise in number of food insecure citizens compared to 2020 and represents the largest figure ever recorded by the SADC RVAA system. South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe are the most affected. Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia are expected to have the biggest rise in food insecure citizens as opposed to their five-year average.

The report further states that Southern Africa is under the threat of a trio of burdens: malnutrition characterised by undernutrition (stunting and acute malnutrition), over-nutrition (overweight/obesity), and micronutrient deficiencies. Southern Africa has over 18.7 million stunted children who are overly short according to their age. The stunting prevalence exceeds 30%, deemed as very high, in 9 of the 16 SADC Member States. In fact, decrease in stunting is taking place too slowly to satisfy the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 or the World Health Assembly 2025.

A laudable initiative has been taken by the Mauritian Government which has established a COVID-19 Solidarity Fund to offer assistance to its citizens and to the community at large who are



being impacted upon by the virus. Moreover, the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme represents an economic initiative by the Mauritian Government to support the self-employed individuals who have been financially suffered due to the invisible enemy. School feeding programs must be reinitiated, accompanied by Covid 19 screening, monitoring as well as follow-up of youths from impacted families. Therapeutic nutrition should be offered to malnourished youths. In the longer run, directly supporting lower income households through agricultural initiatives shall assist child nutrition as well as reduce the detrimental impacts of food shortages and rise in commodity prices.

## **Violence and Conflicts**

The world is facing a global pandemic which threatens to jeopardise the progress achieved when it comes to peace and security in Africa, be it by yielding novel forms of conflicts or aggravating already-existing conflicts. International and regional bodies like the AU and SADC are striving to respond to the pandemic while solving the challenges of increased conflicts.

In fact, the nature of tensions and conflicts in the Southern African region differ from the other regions of Africa. One essential element which singles out the SADC region is the relative lack of fully-fledged civil wars or conflicts in the traditional sense. The SADC represents one of the RECs across the continent which is praised for its ongoing dedication in setting out solutions on peace and security for young people. This has clearly been witnessed through the adoption of the Continental Framework on Youth Peace and Security.

Nevertheless, there exist considerable degrees of social as well as economic inequalities which prevail within Southern Africa, that further tensions and conflicts as well as directly affecting youth. Examples of peace and security challenges in SADC comprise of armed conflict, gender-based violence, xenophobia, intolerance, economically disempowered youth, corruption, police brutality as well as the onboarding of young people in extremist groups.

While a number of these challenges could appear new, the majority of them were already existing which have been exacerbated during Covid 19 and have thereby gained renewed media attraction. Clearly, the emergence of the global pandemic has intensified existing tensions and conflicts within Southern Africa. In addition, Covid 19 has shed the spotlight on ineffectiveness as well as poor political, economic and institutional governance in SADC.

In the Southern African region, youth regularly find themselves at the heart of social tensions. Although in a number of situations, the youths are perpetrators, they are more and more playing an important role in preventing, handling and averting potential tensions as well as conflicts which

arise out of political competition, absence of social cohesion together with violation of human rights. The AU, COMESA and SADC have pointed out that African youths ought not to be regarded as the roots of conflicts or as victims of violence, but instead as key actors in furthering peace and security.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, young people in Southern Africa have instituted and took various initiatives to tackle the increasing conflicts and tensions in the SADC. During Covid 19, the youth have gathered and utilised their platforms in the best possible ways to amplify their voices and lead actions. A clear-cut example is the Anti-Sexual and Gender-Based Violence demonstrations which happened in Windhoek, Namibia alongside Facebook campaigns with the hashtag #ShutItAllDown. Likewise, social media has also been used by the Youth4Parliament grassroots social organisation in Zambia driving awareness of the inadequacy of young people in the country's parliament, in the Zimbabwean Lives Matter movement modeled after the American Black Lives Matter campaign to share occurrences of economic turmoil, arrests and human-rights abuses in the country, as well as in the #CongolsBleeding campaign drawing attention to fatal mine exploitation.

Owing to the nature of violence in the Southern African region, young people should view peace and security in terms of governance deficits like rising extents of poverty, an ineffective healthcare system, the falling economic growth and decreasing living standards.

Youth in Southern Africa have shown their potential via increased awareness, spearheading mass protests and violence prevention campaigns towards creating more peaceful societies. To effectively tackle the issue of increased violence and conflicts, youths must increase their understanding of peace and security that prevail in the SADC, participate in intergenerational debates and actively take part in various platforms to properly build resilient societies and contribute to regional strategies for novel kinds of conflicts.

### **Significant rise in Domestic and Gender Violence**

Tackling the considerable increase in domestic violence and gender violence represents a major concern for authorities in every SADC Member State where governments have set down a total or partial lockdown. As could be expected, young females have been the major victims.

This problem goes against the actual spirit and principles which are found in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for Addressing Gender Violence (2018-30) and the Regional Strategy on Women, Peace and Security (2018-22) that

together are geared towards sustainably empowering and safeguarding females from gender violence and sexual abuse.

Following the lockdowns, domestic violence cases have risen as health, security and finance issues raise socio-economical tensions. Females who find themselves in abusive relationships are henceforth compelled to remain at home with their abusers for an extended period, rendering it more complex for them to seek assistance. Social distancing measures themselves render it harder for female victims to seek their normal support systems, especially, friends and other family members.

Similar to the Zika and Ebola outbreaks, COVID-19 demonstrated that infectious diseases may increase current inequalities, especially when it comes to gender. The Policy Brief of the United Nations Secretary General regarding the Impact of COVID-19 on Women remarked that while females may be the most affected by Covid 19, they may additionally emerge as the cornerstone of recovery in many societies. For example, in Zambia, Covid 19 is expected to have a lasting effect on its socio-economic conditions with around 230,000 young female-headed households which may fall further behind.

Various females have been compelled to 'lockdown' at their home alongside their abusers simultaneously that services to assist survivors such as HIV treatment were being rendered inaccessible or disrupted. Thus, Mutongwizo pointed out that the lockdown measures put the government of Zimbabwe to curb the proliferation of the global pandemic had only exacerbated mental health problems and domestic violence. Girls and young women especially found themselves at a heightened risk of crimes like sexual abuse from their partners. Between 30 March 2020 and 13 May 2020 lockdown period, the Musasa Project noted 1757 gender-based violence (GBV) calls that amounted to a 70% rise compared to pre-lockdown levels, with women reporting 94% of these cases. The National Peace and Reconciliation Commission found that domestic violence appeared to get worse given that families are also encountering problems like financial stress, anxiety as well as living in near physical proximity to each other.

