



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND
SPECIAL PROGRAMS (HSDSP), HELD VIRTUALLY ON FRIDAY 16TH
OCTOBER 2020**

PRESENT

1.	Hon. Bertha M. Ndebele	Malawi (Chairperson)
2.	Hon. Luisa Damiao	Angola
3.	Hon. Ts'epang Ts'ita Mosena	Lesotho
4.	Hon. Jerónima Agostinho	Mozambique
5.	Hon. Nkhensani Kate Bilankulu	South Africa
6.	Hon. Lucien Rakotomalala	Madagascar
7.	Hon. Maria Langa-Phiri	Zambia
8.	Hon. Joyce Makonya	Zimbabwe

ABSENT WITH APOLOGY

1.	Hon Ashley Ittoo	Mauritius
2.	Hon Sebastian Karupu	Namibia
3.	Hon Jamal K Ali	Tanzania
4.	Hon Terence Mondoni	Seychelles

SECRETARY

1.	Mr Dennis Gondwe, Secretary	SADC PF Secretariat
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IN ATTENDANCE

1.	Ms. Boemo M. Sekgoma	Secretary General
2.	Ms Jabulile Malaza	Eswatini
3.	Ms Agnes Lilungwe	SADC PF Secretariat
4.	Trudi Hartzenberg	Executive Director, Trade Law Centre (Resource Person)

The meeting was called to order at 09:15 hours.

AGENDA

- 1) Credentials of Delegates and Apologies.
- 2) Welcome Remarks by the Chairperson.
- 3) Adoption of Agenda.
- 4) Consideration of Minutes from the previous Meeting held at Southern Sun Hotel O.R. Tambo International Airport, Johannesburg, South Africa on 10th March 2020, ahead of the 47th Plenary Assembly Session.
- 5) Noting of the COVID-19 Guidelines Released to National Parliaments and Consideration of the Adaptive Strategy for the Forum concerning the linkage between SRHR and COVID-19
- 6) Commemoration of the International Safe Abortion Day 2020
- 7) Presentation on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on the SADC Region
- 8) Closing Remarks by the Chairperson

1.0 CREDENTIALS OF DELEGATES AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were recorded from the national Parliaments of Botswana, Namibia, Mauritius, Seychelles and Tanzania. 8 out of the 15 Member Parliaments were present. Accordingly, the meeting was deemed to be properly constituted.

2.0 ADOPTION OF AGENDA

The draft Agenda was adopted without amendments on a motion by Mozambique and seconded by Zimbabwe.

3.0 WELCOME REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON

In her welcome remarks, the Chairperson, Hon Bertha Ndebele, recalled the meeting of the 10th March 2020 held in Johannesburg, South Africa, where the HSDSP Committee had deliberated on a number of issues, including the implementation status of the second phase of the SRHR, HIV and AIDS Governance Project which fell under the Committee's oversight ambit, the proposal for the development of the Model Law on Public Financial Management and the recruitment of the Programme Manager for the HSDSP and GEWAYD Standing Committees. In the same meeting, the Committee had also requested to be briefed on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SADC Region hence the inclusion of the said briefing on the agenda of this meeting. Hon. Ndebele commended the Secretariat for securing a resource person to sensitize the Committee on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which was adversely affecting not only the Region but the entire globe. To that end, the meeting was being held under the current and relevant theme, **“The need to adapt to COVID-19 and streamline response measures taken in the view of uplifting the SRHR Agenda of SADC Member Parliaments.”**

Hon. Ndebele noted that in line with its Vision of standing as **“the flag-bearer of democratization and socio-economic development in the SADC Region”** the SADC PF had proactively developed and released COVID-19 Guidelines for National Parliaments to assist them to respond to the pandemic in a harmonized, rights-based manner. The HSDSP Committee, as the Committee directly responsible for championing human and social development issues at the Forum was thus duty bound to consider the Guidelines as well as the adaptive strategies and, where necessary, provide direction in the implementation of the same given the differential impact of COVID-19 on SRHR in the different Member States. It was thus imperative that the Members of the HSDSP Committee be capacitated on the impact of the pandemic and possible response strategies as this would enable them to spearhead debate at the Forum and in their national Parliaments.

4.0 CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD AT SOUTHERN SUN HOTEL O.R. TAMBO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA ON 10th MARCH 2020, AHEAD OF THE 47th PLENARY ASSEMBLY SESSION.

