

REPORT ON

Analysis Of SADC Responses To The COVID-19 Pandemic

January 2021



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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has been nothing short of an unprecedented crisis in modern times, adversely human lives, and the economic order which frames and fashions livelihoods and lifestyles. The World Health Organisation (WHO) timeline reports that by 31 December 2019, a novel coronavirus was identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province. The first recorded case of COVID-19 outside China was confirmed on 13 January 2020 in Thailand. On 11 March 2020, deeply concerned by the worrying levels and pace of spread and seriousness of the coronavirus, the WHO characterised COVID-19 as a pandemic. By that date, COVID-19 had spread to over 110 countries. By 13 December 2020, more than 1.6 million deaths globally were recorded, with more than 70 million cases of COVID-19 despite monumental containment measures installed by virtually all countries around the world.

The universal immediate response across the world was to put travel restrictions into effect, although of varying intensity and degree depending upon the threat and severity reflected in the number of confirmed cases and fatalities. Western Europe, The United States of America, Brazil and India remain as the hardest hit regions in the world in terms of confirmed COVID-19 cases. As lockdown measures intensified in response to the exponential rise of COVID-19 cases, economic activity witnessed a sharp decline. Supply and distribution chains within and across countries were markedly disrupted. In addition, public health initiatives such as social distancing and limiting social gatherings to only a few were effected as measures to curb transmission.

In general, lockdown measures precipitated the decline in economic activity. Partial and full closures of certain business activities reduced (global) production, coupled with a decline in consumption expenditure as consumers stayed home during lockdowns. Restrictions on movements and (global) travel led to reduction in supply and distribution of goods and services. Commodity prices took a hit; oil prices initially dropped and then stayed flat. Eventually, loss of employment followed reduction in both aggregate demand and supply, exposing structural problems in most developing countries as the poor and vulnerable were substantially made worse off. The International Monetary Fund projects a global recession of up to 3 percent for 2020, worse than the 2008/9 global financial crisis.

To safeguard human lives while resuscitating economic activity, public health and socioeconomic measures were relied upon. Public health measures included those focusing on community and personal hygiene such as water supply and sanitation services as well as hand hygiene and wearing of masks in public spaces. Social distancing strategies were also relied upon. From the economic perspective, a variety of fiscal and monetary policy measures were used to mitigate the economic calamities. For monetary policy, stimulus packages of various sorts as well as monetary

policy rate revisions were used to supply liquidity to waning businesses and households. For fiscal policy, tax incentives, negotiations around statutory obligations were used to help business stay afloat. International sources of funds were also available for countries to tap into, which included support from the IMF.

National efforts were crucial in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, but regional associations and interventions were equally required in order to permit functioning of global supply chains and markets. Thus, The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) installed a number of regional initiatives to health its Member States to respond to the pandemic in a more coordinated manner as key to mitigating the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. By asking the SADC Macroeconomic Subcommittee to take stock of the status of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region and its impact on the economy, acknowledgement was being made of the severity of the crisis. The findings suggest that Member States often put aside trade agreements when implementing stringent lockdown measures, requiring interventions by SADC structures to resolve the problem. For example, Zambia effected mandatory quarantining of truck drivers and trucks, even those ferrying perishable goods. Complaints were lodged against the Member State, and resolution was sought through SADC structures. It was also found that containment measures were often uncoordinated due the nature of heterogeneity of these measures between the Member States.

This paper is an analysis of the SADC responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, assessing the SADC bulletins produced by its Macroeconomic Subcommittee. The paper starts with Section One which gives the background to the study, to furnish and motivate the contents of the paper. In doing so, the objectives of the study are explored, and the study methodology which relied on desk reviews is called upon. Section Two then follows, by giving a status update of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of cases and deaths, as well as prospects for a vaccine. Section Three gives the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by theme, ranging from general economic impact, public health, to food and nutrition as well as trade and the environment. Section Four provides an overview of SADC's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic; this demonstrates the variety and combination of containment measures, differing in intensity from passive, active to aggressive, also by theme, from public health measures to economic interventions. Finally, Section Five concludes the paper by giving a concluding remark before providing policy recommendations.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction/Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc across the world, adversely affecting both human lives and world economies.

Over the last few months, Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) has been undertaking initiatives to harmonize and coordinate efforts to respond to COVID-19 in the region. However, these efforts have been slow and requiring more coordination among member states. Mechanisms have been put in place to share capacities and expertise in this emergency and also to draw experiences from other continents. The immediate priority for most African countries is to save the lives of people but at the same time all the lockdown measures have resulted in an economic crisis and this has, in turn, hurt the livelihood of many citizens within the region.

As the impact of the coronavirus takes its toll on human lives and lifestyles, the lockdown measures and travel restrictions have resulted in the loss of income, unemployment, limited access to health care and reduced remittances to families of migrants among other challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic adversely affects food security in southern Africa because of its impact in reducing agricultural production and productivity as well as limiting market access. The World Bank estimates that agricultural production is likely to contract between 2.6 percent and 7 percent particularly if trade blockages continue to be imposed. Furthermore, food imports may also decline substantially from 13 to 25 percent due to a combination of higher transaction costs and reduced domestic demand. Furthermore, border closures have affected the movement and supply of food. Transport restrictions are affecting the supply of fresh foods. Relief measures should be directed towards ensuring citizens have access to food.

Limited trade and movement of people followed lockdown measures and travel restrictions. The closure of the border has affected cross border traders. They have been unable to undertake trade whilst they contribute to 30-40 percent of SADC intra-regional trade. Most of these small-scale traders are involved in agriculture commodity trade and women are being mostly affected by these measures. 70 percent of cross border traders are estimated to be women and the value of trade conducted by women in the SADC region is approximately US\$20 billion annually. Whilst we fight the COVID-19, how do we keep the borders open? It is a dilemma, whereby on one end trade has to continue to happen but we must contain the virus. At the global level, African countries participating in the global trade has slowdown and there has been a fall in commodity prices. One

of the major export destinations for Sub-Saharan Africa is China, but the pandemic has slowed down economic activities that reduced the demand for Africa exports.

At a regional level, SADC has responded to adopt regional guidelines to facilitate trade at the same time contain the virus (SADC, 2020p). The guidelines aim for the harmonisation and facilitation of the movement of critical goods and services across the region during the COVID-19. To limit the spread of COVID-19, SADC will implement transport-related COVID-19 measures in cross-border transportation, facilitating the flow of essential goods such as fuel, food, and medicines. The guidelines will also limit unnecessary and mass movement of passengers across borders and reduce the close contact between the customs, border officials and traders. The implementation of simplified trade and automated systems at the borders can expedite the movement and clearance of goods. The response to COVID-19 can only be as good as our health system to contain the spread of the virus. In the southern Africa region, our health system is very weak because of limited staff capacity, lack of medical equipment, poor management of health facilities, no available medicines to administer to patients.