In fact, it is up to individual governments to offer flexible and creative tools for reporting. This should moreover be stretched to counseling thereafter. Such tools should be clearly communicated to allow those impacted to easily access as well as use them. In response to the Covid 19 global pandemic, shelters and places of safety for victims of abuse should be deemed as a key service and expanded as required. Such an approach aligns with Article 20 of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development that compels Member States to take steps to reduce gender violence.

## **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)**

Young women and girls encountered considerable obstacles in accessing basic sexual and reproductive health information and services prior to the global pandemic. Today, given that Covid 19 is affecting even the best healthcare systems, a genuine risk exists that such rights shall move even more away from reach.

Covid 19 risks shrinking the already restricted access to SRHR information and services for young women and girls in three key manners. To begin with, we are witnessing that resources are being shifted away from essential SRHR services towards other Covid 19 related responses. Previous outbreaks have demonstrated that absence of access to key health services because of a shutdown of services may ultimately result in greater deaths than Covid 19 itself. Challenges in accessing contraceptives and other basic services like safe abortion prevent young women and girls from having the opportunity to control their lives.

Second, lockdown measures set out in response to Covid 19 have shut down educational institutions throughout the globe, so that even lesser youth are today obtaining basic Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). Moreover, when transiting to digital teaching methods, CSE often tends to be overlooked. Moreover, with internet access being a far-fetched possibility for many and an ever-increasing gender gap, young females from vulnerable households have even lesser opportunity of obtaining CSE information.

Finally, as the global pandemic brings about significant economic and political change, a greater number of conservative governments may misuse this moment to limit SRHR such as by restricting access to safe abortion.

The breadth of this problem requires genuine actions from policy makers. With the disruption being caused to educational institutions and health services, new means of furnishing information and assistance to youth should be set out. This may, for instance, comprise of distance learning, although CSE should additionally be incorporated in remote learning packages and those who lack access to online resources be taken into account. Governments should additionally ensure that girls are encouraged to go back to school by adopting a flexible approach to education and rendering it easier for young females who are pregnant to finish their studies without any stigma.

In 2020, the African Union's International Centre for Girls and Women Education in Africa introduced the 'Africa Educate Her' campaign which has the objective of increasing awareness of things preventing girls and young women from having access to education during the crisis, hence

encouraging the AU Member States to adopt positive initiatives to better access to education.

The campaign seeks to emphasise the experiences of learners, particularly girls at all levels of education during the Covid 19-related school closure. Education represents an essential human right, rather than a privilege. As soon as girls drop out of schools, their likelihood of returning back is pretty low.

## 2. Factors contributing to intergenerational inequalities and key lessons for youth

### **Violations of Human Rights**

Across many SADC countries, there has been an increasing call to protect human rights, particularly since where governments have seized Covid 19 as an opportunity to clamp down on human rights. In this respect, the shortcomings exposed and wrongly resorted to through the global pandemic should be tackled and human rights standards applied to address systematic, entrenched as well as intergenerational inequalities. State security agents, the police as well as army have proved to be the biggest perpetrators of human rights violations.

Moreover, as regards the right to health, a decline has been noted in the state of public health institutions, including in South Africa and Zimbabwe, which have been overwhelmed with Covid 19 cases, although many governments in SADC nations have barely shown any priority to this essential field, so that the young people were left more vulnerable.

Hence, it is suggested that SADC nations should reaffirm the significance of human rights so that all citizens, irrespective of creed, colour, gender, ethnicity or religion, has basic rights. Southern African government should take a rights-based approach in every policy it implements, beyond merely the response and mitigation of the global pandemic.

### **Corruption**

The likely increase in corruption cases in SADC countries, reflected in the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International, is a cause for worry for many citizens, especially as almost all economies are performing poorly as an impact of the Covid 19.

Corruption implies that lesser income is available for needy sectors like health, education and infrastructural development, hence contributing to enhanced intergenerational inequality. Corruption should be fought, sustainability encouraged and inclusive, fair post-Covid 19 recovery measures promulgated in order to have intergenerational equality. Moreover, the improper use of resources obtained out of public borrowing represents an additional factor which results in increased intergenerational inequality.

### **Redundant educational system**

Given that there is barely any transformative education system in many SADC countries, the educational results are poor, compared to other regions of the world. This represents a significant cause of intergenerational inequality and prevents development and global competitiveness. Given that the highest return to human capital investments are linked to the quickest involvement, particular focus should be laid upon early childhood development, that has shown the ability to better health outcomes, increase earnings by almost 25%, and yield better results in health, health and productivity.

## **Social and economic challenges**

While the lockdown measures succeeded to some extent in assisting to curb the proliferation of the Covid 19, they also brought about different extents of inconvenience for vulnerable young people particularly in those who live in the informal economies of Southern Africa. In fact, the informal sector has turned into the life blood of the economy as the greatest employer and potentially the main drive of regional productive capacity. As concerns the majority of young people who already live in poverty, the Covid 19 and its confinement measures has simply further exacerbated their situation. With the significant rate of unemployment in Southern Africa, the majority of young people work themselves in the informal sector. This brought about a dilemma of huge numbers and great challenges during the pandemic.

In South Africa, Covid 19 has been seen as highlighting the systemic inequality which increasingly excluded and marginalised the young people already being discriminated against. By contrast, when the global pandemic emerged, the government had at least acknowledged the unemployed young people aged over 18, by setting out a six-month social relief grant of USD20 per individual monthly. There was a rise in various welfare grants for children, pensioners and disabled citizens, while such a measure was condemned as not being transparent. Certain opportunities, like a monthly stipend, formulated by the government may be regarded as being problematic for the excluded due to their meagerness. It is unlikely under present circumstances that USD20 monthly would do much to tackle a young excluded learner's requirements.

Malawi introduced similar measures by formulating an emergency cash transfer initiative via which all eligible households shall be offered USD 46.7 per month. The initiative was directed towards one million marginalised or poor households for duration of half a year. Nevertheless, for instance in the South African case discussed previously, their initiative did not have transparency such as no thorough criteria for assessing a household's eligibility. Moreover, the initiative was condemned for increasing exclusion as it was aimed at merely one million from the more than four million households, while over half of the population live below the poverty line.

