



Concept Note

JOINT SITTING OF THE SADC PF STANDING COMMITTEES AND THE RWPC

(Human and Social Development and Special Programmes; Democracy and Governance and Human Rights; Regional Women’s Parliamentary Caucus; Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources; Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment; and Regional Parliamentary Model Laws Oversight Committee)

SESSION I THEME:

“THE URGENCY OF CONTINUED INVESTMENTS IN CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE COVID-19 CONTEXT AND THE ROLE OF THE SADC MODEL LAW ON CHILD MARRIAGE”

SESSION II THEME:

“THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ADVANCING ACCESS TO ADVANCE ACCESS TO COVID VACCINES, MEDICINES AND DIAGNOSTICS”

15TH APRIL 2021

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF) will host a Joint Sitting of Standing Committees and the RWPC on 15th April 2021. Session I will be under the theme **“THE URGENCY OF CONTINUED INVESTMENTS IN CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE COVID-19 CONTEXT”** while Session II will focus on **“THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ADVANCING ACCESS TO ADVANCE ACCESS TO COVID VACCINES, MEDICINES AND DIAGNOSTICS.”**

2.0 THE URGENCY OF CONTINUED INVESTMENTS IN CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE COVID-19 CONTEXT

The first part of the programme in conjunction with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA ESARO) East and Southern Africa Regional Office and the United Nations Children’s Fund East and Southern Africa Regional Office (UNICEF ESARO) will focus on the increased urgency to invest in child marriage efforts in the COVID-19 context and the continued important role of understanding and using the SADC Model Law to strengthen legislation, policy and accountability frameworks in countries in the region.

Projections by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in April 2020 showed that COVID-19 will disrupt efforts to end child marriage, potentially resulting in an additional 13 million child marriages taking place globally between 2020 and 2030 that could otherwise have been averted. While many schools have been allowed to re-open this year, the risk of being exposed to gender-based violence (GBV), female genital mutilation and adolescent pregnancy remains for those who are unable to return. In addition, mega-trends of increasing conflict, climatic disasters and deepening poverty pose new challenges and underscore the importance of the Leave No One Behind principle. A Regional Brief on Child Marriage in COVID -19, produced by UNFPA and UNICEF, highlighted the disruptions and alternative approaches that the two agencies have adopted to respond to child marriage in lockdown contexts in the Global Programme to End Child Marriage (GPECM). This work continues into 2021 alongside governments, development partners, civil society, regional economic communities and United Nations sister agencies.

One of the innovative approaches which was adopted is the animated adaptation of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage. Through a four-part video and comic book series, UNFPA, UNICEF, GNB and the SADC Parliamentary Forum utilize the voices of young advocates, child marriage survivors, parliamentarians, healthcare workers, religious leaders and law enforcement to champion equal access for girls to education, health and rights in Southern Africa. The series entitled ‘Wait to Wed’ comes at a critical point in the roadmap to achieving the SDGs by 2030 and realizing Agenda 2063.

3.0 THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ADVANCING ACCESS TO ADVANCE ACCESS TO COVID VACCINES, MEDICINES AND DIAGNOSTICS

The second part of the programme in conjunction with the AIDS and Rights Alliance for southern Africa (ARASA) and Southern African Programme on Access to Medicines and Diagnostics (SAPAM) will focus on reviewing the progress that has been made by some of the SADC member states in efforts to review, revise and install progressive Intellectual Property / Patent laws and national policies. The session will look at progress made during the period 2012 - 2020, to advance enabling IP/Patent legislative and regulatory environments, for the improvement of access to essential pharmaceutical medicines and diagnostics and present an update of the Breaking IP Barriers: Creating Pathways to Medicine Access SADC Member States Snapshot Report on the status of TRIPS Flexibilities publication presented to SADC PF in 2018 by ARASA and SAPAM.

Moreover, this session will discuss the emerging COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of TRIPS flexibilities and discuss options available to the Member States, to improve access to the COVID-19 therapeutics (diagnostics and vaccines), as well as the role that parliamentarians could play in this.

Member States (MS) of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have recognised the importance of Intellectual Property (IP) as an important policy instrument to drive innovation, industrial development, knowledge transfer and regional integration. Harnessing of the flexibilities contained in the WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS-Agreement) will go a long way in the protection and promotion of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs), while safeguarding public health, promoting local infrastructure and manufacturing capability, as well as food security and the protection of indigenous knowledge systems in the SADC.

The past decade saw greater momentum within member states leveraging the TRIPS-flexibilities as a strategy to promote access to affordable, safe, and efficacious medicines. The past year has highlighted the need to increase this momentum more than ever as conversations around how to ensure an equitable roll out of COVID-19 vaccines regardless of income level of countries. There are different measures at that can be implemented at international, regional levels that could improve access to the COVID-19 therapeutics and parliamentarians can play their part in ensuring these measures are implemented at national level.

4.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE JOINT SITTING

The main objectives of the two Session of the Joint Sitting will be as follows:

Session I

- i) To explore and raise awareness to the Members of the Forum on the Impact of Covid 19 on the efforts to end Child marriages in the region;

- ii) Raising awareness and strengthening knowledge of the Members of the Forum through showcasing of the Wait to Wed video series of the Model Law on Child marriages with the aim of deepening their understanding of the Model law; and
- iii) To provide an opportunity to Members of the Forum to interact and share with their counterparts on the implementation of Child marriage related laws in their respective countries.

Session II

- i) Discuss the emerging COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of TRIPS flexibilities and discuss options available to the Member States; and
- ii) To enhance the role of parliamentarians in advancing access to the COVID-19 therapeutics (diagnostics and vaccines).

5.0 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE JOINT SITTING

The specific objectives and expected outcomes of the Joint Session are as follows:

- a) To explore and raise awareness to the Members of the Forum on the Impact of Covid 19 on the efforts to end Child marriages in the region;
- b) Raising awareness and strengthening knowledge of the Members of the Forum through showcasing of the Wait to Wed video series of the Model Law on Child marriages with the aim of deepening their understanding of the Model law; and
- c) To provide an opportunity to Members of the Forum to interact and share with their counterparts on the implementation of Child marriage related laws in their respective countries.
- d) To share with Members of the Forum the progress that has been made by some of the SADC member states in efforts to review, revise and install progressive Intellectual Property / Patent laws and national policies.
- e) To provide an opportunity to Members of the Forum to interact and share with their counterparts on the role they are currently playing and can play to improve access to the COVID-19 therapeutics in their respective countries.

6.0 VENUE AND PARTICIPATION

The Meeting will involve Members of all the SADC PF Standing Committees, namely Human and Social Development and Special Programmes; Democracy and Governance and Human Rights; Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus; Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources; Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment; and Regional Parliamentary Model Laws Oversight Committee. It will also be attended by SRHR Researchers and partners and will take place virtually

on Zoom in the three official languages of SADC PF, namely English, French and Portuguese.