With the outbreak of COVID-19 and limited funds available to respond by policymakers, national governments will need to fundraise to prepare for a possible surge in cases. This surge will require purchasing new medical equipment such as ventilators, testing facilities, etc. Most African countries will have to borrow more money to support the health sector which will increase the country's indebtedness and limit support to other sectors. The health sector expenditures are mostly covered by donor financing. For example, in Zambia, donor financing covers 43% of total health care expenditures.

The low health service coverage in Africa is also caused by supply barriers, weak health system low population density causing service delivery to be expensive. With limited economic activity taking place due to the pandemic, countries have limited resources to invest in and respond adequately to the COVID-19. Loss of jobs has also resulted in reduced remittances, migrants are unable to send money home. It is important to note that an estimated number of 3.3 million migrants in South Africa send at least 11 billion rands to other SADC countries in a year

The Southern Africa Trust is commissioning a research paper to analyse SADC response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It worth noting that the socioeconomic landscape in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic has been

1.2 Objective and research questions

The objective of this study is to analyse and document findings on the measures and responses the SADC region has taken to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in the SADC region.

Specifically, the study will respond to the following research questions:

- What has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SADC region i.e. social and economic
- How has SADC responded to the emerging challenges resulting from the pandemic
- What mechanisms have been put in place by SADC?
- Are the systems in the region able to cope with any emerging pandemic?
- What are the opportunities for SADC to address current challenges?
- What policy changes need to be made?

1.3 Scope of Work

This study will include:

- The status of the COVID-19 pandemic in Southern Africa
- The impact of the pandemic in the SADC region (social and economic)
- An overview of SADC's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic
- The impact of the regional response, seeking out opportunities and challenges
- Drawing out lessons and offering policy recommendations

1.4 Methodology

Primarily utilising a desk review approach, the study makes use of secondary literature, specifically analysing published reports in Southern Africa on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the SADC region. In particular, the analysis of SADC responses to COVID-19 are based on documents published by SADC itself through the vehicle of bulletins focused on SADC responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. The Status of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Southern Africa

2.1 Introduction

Following recognition and declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, part of SADC's response was through the SADC Council of Ministers which met between 16 and 18 March 2020, after which it instructed the SADC Macroeconomic Subcommittee to keep track of the COVID-19 impact on the SADC economy, while extracting lessons and constantly providing recommendations to SADC Member States. Consequently, fourteen to sixteen bulletins have since been published to take stock of the ongoing surveillance of the regional organisation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which will be specifically discussed in section 3 and 4. This study makes use of these bulletins to give an analytical angle to SADC's response to the COVID-19's impact on the region.

The following subsections in this section preface the subsequent discussions on impact and response by first highlighting the status of the COVID-19 pandemic globally and for SADC, including an overview of the prospects for a vaccine.

2.2 COVID-19 Status: Cases and Deaths

From 31 December 2019 when COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic to 25 April 2020, there were almost 3 million confirmed cases with a fatality rate of 7%. Since then, both infections and fatalities have gone up nominally, although varied across countries, with Africa experiencing one of the lowest rates across the world.

As of 30 November 2020, according to WHO, SADC recorded under a million confirmed cases with only 1.9% confirmed deaths. In terms of fatality rates, SADC appears to have been fortuitous having for the time being miraculously escaped the worst possible scenario, compared to some parts of the world. The global fatality rate average stands at 2.3%, with variations across countries. The United Kingdom, with around 1,617,331 confirmed cases has recorded a fatality rate of 3.6%, one of the worst scenarios for the Western Hemisphere. For SADC, there are variations across countries in terms of nominal figures. For example, though the United Republic of Tanzania has a low infection rate, it has the highest fatality rate. In terms of nominal figures, South Africa has been the hardest hit, accounting for around 86% of SADC's confirmed coronavirus cases.

Table 1 SADC Cases and Deaths by 30 November 2020

	Covid-19 Cases	Covid-19 Deaths	Fatality rate
Angola	15,103	346	2.3%
Botswana	9,992	31	0.3%
Comoros, Union of	610	7	1.1%
Democratic Republic of Congo	12,701	333	2.6%
Eswatini	6,410	121	1.9%
Lesotho	2,109	44	2.1%
Madagascar	17,341	251	1.4%
Malawi	6,025	185	3.1%
Mauritius	501	10	2.0%
Mozambique	15,613	130	0.8%
Namibia	14,345	151	1.1%
Seychelles	172	0	0.0%
South Africa	787,702	21,477	2.7%
United Republic of Tanzania	509	21	4.1%
Zambia	17,608	357	2.0%
Zimbabwe	9,950	276	2.8%
SADC	916,691	23,740	1.9%

Source: WHO website <https://www.who.int/countries/>

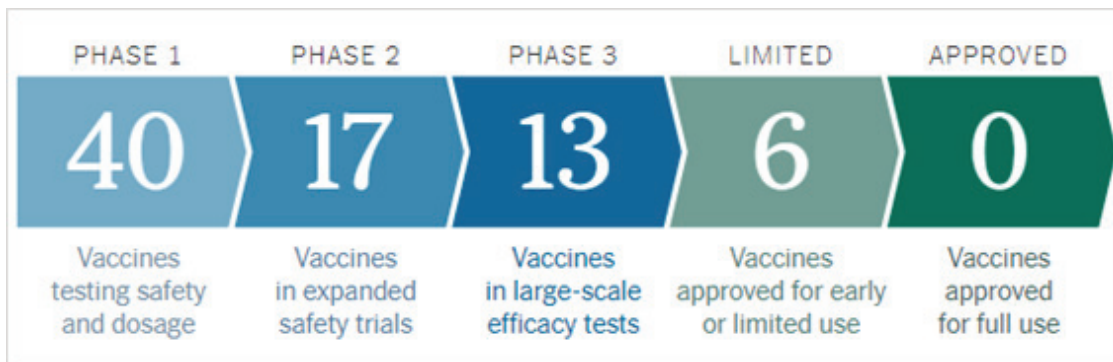
2.3 COVID-19 Status: Vaccines

As the world continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, deploying a range of mitigating interventions, considered as short-term measures to address the scourge, there have been concerted efforts called upon by the international community to find a vaccine as the lasting solution to the devastating coronavirus. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that currently no vaccine has been authorised nor recommended to prevent COVID-19. In the United States, by 24 November 2020, five COVID-19 vaccines are undergoing clinical trials.