## **Key lessons for Southern African youth during Covid 19**

The Covid 19 has proven that even when everything looks like doom and gloom, revolutionary hope does exist which in former US President Barack Obama's words is far from being "blind optimism". Such a hope may reflect, for instance, the Soweto uprising in South Africa led by black school children in 1976, hence proving that young people may find a solution even when there seems to be none.

Moreover, Covid 19 has further enhanced the realisation that unity may not be invoked during a crisis; rather, unity represents something young people must always consciously cultivate, not simply when it is appropriate to do so. Young people should join hands with other human beings to dedicate themselves in creating a world which is equal, peaceful, just, free and fair. Young people must tailor their everyday actions and values with how they wish the world to become.

The global pandemic has shown us that young people should not bother about injustice simply insofar as it explicitly impacts upon them. By way of example, in South Africa, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela expressed his dissent of the Apartheid government's infamous racist pass laws even prior to their application to females. Youth ought to be compassionate and understand the problems of others so that in the longer term they receive the same compassion.

The invisible enemy has demonstrated that a pandemic shall have different outcomes and effects upon young people according to the category they find themselves in. While Covid 19 affects all young people alike, youth with better resources can avail themselves more protection during this difficult period. Covid 19 has clearly affected disproportionately affected vulnerable young people who are from poor families or those who rely upon informal employment.

In addition, young people should realise by now that to better face a crisis, they must have stamina. Youth must adapt themselves with the fact that the impacts of Covid 19 shall likely be here for a few more years. It is the opportunity for young people to become great leaders with the stamina to fight till the end just like Oliver Tambo and others who created the global anti-apartheid movement despite myriad challenges.

Furthermore, it is imperative for young people to know history well in order to better understand contemporary problems, for instance, the reason behind today's intergenerational inequality? By reflecting upon history, youth may be comprehensively informed on how to face the challenges they are encountering today.

## **Promoting youth engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic**



Young people are those who have been the most negatively impacted by the virus. In addition to the issue that there exists almost the same number of youth passing away from the global pandemic as their older counterparts, the majority of school-going youth have seen their studies being stopped dramatically while countless youth working in informal sectors have seen themselves being suddenly unemployed. Furthermore, young people have faced the social effects of Covid 19 such as more gender based violence, psychological problems as well as absence of social security. In fact, young people represent the majority of the populations in the SADC region so that they not merely possess a vested interest of eliminating the global pandemic but additionally eliminating it in such a way that they shall not impact on their nation's domestic resource mobilisation initiatives. What this implies is that youth should engage their governments at the national and regional levels via legal, political and civil means to have an effect on domestic resource mobilisation in such a difficult moment. Thus, young people should get a say in important decision-making regarding accountability and transparency measures, financial management, etc. like never before.

Youth make up over 50% of SADC's population. Overlooking them in key decision-making processes brings about a danger to good governance and development, particularly as the majority of the region's development challenges have a clear effect on young people such as HIV/AIDS, unemployment, poverty, etc. It is argued that young people ought to be provided with a voice in community, national and regional initiatives. Rather than a problem, youth must be regarded as an asset to a country.

Lockdown measures set out to curb the spread of the virus have changed our daily life and how individuals engage with one another across the globe. The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation has critically assessed the link between socioeconomic chances for young people and prevention of violence. Ever since the government of South Africa put a countrywide lockdown on 26 March 2020, the institution has collaborated with the South African Ministry of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs to protect the socioeconomic rights of marginalized groups.

The research carried out by the University of the Western Cape concentrates upon gangs, how the young people of South Africa form such groups of violence, as well as how the youth may become resilient to them. With the Covid 19, the university researchers have shifted towards the digital policy engagement arena. In collaboration with the Department of Social Development of South Africa, the researchers are encouraging mobilisation instead of militarisation, as they continue to promote youth-oriented and inclusive methods to tackle the problem of gang violence.

The Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust and the Research and Advocacy Unit are two bodies in Zimbabwe which further youth measures in policy development and implementation and

are compiling data on the global pandemic. They seek to become genuine sources of information on Covid 19 for young people. Sharing this information offers young people with a complete picture, minimizes alarm, stems the emerging culture of fear, and increases citizen trust in government interventions on COVID-19.

### 3. The role of youth in formulation and implementation of post Covid-19 recovery measures

The post-Covid 19 recovery in Southern Africa demands a global response. The effect of the global pandemic may be best tackled using multilateralism as well as a collective response. In fact, Covid 19 has reaffirmed the need for a multilateral approach to sustainable development, and the significance of uniting the economic, social as well as environmental priorities. It should be recognised that least-developed nations, or even developed nations, will not be able to achieve this alone. These countries shall require assistance both financially and non-financially from the development financial organizations and partners. The latter should work with various domestic stakeholders including the private sector, the government and the civil society while the young people have a critical role to play so as to improve their future.

Young people must be at the forefront of the post-Covid 19 recovery measures. There are a number of fields and services which are demonstrating the potential for large-scale creation of employment and productivity growth including agribusiness, ICT and tourism. In fact, the youths are already integrating such fields as entrepreneurs but require access to capital to set up and expand businesses. New loan and financial instruments are required for access to finance. Youth must additionally be provided with other business-linked assistance from the private sector and government alike. Vocational training and education may empower youths with the skills required for prospective employment. Improving education in sectors associated with the needs of the digital economy shall result into a better workforce and business.

Many public-private partnerships are being entered to find a Covid 19 vaccine or other treatment. As an illustration, the Governments of France, Netherlands, Germany and Italy created an Inclusive Vaccine Alliance to reach an agreement with prospective manufacturers and producers regarding a Covid 19 vaccine and wished to include the European Commission. Such countries entered into an agreement with British pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca to provide them with its prospective Covid 19 vaccines. Bringing about shared value between stakeholders must additionally break the social divides and engage young people.

Young students at universities and research institutions may contribute meaningfully to develop and test medical products. Prime examples in the SADC region are the collaboration between the Stellenbosch University and University of the Western Cape in South Africa to produce the Sars-CoV-2 strain and the development of antigens and antibodies needed for quick diagnostic Covid 19 test kits by the University of Cape Town.