The Committee considered the minutes of the previous meeting, and the following corrections were made:

1. That on page 1, the name of Hon. Mapelepo be removed on the list of those absent with apologies;
2. That on page 5, Item 5.1 first sentence the word ‘including’ be replaced with ‘namely’
3. That on Page 5 on the table reflecting SRHR Researchers the spelling of the name of the SRHR Researcher appointed by the Parliament of Lesotho be corrected to “Ntsoaki Chabeli”
4. That on page 6 Item 5.2 be rephrased to ‘each staff member’
5. That on page 10 Item 7.0 be rephrased to “...the Secretary General provided the link to the WHO website for more information”

On the motion by Mozambique and seconded by Zimbabwe the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10th March 2020 were adopted as a correct record of proceedings subject to the afore stated amendments.

5.0 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING, HELD AT SOUTHERN SUN HOTEL O.R. TAMBO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA ON 10th MARCH 2020, AHEAD OF THE 47th PLENARY ASSEMBLY SESSION.

There were no Matters Arising from the Minutes of the previous meeting.

6.0 NOTING OF THE COVID-19 GUIDELINES RELEASED TO NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS AND CONSIDERATION OF THE ADAPTIVE STRATEGY

FOR THE FORUM CONCERNING THE LINKAGE BETWEEN SRHR AND COVID-19.

- 6.1** The Secretary General briefed the meeting that in line with the Forum’s Vision of being ‘the flag-bearer of democratisation and socio-economic development in the SADC Region,’ it was imperative for Member Parliaments and Members of the SADC PF to keep abreast with contemporary developmental issues, including strategies to counter and adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic which had been declared a disease of International Public Health Concern (IPHC) by the World Health Organisation (WHO). To that end, the SADC PF had come up with the Guidelines for National Parliaments to Address the COVID-19 Outbreak (Attached as Annexure 1) as a framework to buttress short and long-term interventions by national Parliaments and Governments in the region. The Guidelines were informed by public health principles contained in Model Laws that had been developed by the Forum, including the quest for Universal Health Coverage (UHC) which had been the theme of the 46th Plenary Assembly held in Swakopmund, Namibia in December 2019, as well as international public health principles outlined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) among others.
- 6.2** The Guidelines were also predicated on Parliament’s role in mitigating the pandemic including, but not limited to, policy-making and enactment of legislation as well as budgetary oversight. To that end, the Guidelines provided pointers to Members on what they should look out for in fulfilling their legislative, policy and budgetary oversight and representative role in the fight against COVID-19 within the remit of UHC. This included embedding principles of equality, access to health care services, observance of human rights, protection and promotion of frontline staff and access to SRHR services which had become more prominent during the pandemic. For instance, cases of teenage pregnancies, gender-based violence, intimate partner rape and rape in general had increased while access to health care services such as cervical cancer screening and access to anti-retroviral treatment had also been seriously compromised. It was thus critical for Parliament to enquire into and deliberate on these issues as well as ensuring that budgetary allocations cover this broad spectrum of SRHR issues which had been heightened by the pandemic. The Guidelines thus provided a user-friendly one-stop guideline in looking at this whole gamut of SRHR related issues.
- 6.3** The Guidelines also outlined the possible adaptive strategies by national

Parliaments and how Parliaments could streamline SRHR issues within these response initiatives. For instance, it was highly probable that national Parliaments would prioritise the enactment of COVID-19 related emergency legislation during the prevalence of the pandemic at the expense of any other legislation. It would be important, therefore, for Members to ensure that SRHR issues do not take a back seat during the pandemic given the upturn in SRHR indicators during the pandemic. Thus it would be prudent for national Parliaments to prioritise both SRHR and COVID-19 related legislation despite giving greater priority to the latter.

- 6.4** The Secretary General stated that over and above budgetary oversight, the Guidelines also provided for increased oversight on institutions and agencies of the State during the pandemic. It was just as important for national Parliaments to ensure prudential allocation and use of resources during this crisis period as it was for them to prevent arbitrary wastage of public funds. It would also be important for Parliaments to demonstrate inclusivity and an increased willingness to champion SRHR issues of communities and vulnerable groups during the pandemic. To this end, Members of the HSDSP Committee were expected to engage citizens at the community level to hear their concerns and report to the Committee on the same. Members were also implored to influence their Committees at the national level to adopt and implement the Guidelines and again report on what they had done in this regard at the next meeting.
- 6.5** In the ensuing deliberations, the Chairperson underscored the importance of the Guidelines particularly, their insistence on Members keeping tabs on SRHR issues during the pandemic. Hon. Ndebele confirmed that, indeed, teenage pregnancies had gone up exponentially in Malawi with the Ministry of Health confirming that the rate of teenage pregnancies had risen from 29% to 35% since March 2020. To that end, it was imperative for Members of the HSDSP Committee to internalise the Guidelines and the adaptive strategies and champion them in their respective national Parliaments.