The New York Times Coronavirus Vaccine Tracker as of 30 November 2020, reports that “scientists are racing to produce a safe and effective coronavirus vaccine by next year. Researchers are testing 57 vaccines in clinical trials on humans, and at least 87 preclinical vaccines are under active

investigation in animals."Thirteen vaccines globally are said to have reached final stages of testing (see Figure 1 below). On 30 November 2020, the NPR reported that Moderna's COVID-19 Vaccine Candidate has shown more promising results, with 94% effective rate, with a strong protection against grave illness, causing the company to be confident enough to already begin arranging an application for emergency authorisation to the Food and Drug Administration.

Figure 1 New York Times Coronavirus Tracker



Source: New York Times website

3. The Social and Economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the SADC region

Though with variations across sectors and countries, the impact of COVID-19 is particularly more debilitating and apparent in economic sectors which depend upon human interactions such as hotelling and tourism more broadly and travel and aviation (SADCe, 2020: 7). As will be argued below in section 4, the immediate response to curtail the spread of the coronavirus has been to limit social interactions via social distancing measures and restrictions on movements which necessitated travel limitations and bans altogether as well as border closures, ultimately combining to disrupt both production and supply chains, including cross-border trade.

3.1 General economic impact

Due to disruption in production and supply chains, as well as public health and social measures, the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic has led to contraction in economic activity. Consequently, fiscal revenues have dropped, putting further pressure on public resources to fight the pandemic while supporting livelihoods. Even at the global level, the pandemic has been devastating on public resources that global public debt is projected to be more than 100% of 2020 global GDP. Meanwhile, "given the pandemic and adverse climatic events that affected the SADC region, 13 Member States are projected to record economic contractions in 2020 with the following worst affected: Seychelles (13.8 per cent); Mauritius (12.2 per cent); Zimbabwe (10.4 per cent); Botswana (9.6 per cent); South Africa (7.2 per cent); Comoros (6 per cent); Namibia (6 per cent); Zambia (5.1 per cent); Lesotho (4.5 per cent); and Angola (4 per cent)" (SADC, 2020h: 6).

SADC Member States were already experiencing a range of economic contradictions following the aftermath of global financial crisis of 2008 and thus "entered this crisis in a vulnerable state characterised by sluggish growth, high debt levels and limited fiscal space to support the health sector and the flagging economy" (SADC, 2020g: 5). With restricted range for monetary policy given already low interest rates in the region, SADC countries have had to rely on fiscal policy to stimulate economic activity while safeguarding the lives of the vulnerable. Subsequently, as government revenue has not growing, increased public spending has been supported by ballooning debt levels: "the region's public debt averaged 59.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019 up from 48.8 per cent of GDP recorded in 2018" (SADC, 2020g: 5). Projections suggest that public debt levels in the region could on average reach 70 per cent of GDP in 2020, leaving most SADC Member States in debt distress as debt servicing costs rise above the countries' capacities to repay. Already, Zambia has been reported to have defaulted on some of its loans.

Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic is said to have derailed the macroeconomic convergence (MEC) programme set by SADC, given that the economic growth target of 7 per cent in 2020 will not be met by any Member State.

As most Southern African countries are dependent on primary commodities for their foreign exchange earnings as well as general economic wellbeing of their economies, the general economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic on these countries can be understood from the point of view of movements in commodity prices. Overall, economies of SADC Member States are expected to contract in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

SADC (2020a) acknowledges a slowing global growth even before outbreak of the coronavirus, but further notes that the COVID-19 pandemic will send the global economy into a recession, contracting by at least 3% largely on account of disruption of economic activity due to public health measures to contain the pandemic. Subsequently, there has been a decline in demand for primary commodities which constitute the bulk of developing countries' exports.

Oil prices remained largely flat. Angola, the second largest SADC economy, accounting for around 14% of the region's GDP, is heavily reliant on oil exports. However, "with reductions in oil exports, oil revenue in 2020 is projected to decline by 14 percent, compared to the 2019 outcome," and the economy is expected to contract by around 4%, the largest recession in three decades (IMF, 2020: 6). Spill-overs to the rest of the region are likely yet the SADC bulletins fail to provide specific details in terms of how contraction of economic activity at individual country level is affecting trade intensity within the region.

Zambia, the fifth largest economy in SADC, is heavily reliant on copper exports for its foreign exchange, with the commodity accounting for around three-quarters of its foreign exchange receipts. In the second quarter of 2020, total exports earnings were US\$1.57 billion, 14.5% lower than the US\$1.83 billion reported in the corresponding quarter in 2019 primarily due to supply chain disruptions, the fall in commodity prices, and subdued global economic activity caused by COVID-19.

Meanwhile, most domestic currencies across SADC have drastically plunged against the United States dollar, as their foreign exchange receipts have declined due to the COVID-19 scourge, raising their costs of dollar-denominated liabilities, including debt-servicing costs. By way of example, Zambia, with an external public debt stock of US\$11.97 billion as at June 2020, with debt-servicing obligations up to US\$1.5 billion per year, has witnessed its national currency, the Kwacha, depreciate by around 80% in the past one year alone. The Malawi Kwacha begun its downward

trend against the USA dollar due to below-average foreign currency tobacco receipts, driven by the COVID-19 impact on tobacco marketing and trade. Between January and August 2020, the Angolan national currency, the Kwanza, depreciated 17.4% against the US dollar and 21.4% against the Euro, due to a decrease in foreign currency as oil export revenues declined.

These examples highlight some of the concerns of how a depression in global economic activity is adversely affecting SADC countries via the effect on commodity prices. As SADC (2020d: 3-4) notes, “prices of international commodities that include oil are sensitive to events that lead to disruptions or create uncertainty about future supply or demand. Consequently, Covid-19 has brought to the fore uncertainty in future demand which has led to weak commodity prices in light of a supply glut especially in the oil industry.”

Further, as economic activity slackens, the COVID-19 is seen to intensify already existing systemic challenges and fragilities, particularly those affecting the most vulnerable groups of society. For “Lesotho, UNDP found that COVID-19 increased the number of vulnerable households by nearly 50 percent due to loss of employment and income. As part of the National Response, UNDP is supporting Lesotho to meet emerging needs, including linking local producers with e-commerce markets.” The Internal Development have been working tirelessly to complement and strengthen national responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Generally, projections for 2021 remain overly optimistic based on easing of restrictions. SADC (2020h: 6) reports that “the SADC region is also expected to recover with a projected average growth of 3.9 per cent in 2021.”