Public-private partnerships may additionally be leveraged to tackle a number of problems young people are facing, not merely during the pandemic but beyond it. Covid 19 is accelerating the transition to digital economies. Therefore, such partnerships must seek to tackle problems or offer opportunities for young people in a twenty-first digital world. In South Africa, a partnership has been entered between the MultiChoice Group and the Youth Employment Service to create half a thousand jobs for the young people in the country. In addition, giant company Amazon has freshly created 3000 virtual jobs in South Africa that demand staffs with home internet connectivity as well as digital expertise to assist the customer enquiries of the business.

Big businesses may assist via apprenticeships, graduate programmes and internships. Empowering young people with the required set of skills and a little experience is critical to a developing and sustainable economy. As unemployment of young graduates has turned into the new trend in a number of countries in the SADC region, providing them with work experience may make a huge difference when they seek employment.

Development financial organisations and partners must offer the required resources to realise the work with regards to post-Covid 19 recovery plans. International bodies may enhance and provide collaboration to further youth development via joint initiatives. In this respect, UNICEF has set out a Global Agenda for Action with six pillars in order to safeguard children who are at risk: ensure they are healthy and safe; attain them with water, sanitation as well as hygiene; ensure children continue with their education; assist parents to cover their requirements; safeguard children from harm; and safeguard children who are refugees, migrant or conflict-stricken. In fact, it is widely agreed that Governments should actively implement these pillars to bring about a huge improvement to the lives of countless youths.

Governments actively need to associate themselves with and promote youth initiatives throughout the economy. The undeniable potential and innovative minds of the young people of Southern Africa should be acknowledged and they need to be given a key role to play in the post-Covid 19 recovery of the SADC region.

## 4. Emerging industries and opportunities for youth

### **Innovation**

Regardless of the challenges ensuing from Covid 19, it has also proved to be a blessing in disguise by bringing about myriad opportunities for the energetic youths of the Southern African region who are using innovation to find solutions for their nations and local communities.

#### **Case Study 1:**

The youth-led business in Malawi called Tiwale Women's Center For Education and Entrepreneurship has begun the mass production of PPE like face masks. The business provides assistance to a large amount of poor young women in the country via skills training, education, and microloans, and is additionally enhancing the skills of young graduates who are without a job via this fresh initiative. The masks are sold to citizens to assist in supporting its programmes.

#### **Case Study 2:**

In South Africa, youth co-founded award-winning online rewards web-app Zlto uses blockchain technology so as to further positive behaviour like health, entrepreneurship, well-being, positive citizenry, learning and volunteering. Dr Ayodele Odusola, the UN Development Programme Resident Representative in the country has remarked that Zlto is driving safe and healthy actions like handwashing, cleaning homes and caring for loved ones in order to tackle Covid-19 and empowering people through access to free courses on health, hygiene, life-skills and money management despite the lockdown in South Africa.

With the assistance of RLabs, Zlto, pronounced "Zlato" and meaning "gold", has assisted more than 2 million people get on in life via technology, innovation and education. Rewards can be used to purchase clothes, groceries, mobile data and any other things. Moreover, Covid 19-hit households have been gifted food vouchers and electricity vouchers have been gifted to more than 500 poverty-stricken senior citizens by young Zlto users whom they do not know.

That said, the principal goal is to ensure youth get into work. Indeed, Zlto assists in solving the problems youths encounter when seeking work by empowering them with interpersonal skills and work experience, as well as supporting them with regards to the expenses for job hunting, like travel expenses for interviews.

In early 2020, Zito emerged as a winner of the global UN Development Programme - Unicef Big Think Challenge that rewards landmark innovations promoting the Global Goals for Sustainable Development, that is, those innovations that seek to promote shared prosperity to alleviate poverty, safeguard the planet, as well as further peace and stability by 2030.

With the assistance of UNDP and UNICEF, the Zito team is now dedicated to safeguarding livelihoods and saving lives against the impacts of Covid 19, and is seeking to target a further 100,000 young people, develop a data-free interface and promote access to the app via a variety of instant messaging services.

## **Governance and Leadership**

Youth in the SADC region are already succeeding in various important fields, although in recent years they have more often than taken politics lightly. This is mainly due to the fact that under authoritarian regimes, young people linked politics with bad scenes of violence as well as abuse. Young people have begun to play an increasingly active role in politics, although the global pandemic must incentivise them to take even more effective roles in leadership and governance. Inclusive of such an approach is mentorship and succession planning.

In grabbing the fresh opportunities for leadership, the young people of SADC must acknowledge the importance of governance in the proper management of political and social affairs. For the younger generation, governance ought to be a daily concern since it finds itself at the forefront of the allocation and distribution of resources with huge consequences for political and social stability. By way of example, the impacts of Covid 19, is partly linked with the broad governance issues which have since a long time negatively affected our Southern African countries. Similar to previous public emergencies, Covid 19 has been happening with outdated and poorly resourced public health systems, the majority of which have failed because of poor handling of resources and lack of transparency. Likewise, Covid 19 has proliferated very quickly in informal settlements and slum-dwelling communities as States have shun away from fundamental responsibilities in providing water, housing and sanitation to the population. Moreover, in many Southern African countries, the ruling elites aid and abet with the rich to deny public bodies of adequate tax revenues to create successful and equitable societies.

The youth of Southern Africa must be conscious of a number of these governance issues so as to be prepared to resolve them and come together for novel ways of doing things. Such issues mainly arise out of the huge gaps that exist between the government and its citizens. To bridge such gaps, responsive and accountable governance is needed and, more importantly, citizens who are informed and ready to fight for good governance. Even today, many SADC nations still

have weak institutions which fail to deliver public services and ensure that all citizens receive a fair treatment. It is precisely here that the leadership of young people is needed: the global pandemic has potentially propelled the youths of Southern Africa to key positions which can turn them into leaders who strive for reconstructing the political as well as socioeconomic fabrics in such manners which proves a spirit of perseverance, hard work and joint efforts to find solutions.

Post-Covid 19 world, the youth of Southern Africa must make it clear that there ought to be a shift back to normalcy only with their involvement in leadership roles. While young people have taken the initial step in community mobilisation as well as social advocacy as regards the global pandemic, they must push for such involvements to take frontal positions in prompting for important changes. The youths must call for a seat at the discussion table of post-Covid 19 rebuilding, assisting in the design as well as implementation of a broad variety of policies and programs which find solutions to the Covid 19.