3.2 Public Health

Public health interventions require material resources in terms of medical supplies, personal protective equipment, diagnostics as well as transport to facilitate public health related movements such as contact tracing. Yet, with its damaging effects on economic activity, COVID-19 has placed additional challenges on already strained health systems. Subsequently, there have been reports of substantial shortages of material resources to fight the pandemic.

In the event of a positive COVID-19 test, additional resources are required for the patient, in terms of hospital space, staff time and medical equipment and supplies. COVID-19 care centres are ideally supposed to be equipped with what the World Health Organisation calls “Priority Medical Devices in the context of COVID-19” which is a detailed list of medical devices for managing COVID-19 patients at different levels of health care provision.

The SADC publications have not been detailed in terms of giving a comprehensive account of individual country public health responses. Nevertheless, they are indicative of the kinds of interventions the region has put in place. On the public health front, in April 2020, there was increased screening and testing of suspected cases. Additionally, SADC (2020c) reports that public-private sector partnerships were relied upon to scale up COVID response, yet the details of such strategies are not given in the report to help understand the particular configuration of these interventions, including the roles played by the agents involved.

In addition, there has been goodwill extended to Africa by international philanthropists. For example, the Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation had by May 2020 provided to the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention a third donation of medical supplies and equipment, which included 4.6 million masks, 500,000 swabs and test kits, 300 ventilators as well as hundreds of thousands of protective clothing and face shields, gloves.

3.3 Food and Nutrition Security

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, SADC was already grappling with matters of food insecurity. About 13% of the 345 million people in the region are considered food insecure, largely on account of external factors such as droughts and flooding, as well as internal factors such as structural socioeconomic factors related to underdevelopment.

SADC warns that COVID-19 would serve to “exacerbate the situation, eroding community coping capacities and deepening food and nutrition insecurity of vulnerable households and individuals” (SADC, 2020b). Hence, more resources are required to safeguard the lives and livelihoods of the vulnerable food insecure sections of society and those at risk of falling into this category due to loss of employment resulting from the COVID-19 impact.

COVID-19 has contributed substantially to increasing the number of food insecure people in the SADC region; data shows that between 2019 and 2020, the number of food insecure people have increased by a tenth. Though there are variations by country in terms of increases in number of food insecure people: for example, Eswatini the figure was 585, while for Zimbabwe and Malawi it was 40% and 140%, respectively.

Meanwhile, COVID-19 containment measures are expected to worsen the malnutrition status of SADC Member States by about 25%. In terms of numbers, approximately 8.4 million children are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition in 2020.

Nevertheless, the SADC Food and Nutrition Security Strategy 2015-2025 can be relied upon as a guiding framework for coordinated efforts to adopted regionally in the area of food and nutrition security. The SADC bulletins do not reference document as a platform that has been used by the Member States to mount strategies of regional relevance.

3.4 Education

Schools and other learning institutions at different levels of education have undergone a series of measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic but these have been varied across the SADC member states, ranging from full closure initially for most, to easing of restrictions allowing partial opening and combining with virtual classes. The immediate impact of COVID-19 on education has been to disrupt normal learning, opening opportunities for other innovative ways of learning such as remote learning via virtual means. Yet, such innovations have deepened the divide between the haves and have-nots. Television and radio options have been offered as learning platforms by some Member States.

SADC in collaboration with UNESCO commissioned a survey to collect information on measures put in place by Member States in the education sector to ensure continuity. The findings suggest that the average number of months of lost learning opportunity were approximately 3 months following lockdown restrictions (SADC, 2020i: 6).

3.5 Gender and Gender Based Violence

Reports around the world indicate that violence against women has increased due lockdown measures necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the pandemic, one in three women around the world reported to have experienced physical or sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner. With lockdown measures, people spend more time to together at home. Consequently, "data shows that since the outbreak of COVID-19, violence against women and girls ... particularly domestic violence, has intensified," increasing by 25% to 33% across the world (UN WOMEN, 2020: 2).

3.6 Manufacturing

Manufacturing performance in the SADC region is expected to decline due primarily to the disruptive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. The disruption of production and supply chains presents itself as catastrophic for production as supply of inputs and transportation of products to their markets is disturbed.

3.7 Trade and Transport Facilitation

Undoubtedly, trade within the region has been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic due to dislocation of economic activity as well as restrictions imposed on movement of people and goods. While the SADC bulletins have taken note of this artifact, they have been shallow in their analytical depth as they have not given a detailed descriptive socioeconomic statistical picture of the pandemic's impact on regional trade. One would have to dig into the national and regional statistics outside of the bulletins in order to fully appreciate the impact of the pandemic on trade.

The aviation industry, as a crucial activity in the transportation of people and goods has been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Airlines across the continent of Africa have recorded substantial losses and revenue forecasts are grim: "African airlines could lose US\$ 6 billion of passenger revenue compared to 2019 and job losses in aviation and related industries could grow to 3.1 million, half of the region's 6.2 million aviation-related employment" (SADC, 2020i: 5).

COVID-19 disturbed road transport and cross border movement and trade. In some instances, some border posts were closed for up to 3 days as they were fumigated when border staff were reported to have tested positive for COVID-19. Also, as drivers and crew members of transport operators test positive for COVID-19, challenges in the transport and cross border activities are only worsened leading to lengthening of transit times for movement of goods and people, a rise in transport costs overall and idling of transport fleets.

Disruptions in transportation and tightening of border regulations have also limited trade flows within the region. Thus, regional efforts were being called upon to help address trade matters.

3.8 Fisheries and Aquaculture

As a key economic activity in the SADC region in terms of food provision, employment creation and private income and public revenue generator, the fisheries and aquaculture sector was given special attention in terms of how it has been by the COVID-19 pandemic (SADC, 2020f: 5). Like many other economic sectors, as the COVID-19 pandemic affected the fisheries and aquaculture sector via the channels of changing consumer demand, market access or logistics-based challenges in transportation and border disturbances.

Even though the SADC (2020f) bulletin claims to give a specific focus on the fisheries and aquaculture sector, it does not give details of the actual impact of COVID-19 on employment, production and sales statistics as data necessary to help quantify the impact. Instead, mention is only made of the

COVID-19 pandemic having dislocated economic activity in the sector, adversely affecting fishers and fish farmers' livelihoods.

3.9 Environment, climate change and natural resources

SADC recognises the nexus between COVID-19 and environment, including climate change dynamics. As economic activity has dampened in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, pollutants from industrial activity have recorded a decline, leading to improvements in air water, and environmental quality. For SADC, there are lessons to learn from this in terms of how connection between economic activity and pollution operates. Nevertheless, the SADC bulletins are silent on SADC environmental issues have been specifically impacted by the pandemic, except cursory look at how waste (including medical) generation and management can underpin transmission of diseases.

Natural resources are critical for SADC economies; for the most part, natural resources underpin and drive other key economic sectors such as mining and tourism. SADC (2020h: 8) reports that "revenue streams to Governments and communities are drastically reduced due to collapse in nature-based tourism both consumptive (e.g. hunting and associated industries) and non-consumptive (game viewing, photographic safaris etc.)." The SADC bulletins do not give specific detail in terms of quantifying the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism-based revenue as well as employment in the sector. In addition, forestry and wildlife are expected to receive decreased government support, leaving the sector susceptible to vices such as poaching, deforestation, illicit trade as funding for anti-poaching and nature safeguarding initiatives reduce their scope of operations.

3.10 Energy sector

In the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, declining economic activity led to lower demand for electricity and, petroleum and gas.

The demand for electricity in the region reduced as observed from regional power demand which reflected in lower volumes of electricity trade in the region. By end of May 2020, the "Southern African Power Pool (SAPP) recorded that the lowest peak demand for mainland Member States reduced to 15,000 Megawatts (MW) which is less by more than 60 percent for the same period in 2019. The low demand from the main load centres compelled some of the national power utilities to put their high-voltage transmission facilities offline to protect them against high frequency and voltage proles due to low loads" (SADC, 2020h: 7). In some cases, some generation plants were operating on reserve mode. Overall, Day Ahead Market clearing prices reduced from 8.6 USc/ kWh

to 4.1 USc/ kWh. As Member States eased their lockdown restrictions, traded volumes of electrical energy increased from 89Gwh in March to 143GWh in early July, with Day Ahead market clearing prices rising from 4.1 USc/KWh to 4.8 USc/KWh.

Global trends affected the operations of petroleum and gas subsector in the region. The lowest demand for oil was recorded by April 2020 since 1998/1999. In South Africa, the low demand for petroleum products led to a plunge in production outputs for refineries following “unplanned and prescheduled maintenance shutdowns such that towards the end of May 2020, five (05) out of six (06) oil refineries were offline” (SADC, 2020h: 7). But by June 2020, a glut in petroleum demand led to some short-term shortages. The recovering of crude oil prices in international markets was recorded by June 2020 following a jump to US\$38 from US\$12 per barrel in April 2020.

3.11 Labour and employment sector

Taking cognisance of direct effects of reduced economic activity on employment, SADC acknowledged the variations of this impact across sectors: “the most at risk jobs are those dependent on trade, tourism and transport, most notably, those in the hospitality industry such as hotels, restaurants, wholesale and retail trade. Overall, at least 60 million jobs were affected though reduced working hours, lay-offs and general inactivity during the height of the lockdown measures” (SADC, 2020i: 6).

No detailed statistics were presented in the SADC bulletins to bring perspective to the actual job losses and in which economic sectors.

3.12 Law enforcement and security

Social unrests are expected during times of crises; the COVID-19 pandemic has fuelled some protests and demonstrations from different cadres including those working in the health sector. Against the backdrop of limited public resources, health workers have protested for lack payment of bonuses in addition to low salaries. Truck drivers have also responded by protesting violently in burning cross-border truckers in some Member States owing to frustrations arising from COVID-19 restrictions.

More worrying, as reported by SADC (2020i: 7) have been actions by Islamist militia who have launched enhanced violent attacks in some Member States, deepening the humanitarian crisis as people get displaced from their settlements.

COVID-19 has also led to temporary closure of police stations for decontamination in some instances, when, for example, police officers test positive. Such actions, though warranted, hinder the provision of adequate policing services to the communities.

Prior to the COVID-19,

- Commodity prices
- Contraction of economic activity
- Decline in government revenue
- Capital flight
- Growing fiscal deficit
- Soaring debt burden and defaults
- Depreciating currencies

4. An overview of SADC's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic

The analysis in this subsection gives an overview of SADC's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic based predominantly upon SADC's own publications. Hence, this is to engage what the regional organisation has put in place by way of policies to encourage its members' responses to the pandemic.

SADC has published a series of bulletins and reports to keep update and track of its concerted regional efforts in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussion now shifts from the general to the specific, by highlighting SADC's response to the pandemic thematically, based upon the detail of these bulletins and reports. It is worth noting at this juncture that these particular publications have been specific in their approach, giving details by sectors and services. Surprisingly, the publication dates for some bulletins were not recorded.

In general, SADC's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, though discretionary and somewhat varied at the country level, have been a combination of public health, monetary and fiscal policies. Principally, the aim has been to safeguard lives and livelihoods, with targeted measures focused on mitigating the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on human life and economic activity. In safeguarding human life, interventions have centred around control of human behaviour and protection of people from exposure. For the economy, policies have been targeted at preservation of existing businesses and jobs, via fiscal and monetary policy initiatives as well as trade measures at the regional level.

4.1 Restrictions on movement of people and goods

All SADC countries put in place strict restrictions on movement of people via the lockdown measures. Nevertheless, lockdowns have been undergoing revisions based upon threats presented by number of cases. In instances of lower cases, lockdown restrictions are eased off. For example, "South Africa and Botswana [had] announced plans for gradual re-opening of their economies on 1 May and 8 May 2020, respectively. The easing of lockdown regulations from level 5 to level 4 in South Africa will see over 1.5 million workers (about 40 per cent of workers) returning to work with strict adherence to all Covid-19 health and safety protocols" (SADC, 2020d: 4).

The relaxing of lockdown measures by SADC Member States is said to follow WHO guidelines which stipulates frames lockdown intensity by disease progression.

4.2 Specific responses speaking to the nexus between COVID-19 and ...

4.2.1 Financing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic

SADC countries like many other countries throughout the world are making use of domestic resources to fight the pandemic. But most of the SADC countries are amongst the poorest in the world, with no capacity to effectively fight off the pandemic in terms of health interventions and allocation of resources to safeguard economic activity. Thus, the international community has responded by providing financial support to developing across the world, including some SADC Member States. Indeed, given the global ubiquity of the pandemic, and debt situation of some of the poorest countries in the world, international goodwill has translated into actions and initiatives to offer financial support through loans and grants as well as relief packages.