In sum, the generational change in governance and leadership represents an ongoing learning activity which rests upon resources, skills and abilities. Nevertheless, difficult times like pandemics usually further prompt for such changes, enabling fresh leaders with improved enthusiasm and dedication to emerge. If Covid 19 succeeds in creating novel leaders and prompts generational change in Southern Africa, the global pandemic shall have contributed to new means to handling political and social affairs.

### **Claiming Power Digitally**

The global pandemic has clearly affected how power manifests and is accessed. A number of powerful bodies are resorting to online engagement formats like online meetings, webinars as well as social media. The Covid 19 period may therefore offer a chance for reshaping as well as reinventing of power owing to the greater use of digital methods.

Emergency responses as well as lockdowns put by countries have shut down civic spaces and refrained youth from physically gathering to arrange things. That said, these have not diminished their endeavors to bring about change, rather their endeavors have now turned digital.

Youth advocates across the world should go on digitally campaigning for their entitlement to participate in decision-making. Covid 19 should not prove an obstacle for the voices of dynamic young people. This moment should rather prove a time for their voices to grow as well as assert power.

That said, a number of vulnerable youth lack proper access to technology and internet across Southern Africa. There exists a considerable gap between the rich and poor in this area. Hence, such work is far from solely for young people to conduct. Leaders in power should include youth voices, their innovativeness and their drive for change.

## **ICT Industry**

During the lockdowns, technology-driven industries have clearly demonstrated technology's power to assist both regional as well as local value chains in Southern Africa and beyond, hence allowing the quick delivery of various services to the homes of customers at relatively cheap costs.

Particularly pertinent during such moments are the online education initiatives deployed in a number of SADC States. In the post-COVID world, a greater number of digital education platforms may assist the programmes as well as curricula of institutions, attracting a bigger number of students with their cheaper costs, without having to resort to the orthodox brick-and-mortar investments. In addition, measures to shape leadership as well as entrepreneurial skills shall prove significant given that the future generation of young Southern African entrepreneurs is being empowered to harness this post-Covid 19 world of revolution.

Certainly, a highly resilient industry of the SADC region to the present crisis, the FinTech (financial technology) sector, which allows for mobile-enabled payment means, has proved critical in making sure that a greater number of transactions continue to be processed, thus assisting essential economic activity from remote farmers, SMEs as well as self-employed persons. Prior to Covid 19, the FinTech sector was already flourishing across the continent. According to WeeTracker, this sector attracted \$678.73 million which the continent's start-ups raised last year.

Be it in the health education, financial services or other technology-enabled industries, online applications effectively resorted to under the global pandemic may continue to be used after Covid 19 goes away. Because of the security they provide, such industries could prove essential for investors seeking to create a recession-resilient portfolio in the SADC region. The pandemic has demonstrated like never before the region's potential for technology-led new investments.

## **Food and Health Industries**

Beyond simply promoting locally produced goods, the global pandemic is also promoting the importance of ensuring food security across Southern Africa. This is anticipated to lead investments throughout the entire agribusiness as well as food-processing value chains. In fact, vertical



integration together with category diversification has emerged as important pillars in sustaining the volatility seen throughout the food sector. Once the global pandemic subsides, there shall be fresh opportunities in basic food products given that such industries have proved to be recession-resilient, regardless of lesser demand.

Investments in the health industry, such as in pharmaceuticals, shall receive an unparalleled boost. Post-Covid 19 there will be new opportunities in the fabrication of drugs, diagnostic testing kits together with treatment therapies. In fact, a number of SADC countries, such as South Africa and Mauritius, were already expanding their health industry to become an even important pillar of the economy. There shall continue to be a lot of investment chances in the health sector as novel technologies like telemedicine emerge.

### **Manufacturing Industry**

With Covid 19 significantly affecting global supply chains, almost all Southern African States have had to use quick-fix home-grown methods, particularly to ensure the making of life-saving medical products to fight the pandemic. A number of factories are now focusing on furnishing the local communities with masks and ventilators rather than on exportations. These demonstrate the potential for Southern African industries to answer local demands quickly.

In fact, a strong African manufacturing sector is additionally a critical element for the AfCFTA to succeed, a highly-dynamic market which shall cover a market of 1.2 billion people, across all 55 AU Member States. As a booster of economic recovery, the AfCFTA implementation agenda is anticipated to obtain priority attention from Southern African governments' post-Covid 19.

### **Tourism Industry**

In the early months of 2020, the tourism sector in the Southern African region seemed to be another successful year. Nevertheless, in April itself, as a number of SADC countries went on lockdowns, tourist arrivals decreased by 94%. Sadly, for the local tourism operators, their field is facing a very restricted numbers of African visitors as well as a huge reliance on rich international tourists, the majority of them no more wishing to travel. While in some nations like Mauritius, the government was successful in offering support to those affected operators, in other countries the governments have been so detrimentally impacted economically that financial support is almost impossible.

Forecasts by the World Bank show that global GDP shall fall by 5.2% in 2020 due to Covid 19, with developing and under-developed nations the most badly to be affected. This is true for a number

of Southern African nations which shall experience a contraction in GDP as follows: Angola (-4%), Namibia (-4.8%), Mauritius (-6.8%), South Africa (-7.1%), Botswana (-9.1%), Zimbabwe (-10.0%) and Seychelles (-11.1%).

Growth is predicted to come back to Southern Africa in 2021, although this depends on the evolution of the global pandemic and a possible second wave. Until then, the countries should look for ways to reduce the harm to their national economies and growingly unstable livelihoods. While the tourism industry shall not be the only avenue for recovery in the SADC region, it may provide support to the economies.

With the equatorial forests in the DRC that have beautiful mountains and lowland gorillas just like the wineries, rich history and traditions of South Africa, the inland Southern African nations possess a lot of wonderful sceneries and extraordinary experiences. Moreover the beautiful islands like Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles which are also French-speaking countries are all surrounded by turquoise waters that are renowned across the world.

The Southern African nations possess a lot of tourist attractions and before Covid 19 arrived, a number of these countries had well-known, successful tourism sectors that contributed significantly to the national economy namely through the creation of jobs and foreign exchange earnings: Seychelles (40.5%), Mauritius (18.8%), Namibia (14.7%), Botswana (12.6%), Lesotho (12.3%), Madagascar (11.8%). A number of these nations have been commended for their sound governance, warm hospitality and good economic management, these being important elements for an effective tourism sector. Tourism, therefore, can be an agent for recovery for the majority of the SADC countries.