Due to the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on livelihoods, and given the varied effects upon different income groups, public resources have been allocated towards spending on vulnerable groups, increasing spending on social safety nets. National governments have also benefited from external support offered by a range of international and regional institutions, which have had targeted material support towards the poor. For example, the IMF and World Bank “made available ... \$18 billion ... to enhance front-line health services, support the poor and vulnerable and keep economies afloat in the face of the worst global economic downturn” (SADC, 2020). In addition, G20 ministers of finance with support from the IMF and World Bank agreed to offer a facility – the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI – to suspend service payments from the poorest countries that request the suspension. Given binding constraints of COVID-19 on national economies, DSSI offers applicants an opportunity to assuage the fiscal constraints they face, thereby freeing up more resources to better respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of ameliorating its impact on both people and the economy. Other initiatives include the award-winning African Development Bank (AfDB) \$3 billion Fight COVID-19 social bond which was issued on March 27, 2020, in response to the coronavirus crisis, to ease the impact of the pandemic on people's means of living and economies of African countries. The African Export-Import Bank put in place a credit platform worth \$ 3 billion as additional support for African governments.

The IMF has provided emergency financial support to help developing countries cope with the COVID-19 contradictions. By end of April 2020, a number of financing platforms such as the Rapid Credit Facility, Rapid Financing Instrument and the Catastrophe and relief Trust were available to the world, with sub-Saharan Africa benefitting 44.9% of the total resource envelope, of which SADC Member States received 21.6% (SADC, 2020c: 5). The IMF emergency financing for the COVID-19 response benefited several SADC countries as the well as the World Bank's financing options (SADC, 2020m: 7).

Additionally, SADC calls upon Member States to consider other financing facilities. One such recommendation is the Global Fund on AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria which reprogrammed its grants by up to 5% to augment efforts towards the COVID-19 fight (SADC, 2020c).

In addition, international development organisations such as UNDP through their country offices were working closely with Member States, providing both financial and technical support to fight the COVID-19 scourge. Member States were encouraged to liaise with international development organisations, to draw upon them.

4.2.2 Economic perspectives

In recognising the damaging effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy, concern has been around how to translate the international and regional goodwill in terms of funding support into effective strategies which safeguard both people and the economy. In the micro-sphere, this has meant orchestrating interventions to support and strengthen economic activity at the enterprise level. Subsequently, a combination of targeted fiscal and monetary policies have been instituted to safeguard businesses while protecting employment in the face of the multiple challenges faced by the business community. Specifically, from the fiscal policy angle, accommodative tax measures to take into account the challenges faced by businesses were being adjusted accordingly.

From the monetary policy perspective, economic stimulus packages sometimes called the COVID-19 bond, have been used to make available funds for the business community, alongside the other fiscal incentives.

SADC (2020i: 6) reports that “all Member States introduced economic stimulus packages to ensure the survival of businesses during the crisis. Various fiscal and monetary policy measures have been utilized through vehicles such as COVID-19 relief funds and cooperation arrangements with financial institutions to defer and restructure loan obligations.” In South Africa, a R500 billion (\$26bn) stimulus package was provided to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, targeting South African enterprises and workers, municipalities for the provision of emergency water supply, increased sanitation, and social protection. Zambia has also used a K10 billion (\$500m) stimulus package called the Targeted Medium Term Refinancing Facility, to benefit Zambian firms and households via Financial Service Providers to effectively respond to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Namibia announced a \$450 million stimulus package for formal and informal businesses and households.

4.2.3 Transport and Trade Facilitation

The SADC Regional Trade and Transport Facilitation Committee (RTTFC) has been monitoring the COVID-19 response measures put in place by SADC Member States in connection with the congruence of national measures and the regional guidelines. Overall, the observations from the reports suggest that national measures are at times in conflict with regional guidelines, with a higher premium placed on national policies, often requiring a formal resolution by SADC-authorities.

Yet unresolved, by end of April 2020, Zambia put in place a strict policy, mandatory quarantining of all incoming drivers and vehicles including drivers ferrying essential and perishable cargo. Subsequently, a complaint was registered against Zambia, recorded as the Non-Tariff Barrier 000-951, a clear violation of regional agreement. An NTB 000-953 was registered against Zambia for putting in place fees on police escorts for operators and drivers. Mozambique had also suspended issuance of visas to commercial truck drivers – a complaint registered as NTB-00949, which had by end of April 2020 not been resolved.

Indeed, SADC notes that “an analysis of the implementation of the SADC Guidelines on harmonization and facilitation of cross-border operations across the region revealed that Member States were implementing trade and transportation laws and regulation differently during the COVID-19 emergency. Congestions at border posts were the result of lack of harmonization of public health measures at border posts, such as testing and quarantine policies” (2020f: 6).

To resolve the conflict of policies between the national and regional authorities in respect of transport and cross-border flows, Member States were being encouraged to provide “copies of national trade and transport facilitation guidelines that they have issued under the Covid-19 emergency, details of their focal persons of their National Trade and Transport bodies and details of designated border focal persons for data sharing in order to facilitate evaluation or consistency, information sharing, monitoring and reporting as directed by the SADC Council of Ministers” (SADC, 2020d: 6).

On transport and trade, particularly to avoid disruptions in cross-border supply chains and transportation, SADC was issuing communiques to Member States as a coordination mechanism, to help them to align their approaches and timing when putting in place measures to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Dialogue and cooperation between Member States ensured that issues pertaining to disruption of trade flows were promptly addressed. A few examples are worth spotlighting from the SADC (2020f) bulletin. Botswana and Zambia put in place joint COVID-19 clearance measures to clear traffic which had built up at Kazungula border. DRC and Zambia were innovative in their approach to clear the traffic which has built up at Kasumbalesa border; they

instituted a One Stop Borders Post, permitting officials from each country to operate from either territory. In addition, a road connecting the two borders was opened.

In an attempt at a comprehensive response strategy, SADC was also working closely with other regional bodies such as COMESA and EAC to harmonise their approaches to regulation of transport. In fact, "SADC on behalf of the Tripartite Regional Economic Communities of COMESA, EAC and SADC and the European Union Delegation to Botswana and SADC have signed addendum for additional resources to the Tripartite Transport and Transit Facilitation Programme (TTTFP) for the development and implementation of the Corridor Trip Monitoring System (CTMS) in East and Southern African regional transport corridors. CTMS will assist Member States in the implementation of SOPs for safe transport and trade in response to the COVID-19 pandemic" (SADC, 2020g: 6).

Indeed, SADC as a regional body had a key role to play in the area of trade and transportation facilitation between Member States including public health initiatives, revising guidelines and interventions as the dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic played out. On 23 June 2020, the SADC Council of Ministers "approved the revised SADC Guidelines on Movement of Goods and Services across the region during COVID-19 together with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for safe and efficient trade and transport facilitation. The Council also made landmark decisions on harmonization of COVID testing protocols and mutual recognition of the test results among Member States" (SADC, 2020h: 8).

Some border posts such Chirundu had even temporarily instituted a 24-hour work schedule in order to clear the traffic which had diverted to them when some other border posts were closed due to COVID-19 positive tests of some staff.

The Expanded Technical Committee of Experts from COMESA, EAC and SADC from public health, trade, transport, and public security reached a consensus on 16 July 2020 on a number of key issues as inputs in the guidelines on the movement of transport during the Covid-19 pandemic. Among the issues of consensus was the implementation of integrated and harmonised surveillance and monitoring system to monitor driver health, truck drivers and vehicles for contact tracing.

For the aviation industry, Member States had points of entry and exit screening and testing sites, while reminding passengers of personal hygiene as they also were required to register their details for follow-up should that be required.

4.2.4 Health Systems and Health Care

HIV/AIDS, TB, Global Vaccines, Traditional Medicines Research

Overall, in particular, public health policies and measures have involved interventions instituting and enhancing hand hygiene, carrying out tests and offering treatment which have seen the ballooning of spending in the health sector for expenditure on cleaning agents, medical supplies and staff time. Other measures to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have resorted to control of movement of both people and goods, as well as restrictions and suspension of non-essential economic activities.

In tracking the dynamics of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, SADC took cognisance of efforts and resources within the continent. For example, by end of May 2020, Africa CDC had launched a strategy called the Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing (PACT) as a way to enhance continental testing efforts and reduce COVID-19 transmission in Africa (SADC, 2020h). Thus, SADC encouraged its Member States to tap into the resources of this initiative.

Some SADC Member States such as South Africa had complex health system response strategies which took account of the existing demographics and comorbidity profile as part of a risk assessment to establish which segments of society were most at risk of the COVID-19 pandemic (SADC, 2020h: 5). For South Africa, the comorbidity profile focused on HIV/AIDS and TB, with Western Cape being the most affected province in the country. Thus, due to interactions between COVID-19 and these pre-existing conditions as intensifying factors, more effort was to be directed to segments of the population most afflicted to ensure that they were insulated from exposure to the coronavirus. TB and HIV/AIDS patients are at least 2.5 times more likely to die from COVID-19.

4.2.5 Education and Labour policy

Public health directives were being promoted at workplaces to ensure that employees at various levels remained insulated from transmission. SADC (2020i: 6) reports that “the main focus of the labour inspectorate in the Member States is education and information sharing on COVID-19, with involvement of public health and occupational safety and health authorities.”

In addition, concerted regional efforts are seen via the SADC Private Sector Forum to provide information on SADC Labour Law Guide, which details COVID-19 responses by SADC Member States. Furthermore, social dialogue between government, workers and employers was being relied upon

to formulate solutions. In practice, some Member States such as Namibia implemented policies such as freezing of retrenchments during lockdowns.

SADC Secretariat is working closely with ILO in supporting Member States towards the implementation of the 4-pillar strategy endorsed at the Global Summit convened by ILO virtually from 2-9 July 2020. The critical pillars identified are stimulating the economy and employment; supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes; protecting workers in the workplace and relying on social dialogue for solutions.

4.2.6 Energy

SADC (2020h: 7) reports that “the Secretariat continues to oversee the situation of the COVID-19 in terms of the energy supply, demand and consumption in the Region.”

4.2.7 Food, Nutrition security and Livelihoods

As the fisheries and aquaculture sector is seen a component of entirety of food production and supply chain, it is worth reflecting on here. SADC (2020f: 6) notes that the on 22 May 2020 held a joint virtual meeting “Ministers responsible for Food Security and Agriculture, and Fisheries and Aquaculture” to approve “response measures to COVID-19 for the fisheries and aquaculture sector.” The proposed public health and economic measures were targeted at preserving economic activity in the fisheries and aquaculture sector to prevent transmission of the coronavirus, protect employment in the sector. Thus, interventions went beyond production, to include the entire supply chain right up to wholesale and retail marketing, calling upon SADC to minimise cross-border disruptions as Member States were being encouraged to “ensure that trade flows continue to be as free as possible, in line with the SADC Free Trade Area established under the Protocol on Trade (1996), as amended in 2010” (SADC, 2020f: 6).

To provide social protection and prop up the vulnerable sections of society, a number of measures have been installed, ranging from cash transfers, food relief, wage subsidies, unemployment benefits to child grants. To demonstrate the ad hoc nature of some of the initiatives, it is noted that around 70% of the schemes were new programmes (SADC, 2020i: 6).

The SADC Secretariat has been working closely with UN World Food Programme (WFP) to assess the impact of COVID-19 on food, nutrition and livelihood security in the region.

4.2.8 Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) sector

The ICT sector has enjoyed substantial dividends during the lockdown. Entertainment, remote education, learning and work platforms has driven use of ICT facilities and services. The main beneficiaries have been global ICT giants like Zoom, Skype, Apple etc. ICT-based economic activities around the region can also tap into these opportunities.

SADC (2020d: 4) warns that "The benefits associated with Covid-19 to the ICT industry maybe be short-lived as the auxiliary industries are weighed down by the pandemic. The negatively impacted industries that include tourism, aviation and sport have seen a dip in visits/traffic volumes and business on websites for airlines, travel agents, hotels, tourist destinations. Additionally, uncertainty has changed consumer spending behaviours and patterns skewed towards essential products and services which can adversely affect the business and revenues for e-commerce industry." Indeed, by and large, ICT depends upon the level of economic activity elsewhere, including physical production and services.

5. Concluding Remarks and Policy Recommendations

5.1 Concluding remarks

The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating, adversely affecting both human lives and livelihoods. Immediate responses have been centred around preservation of human lives via containment measures, but as the pandemic wreaks havoc on economies, targeted measures have been provided to mitigate the impact on livelihoods and sources of income.

In general, "SADC Member States have continued to implement control measures to achieve low level or no transmission with varying intensity depending on the transmission scenario each country is facing (no cases, first cases, clusters of cases, or community transmission). These measures included among others; identification, testing, isolation and care for all cases, tracing and quarantine of all contacts, public health and social measures at individual and community levels. Many countries in the region also implemented additional large scale public health and social measures (PHSM), including movement restrictions, closure of schools and businesses, geographical area quarantine, and international travel restrictions" (SADC, 2020e: 4).

SADC has also been used as platform for dialogue and resolution between Member States in the event that containment measures at the country level come into conflict with regional agreements, particularly in terms of cross-border trade.