It is worth highlighting that according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, each international tourist spends around US\$10 in the DRC, US\$2,120 in Comoros, US\$2,400 in Madagascar and US\$2,500 in Angola.

To ensure the recovery of a post-Covid 19 tourism industry, the SADC Common Agenda - one key element of various economies – policy number six appears especially pertinent: 'Promote and maximise productive employment.' Additionally, the Protocol on the Development of Tourism 1998 appears more applicable and states that:

"... build upon the region's potential as a tourist destination. SADC intends to ensure even distribution of tourism development throughout the region and to create a favourable environment for tourism, thereby using tourism as a vehicle for socio-economic development. ... As well, the Protocol establishes systems for facilitating travel to Southern Africa, training for industry workers, and marketing the region as a tourist destination."

Hence, together with the private sector and national governments, the SADC possesses an unambiguous mandate to steer the revival of the regional tourism industry. Just like in other regions of the world, multinational hotels as well as tour operators, by way of example, are in a more appropriate position to fight the global pandemic compared to the various SMEs that are functioning in local tourism industries. To help these small, local enterprises to survive ought to be a priority.

Given that many countries globally are gradually re-opening up, the SADC could well bring back to existence the Regional Tourism Organisation of Southern Africa (RETOSA), the SADC's very own, mostly extinct, tourism marketing organisation. When RETOSA was receiving sufficient funding, it had the task of promoting tourism in both the countries of the SADC and the African region to foreign travelers as a special destination. With renewed funding, the RETOSA may prove a key body for working in close collaboration with member States, tour operators, airlines as well as national representatives to devise marketing means for tourists to the SADC nations.

One prime example is South Africa. Being the nation with the biggest and most advanced tourism sector which welcomes the biggest number of tourists from the rest of the African regions, boasts the largest number of international road links and has the SADC's principal airport hub at Johannesburg, South Africa is more appropriately positioned than other Southern African countries to act as the principal attraction in campaigns to promote the merits of visiting the SADC region in general. The safari, historical, culinary and adventure attractions may be utilised to encourage the tourists to explore, for example, the wildlife of Kingdom of Eswatini, Zambia, Lesotho or Zimbabwe, as well as perhaps the unique beaches of Mauritius and Seychelles.

## 5. Policy recommendations for inclusive mitigation and recovery measures

### **Reimagining Policy Response to Youth Employment**

The answer to youth employment during and post-Covid 19 necessitates a policy of resilience and recovery, as well as one of innovation. Regardless of the threats that a global recession brings about, it provides us with a remarkable chance to re-assess several rules we were following for many years. Indeed, attempting novel things could be very important.

An area that this innovation ought to be supporting is the resilience of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), the biggest employers of youth in the SADC region and the mechanisms of an economic recovery. SMEs shall be seeking to recover rapidly post-Covid 19, hence incentives in the form of cash advantages for example to generate chances for apprenticeships and internships could assist in ensuring faster recovery. Productive inclusion processes within social protection projects, like cash transfers which comprise of training, may be tailored to the requirements of SMEs that could additionally help resilience. Nevertheless, fast relief benefits from government usually prove unsustainable when it comes to the creation of jobs that need to emerge from the private sector. Hence, we should furthermore examine how these present interventions may enhance the longer-term prospects for the creation of jobs as well as private sector stimulus.

Entrepreneurship trainings as well as stand-alone expertise fail to bring about job creation and must be desisted from unless they are appropriately associated with current markets or job opportunities. Concentrating upon youth-led SME resilience and recovery assistance would prove a more effective approach. This avenue would prove an inexpensive investment, paving the way for the development of market-led skills, creating employment chances for youths and yielding economic benefits to SMEs in the long run.

After the Great Recession, entrepreneurship programmes turned into one a major focal point of youth employment interventions in the SADC region. Experiences of recent interventions throughout the last few years have shown that entrepreneurship assistance programmes in the SADC region either had little or no lasting impact at all. Moreover, a number of interventions have mainly focused on enterprises out of a supply-side or livelihoods point of view. Such interventions fail to create the kinds of effective employment or development which businesses required to properly bounce back from the 2008 financial crisis. Properly weighing such interventions and combining the latter with other interventions shall prove essential during Covid-19. That said, in the longer run, there is

a requirement to diversify policy responses and engage in a shift from – or even update – mass livelihood entrepreneurship assistance programmes as the principal policy response to the problem of youth unemployment. Post-Covid-19, there is a great probability that there shall be even more call for formal job security as well as protection, and potentially less demand for such emphasis upon entrepreneurship.

A final suggestion for SADC countries when it comes to employment is to shift from simple social support grants to public employment programmes (PEPs). The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation's (CSV) research on PEPs across Africa has emphasised the tangible benefits like wages, skills and infrastructural development and intangible benefits such as greater social cohesion of these kinds of programmes that may enhance the prospects of youths obtaining jobs or acquiring self-employment skills. In this respect, the PEP budgets of Southern African countries should significantly focus upon training and skills development instead of part-time employment.

### **Promoting Agriculture among Young People**

Following the lockdown imposed due to the Covid 19 outbreak, a number of communities in the SADC region faced the threat of increased exclusion because of the constraints on movement and restricted access to communication platforms because of data requirements and prices.

The African Development Bank found out that before Covid 19, the Southern African region in contrast to the rest of Africa boasted the greatest rate of unemployment of around 12.5% from 2011 to 2019. The second greatest rate of unemployment was in the Northern African region with nearly 11.8% throughout these years. Two critical problems in the Southern African region are inequality and poverty. In fact, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho, São Tomé and Príncipe, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Madagascar even had nearly one out of two of their citizens living below the poverty threshold of the country from 2007 to 2018.

Food security has proved one key challenge and how the limitations set down because of Covid 19 have disproportionately impacted upon especially youth who are involved in the agricultural sector and informal trade. Pre-Covid 19, the SADC Food and Nutrition Security Strategy had already highlighted food and nutrition security as a challenge. The period of 2008/2009 experienced the greatest level of insecurity for the Southern African region when it faced the worst drought for over ten years with more than 22 million citizens being food insecure. The Covid 19 global pandemic has clearly highlighted how the numerous Southern African governments have been poorly handling the agricultural sector, hence emphasising that better management is a pressing requirement.