In a nutshell, SADC points out that the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been formed around five broad categories, namely: public health measures; monetary measures; fiscal measures; travel and human control measures; and trade measures.

5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations are discussed in terms of the themes presented when analysing the containment measures put in place by Member States. More broadly, SADC recommended that Member States follow closely and align their national policies to the UN guidelines in connection with public health and social measures as well as business and macroeconomic policies.

5.2.1 Lockdowns and social measures

Lockdowns and containment measures were dependent on the severity of cases, easing when

cases were dropping and becoming more stringent when cases go up. Lifting of lockdown rules were being encouraged in phased manner, to ensure conformity with public guidelines, to avoid transmission of the coronavirus.

Overall, risk assessments are being encouraged when adjustments in public health and social measures and interventions are required. Thus, according to SADC (2020f: 4), “the decision to introduce, adapt, or lift public health and social measures should be based on a risk assessment with a standard methodology to balance the risk of relaxing measures, capacity to detect a resurgence in cases, capacity to manage extra patients in health facilities or other locations, and ability to re-introduce public health and social measures, if needed. Since the risk of COVID-19 transmission is not homogeneous within a country, the risk assessment should be extended to sub-national or even community levels.”

5.2.2 Economic Perspectives

SADC recommends that SADC macroeconomic convergence programme should be the basis upon which strategies to fight the COVID-19 pandemic should be based. Within this framework, member states are encouraged to develop roadmaps and action plans that reflect priority sectors, ensuring that investments are channelled to critical economic activities which can underpin and create resilience while also building competitiveness.

In terms of resource allocation through the public/national budget, SADC (2020e: 7) recommends that governments across the region “revise priorities reflected in budget revenue, spending and financing to meet COVID-19 emergency demands and to contain fiscal deficits and surges in public debt, at manageable levels.”

SADC (2020f: 6) also recommends that as economies start to recover, policy focus should shift from broad fiscal support to more affordable, targeted policies, particularly those affecting the poorest households and sectors worst affected the pandemic.

Owing to huge debt levels in the region and deteriorating macroeconomic fundamentals of Member States, SADC (2020g: 6) recommended that sound debt management and transparency, good governance, effective regulation and supervision, and prudent macroeconomic policies were crucial for comprehensive COVID-19 response package. SADC (2020h, 7) urged Member States to “implement structural reforms to put their fiscal positions on a path consistent with debt sustainability.”

5.2.3 Public Health

Public health was seen to operate at different levels, from the system to the institutional and individual level. At the system and institutional levels, focus was on protection, safety, diagnosis and treatment, using a combination of health care interventions, social distancing and cleaning/disinfecting potential areas or spaces of interaction. Thus, “the lifting or adjusting of public health and social measures should be coupled with measures aimed at breaking chains of Covid-19 transmission by detecting, testing, isolating, and treating cases and quarantining contacts. Evidence in the SADC Region demonstrates that while some countries have significantly expanded their testing capacity, the required level of testing to effectively control the transmission of the virus remains insufficient.” (SADC, 2020e: 5)

At the individual level, personal hygiene practices, protective clothing, masks including water and sanitation facilities were being encouraged.

Other recommendations in the health sector include those targeting health workers such as scaling up testing of health workers exposed to COVID-19, while also developing a protocol for health worker infection management (SADC, 2020j: 5).

5.2.4 Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) sector

SADC (2020e) recommended that investment in ICT facilities and capabilities must result from combined efforts of governments, private sector and businesses, to enable business continuity and support economic growth. SADC, however, does not reflect upon the nature of such ICT capabilities and the source of funds for such investments.

5.2.5 Food and Nutrition security

To promote food and nutrition security, some recommendations were specific to particular food production and supply subsectors. Specifically, the SADC recommended that border restrictions be avoided on trade in fish and fish products to minimise deficits in food provision. Thus, “adherence to the recently approved SADC Guidelines on Harmonization and Facilitation of Cross-Border Transport Operations across the Regional during the COVID-19 Pandemic” is of critical importance as response measure (SADC, 2020f: 6).

Member States are being advised to expand high-impact nutrition interventions, targeting children, adolescent girls and women of reproductive age. In addition, Member States are being encouraged

to seek increased budget allocations for relief food aid, to help prop up poor households during the COVID-19 episode.

5.2.6 Energy sector

SADC notes that the COVID-19 era is an opportune reflection moment. Specifically, "Governments have an opportunity, as part of their economic stimulus and recovery plans, to ramp up investment in and adoption of renewable energy technologies, in keeping with the SAPP's Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy" (SADC, 2020h: 8).

5.2.7 Environment, climate change and natural resources

Despite the natural resources sector being afflicted by the pandemic leading to a slump in interlinked economic activities, governments across the region are urged to dedicate a parcel of public resources to conservation during the and beyond the pandemic. SADC (2020h: 9) encourages Member States "to increase joint Transboundary Conservation activities to complement strengths and increase effectiveness against illegal activities."

5.2.8 Trade and Transport Facilitation

As the aviation industry was beginning to open up, stringent COVID-19 guidelines regarding public health and personal hygiene were being encouraged to avoid transmission.

Strict adherence to COVID-19 regional guidelines for cross-border trade were being encouraged. Mutual recognition of COVID-19 test certificates meant that Member states did not have to test again as results were valid for 14 days.

5.2.9 Education

Member States were encouraged to adopt blended learning approaches to address educational inclusion and embark on policy reform for the education sector to cope with future crises.

5.2.10 Civil Society and Citizens' roles

Though the SADC bulletins are largely mute on the role of citizens and civil society during the COVID-19 era, much can be said about this. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to present mounting challenges for livelihoods and health systems, citizens have a duty to themselves and

their communities. Without the need for coercion, the COVID-19 pandemic calls for concerted efforts and solidarity from the patriotic citizenship point of view, asking people to remain resolute as they adhere to social and public health guidelines.

Civil society groups have a role to play in advocating to, and engaging, both the government and grassroots communities. On the one hand, they could speak to the government on behalf of the communities, especially vulnerable sections, to ask for support through social protection initiatives. On the other hand, they can speak to communities on behalf of the government, to ask that communities observe social and public health guidelines aimed at curbing the transmission of the coronavirus.

Engagement of both communities and citizens is crucial for social cohesion in avoiding tensions which might lead to social unrest. Hence, this aspect of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic must receive adequate attention, in terms of resources and a platform. In extreme cases, some governments can use the lockdown and containment measures as an excuse for centralising power and strengthening their grip and surveillance over citizens.

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