Although it is clear that young smallholder farmers add considerable value to the agricultural sector,

functioning as informal traders implies that they regularly find themselves excluded out of the value chain. Greater focus should be laid at developing inclusive spaces in such value chains to recognise and promote the contribution of those young smallholder farmers, assisting local economies.

Policy makers should set up support programmes for the youth of the rural regions in Southern Africa to make it easier for them to register their businesses; offer them access to, for example, loans to purchase lands and approved spaces for trade in urban and peri-urban areas, quality seeds as well as technical assistance; broaden and enhance internet connectivity services to rural regions to allow better access to data and markets; broaden free education as well as vocational courses in agriculture to unemployed youth; promote the establishment of youth farming bodies; develop job funds at country levels as an incentive for agricultural businesses to employ a greater number of youths. Policy makers should additionally create more formalised employment conditions, particularly owing to the usually precarious nature of employment in the agricultural sector.

The Synthesis Report produced by SADC Secretariat estimated that nearly 44.8 million people in SADC are food insecure. At the outset of the global pandemic, a survey by the Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Union (SACAU) noted that youth agripreneurs in Southern Africa were most vulnerable to emergency shocks like the Covid 19 global pandemic compared to their more seasoned counterparts because of the fragility of their fresh and young enterprises. They enjoyed restricted access to resources and chances under Covid 19 restrictions.

The four principal challenges found to be usually faced by young agripreneurs in Southern Africa are: decreased demand for agricultural products, lesser supply of factors of production and services, disruption of supply chains and greater cases of products being stolen.

### **Assisting SMES by Rethinking Investment**

Further to orthodox development-sector responses, there are moreover high net-worth entrepreneurs who shall be looking to initiate projects post-Covid 19. Although such entrepreneurs shall be critical to redevelop the economies of SADC countries, a lot of disconnects prevail between such kinds of entrepreneurial projects obtaining investment and the kinds which shall be required for creating employment for young people.

The present attitude to impact investment – previously regarded as a key opportunity for development of the SADC region – is failing to function as effectively as expected. Orthodox impact frameworks of investment adapted from investors in the Western world are restricted with the high operating costs of notably wages, lengthy due diligence and high return anticipations, implying that smaller

deals are simply not considered.

Until now, there exists an absence of proper and readily accessible funding sources for smaller, more risky SMEs which do not require large sums to develop, succeed and hence bring about job creation. So as to tackle such a problem, investors must investigate the different ways that capital may be deployed more effectively, with careful methods which really understand, from a demand perspectives, what SMEs must do to attain their goals.

In response to COVID-19, SMEs must promptly get investment, although we cannot offer it via a failed framework of costly debt or direct equity which shall adversely affect a number of already struggling businesses.

In fact, investment facilities offering reasonable royalty-based lending responses represent a mechanism that may assist SMEs in continuing to operate despite the impacts of Covid-19. With such a mechanism, the investor offers the enterprise a loan with repayments from a percentage of continuing gross revenues; hence the repayments vary according to the performance, instead of being stagnant sums. Such an approach shall enable SMEs to obtain capital from investors, repaid throughout a workable amount of time, as soon as a business bounces back to former revenue levels. This shall guarantee flexibility, enable extended planning as well as set out a just partnership created to jointly succeed. A flexible infrastructure, a rapid due diligence procedure resting upon relationships as well as effective capital distribution is central to such an approach.

One viable concept seeks to work with social impact investors so as to access large funds of money to re-grant to smaller SMEs, keeping in-line with the objectives laid down and monitoring the SMEs. That said, we need to stay vigilant not to turn social impact investors into donors rather maintaining the high impact value of such funds. Presently, financial bodies are filling such role of social investment, merely since investors perceive that their funds are being safely guarded by banks which possess a way to start a conversation with investors regarding investment in projects. The problem that such financial institutions face is that they lack the administrative capacity for the identification and monitoring of projects for such investors although they are slowly seeking to shape that capacity. The area of focus post-Covid 19 would centre on building resilience for SMEs by assisting them to recover from the effects of the global pandemic.

## **Private Sector**

There are a number of prospective areas of development which the private may focus on to recover in a better as well as quicker way in the post-Covid 19 world and the youths can take advantage

of. SADC States should set out clear conditions in order for the private sector to become better drivers of industrialisation, trade, investment economic diversification that may ultimately bring about renewed economic development as well as decent jobs. Assistance should be provided to the Member States to take maximum advantage of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for greater socio-economic advancement and prosperity for the citizens of the SADC. It is widely agreed that the AfCFTA represents a game changer for Africa in general and the private sector stands as a key element for reaping the benefits of the Agreement.

The global pandemic offered unique chances for SADC countries to re-evaluate their development methods and benefit from digitalization, innovation, sustainable growth, climate-friendly methods as well as regional integration as a way to form economic resilience from prospective shocks. To allow this, the private sector ought to become the ultimate partners; policy makers must hence make sure that there the private sector is even more active in policy development and implementation procedures throughout SADC. Therefore, post-Covid 19, the youths is ideally positioned to take advantage of the public-private sector exchanges geared towards achieving policy effectiveness.

Nevertheless, we should recognise that the key challenges to business in Southern Africa has comprised of lower demands, lesser supplies, lesser cash flows, more time in shipments, increased logistics costs and lesser cash flows. Moreover, access to funding still represents one critical challenge encountered by SMEs, especially with a prospective financial recession across the world, absence of emergency preparedness plans, problems with supply chains as well as a number of other issues. In Eswatini, governments, enterprises as well as workers have been unsuccessful in finding an agreement to tackle the effects of the pandemic when it comes to the apparel sector and this has caused unemployment as well as a fall in public income. Before Covid-19, in South Africa, the automotive value chain was already in difficulty and post-COVID-19, it began looking for non-African markets.

### **African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA)**

The AfCFTA aims to connect 55 countries, creating a market of 1.3 billion people. The AfCFTA offers a unique chance for SMEs, including youth-led businesses that function in cross-border trade, to engage in creating regional value chains, satisfy the standards of continental markets with less difficulty as well as supply inputs to bigger enterprises in their regions.

Digital identities represent a principal building block to enable the success of digital trade. They furthermore pave the way for fresh opportunities to develop small businesses and for providing assistance to SMEs at different stages in the development. In addition, they enable increased



assistance to be offered to new enterprises and start-ups.

The success of the AfCFTA shall depend on the ability of Africa to mobilize the power of youths. Governments should therefore leverage Africa's digital infrastructure to harness these chances via the AfCFTA. During the COVID-19 lockdowns in Southern African countries, e-commerce became a trade facilitator as well as multiplier. Therefore, governments have a key role to play to promote the production and supply of goods and services using e-commerce throughout Southern Africa and elsewhere. Moreover, Governments should improve the frameworks for young African entrepreneurs to harness the avenues brought about by e-commerce throughout Southern Africa.

It is important for Governments to recognise that fresh innovative solutions offering credit for e-commerce, including FinTech solutions, crowdfunding and coaching, may tackle such problems of access to finance.

Moreover, through the Agreement's framework, the youths of Southern Africa would have the opportunity to explore their talent and access to other parts of the African continent. The African Union's Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons has the potential to tackle skill-shortages and enable youths to move to places where they earn the most revenue for their work and benefit from a better standard of living.

The AfCFTA shall support young people in cross-border trade by developing a tariff free continent. Hence, the Southern African States should encourage the youth to get involved in the AfCFTA process. It is important for Governments to view broadband connectivity as a fundamental service in Southern Africa and when it comes to digital infrastructure investments, policies should tackle the grassroots of the increasing challenges to enable inclusive access.

It is suggested that Southern African countries should reflect upon their key experience of working collaboratively with different partners at the UN and AU levels. The Governments must harness such opportunities alongside an inclusive range of regional partners comprising of the leading research institutions in Southern Africa, civil society organisations, the SADC Troika and Secretariat, the private sector, International Cooperating Partners, organised labour and multilateral development bodies.

In a nutshell, the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area as of 1 January 2021 indeed offers exciting moments for African trade. Time will tell if it shall actually work in practice. Moreover, transacting in Southern Africa shall be at the centre of discussions and other Fintech issues. Inclusive business shall additionally be up for discussion once more given that big businesses shall be seeking cost effective methods to work across borders as part of their post-Covid 19 recovery.

The expansion in markets will also imply increased chances while SMEs should be at their very best with a key role to play.

### **The Future of Work for Youth**

Following the Covid 19 pandemic, some commentators believe that we should be redefining the concept of “work”. So as to enable the technologies and innovations which have been brought forward due to the restrictions on movements caused by Covid 19 to thrive, we should move away from a society where most social benefits ensue from jobs. The orthodox notion of work is overly restrictive and shall prove harmful as we shift towards an e-economy.

Given that the novel technologies enable our society to become more effective while having fewer staffs working, we may redefine the notion of work to incorporate parenting, volunteering, mentoring as well as leisure time.

By stretching the concept of work and petitioning the government to offer benefits like health care as well as retirement benefits to citizens who are striving in non-orthodox manners, countries may solve various issues arising from such technological innovations and prevent significant political instability.

When it comes to the organizations, they may reinvent themselves by reinventing their people. Adopting a multi-stakeholder approach geared towards allowing people and societies to satisfy the skills needs of the next industrial revolution will help to contribute to employment.

Technology shall yield two principal outcomes: creation of jobs from novel organisations and professions as well as a considerable destruction of jobs which shall be automated. Individuals also have a key role to play in that they should understand that employability represents an asset in an ever evolving world and they should invest adequate time and effort in learning chances so as to increase their creativity, effectiveness and hence employability.

As regards the government, a number of governance solutions to the workforce disruption ensuing from such advancements could be proposed such as paid parental leave, a universal minimum wage, a shift to lifelong learning, enhancing worker training, etc.

The organization's responsibility shall be to assist, promote and reward ongoing learning in the workforce, providing time as well as financial assistance together with an organisational culture which assists people in practicing novel skills.

## **NGO sector as a contributor to reducing unemployment**

There is space for the NGO sector to contribute to offering experience to graduates particularly in the area of development. Moreover, an increasing number of NGOs are being registered, such as in South Africa, and this offers room for the creation of sustainability strategies for such young NGO's and for the attainment of more impact instead of the creation of project-based NGOs which exist due to specific funding.

The global pandemic moreover offers a unique opportunity for NGOs and donors to think seriously about gearing their funding, more aggressively, towards the most marginalised ones because of Covid 19. Therefore, prospective partnerships with youth-led and specific initiatives working to promote the economic and social mobility of young people during this moment remain important. Youth have shown both resilience and innovation in finding out solutions and ideas during the global pandemic and have adopted initiatives in adapting to models which are geared towards responding to the effect which COVID-19 has produced on engagement, education, entrepreneurship, employment as well as their communities. As a result, NGOs which respond explicitly to vulnerable young people during and post-Covid 19 shall not merely be enhancing their social currency but additionally promoting their relevance.

As a matter of fact, NGOs should engage with youths, via formal discussions, together with youth-oriented organisations which possess broad reach and effect in Southern Africa. Organisations like the YALI Regional Leadership Center Southern Africa and the South Africa Institute of International Affairs represent certain organisations which shall be important to collaborate with owing to their impact throughout the SADC region on the youth.

These types of collaboration shall ensure that NGOs can network and interact with youth during and post-Covid 19 on prospective investment and funding chances that are available. Moreover, this shall offer an idea how young people are responding to Covid 19 and where they require the greatest support. This is especially important since the young people – particularly those from vulnerable groups – have been greatly omitted from multi-stakeholder discussions as concerns the effect which the global pandemic has caused to them. Hence, the relevance of NGOs during and post the Covid 19 economy shall greatly be decided through their capacity and readiness to respond directly to the young people taking into account SADC's rising youth demographic dividend.

## 6. Conclusion

Policy makers need to acknowledge that artificial or patronising types of youth consultation will simply enhance the frustration of youth and the feeling of exclusion. A lot of responses may be revealed by bringing the young people to the discussion table and hearing from them. States must work with young people and other stakeholders in order to obtain national as well as international examples of what has functioned well and allocate much more resources to assessing the results of policies and programmes.

Moreover, in the anticipation that the policy makers shall embrace the idea of including young people, they must continue to formally organise themselves in such manners which are likely to ensure that their requirements are more properly represented. Youth must continue to acknowledge the power of their vote and the SADC must amend current policies to make sure that political or State violence does not go on as a mechanism to carry on with the status quo.

As the above recommendations have shown, tackling issues of youth exclusion and especially youth economic exclusion present a big task. In fact, the problems that Covid 19 has brought will certainly make it even more significant for States and other stakeholders to effectively engage around the potential and problems of increased youth inclusion.