7.0 COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL SAFE ABORTION DAY 2020

- 7.1** As part of belated commemorations of the International Safe Abortion Day held on 28th September 2020 under the theme, ***“Telemedicine, self-managed abortion and access to safe abortion in the context of COVID-19 pandemic,”*** the Committee was treated to an illustrative video which highlighted the prevalence of unsafe abortions and their negative

impact on women and girls in the region. The video revealed that, though most countries in the Region were averse to legalising safe abortion, one (1) in every four (4) pregnancies in Southern Africa ended in abortion while sixteen thousand (16 000) women die each year from abortion related complications. 74% of unsafe abortions ended in death and the reasons for unsafe abortion varied from rape to unmet needs for contraceptives as well as poverty.

7.2 However, these fatalities could be avoided if women and adolescent girls are given unrestricted access to safe abortion services and contraceptives. Instead, girls and women have had to suffer the ignominy of stigma and ostracism that often comes with unsafe abortion let alone the trauma and lifelong internal injuries associated with the same. Unsafe abortions were also impacting negatively on the development of women and adolescent girls in the Region as the victims are often forced to drop out of school due to stigmatisation and thus miss out on economic opportunities. In this regard, unsafe abortions have adverse economic consequences for governments and the public health system as the cost of having safe abortions was estimated to be less than a tenth of the cost of caring for women after abortion. Additionally, loss of income and the cost of recovery from unsafe abortions exerted a major financial burden on families, communities and the public health system.

7.3 Restrictive policies and legislation were the major stumbling block to safe abortion and unrestricted access to contraceptives. Even in cases where safe abortion is permissible, other barriers such as the distance to the health care service centre, lack of information on safe abortion, social norms and cultural practices that perceive abortion as taboo and sinful and stigma drove women and adolescent girls underground into unsafe abortion practices. Governments and Parliaments in the SADC Region thus had it within their power to stem the growing tide of unsafe abortions and save lives by:

1. Enacting progressive SRHR policies and legislation that promote safe abortion and access to contraceptives.
2. Speaking out against stigma, social norms and cultural practices that force women and adolescent girls to opt for clandestine unsafe abortions.
3. Educating health service providers on ethical conduct that is non-judgemental and supportive of safe abortion.
4. Enhancing access to sexual and reproductive health information.

5. Lobbying for the implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education to prevent early and unwanted pregnancies

7.4 Making abortion legal and accessible would thus improve the lives of communities by reducing maternal mortality and morbidity, keeping the girl child in school and increasing sexual and reproductive health outcomes. Consequently, putting policies in place that expand access to safe abortion would lower health care costs and achieve Sustainable Development Goals.

7.5 The Committee noted and acknowledged the need to promote safe abortion in the SADC Region by enacting enabling legislation and policies. The Committee recognised that in the absence of enabling legislation unsafe abortion would continue unabated and the Region would continue to lose the potential human capital resident in women and adolescent girls.

8.0 PRESENTATION ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE SADC REGION: TRUDY HARTZENBERG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TRADE LAW CENTRE

8.1 Ms Hartzenberg prefaced her presentation by acknowledging that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected everyone, some more closely than others, and had changed the way we live, the way we relate and the way we do business. She asserted that the COVID-19 pandemic was a health crisis in the first instance which had morphed into a global economic crisis and a developmental crisis for Africa. This had been exacerbated by Africa's vulnerability to crises due to the continent's fragile health systems, the largely informal economies and a heavy reliance on tourism and trade which were adversely impacted by the closure of borders. COVID-19 had thus exposed existing vulnerabilities, inequalities and exclusions and unearthed new ones. The pandemic had brought to the fore the need for Africa and the region to review its national, regional and continental development priorities as well as the importance of regional integration, regional co-operation and collaborative regional responses in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and any other crises that may arise in future. It was thus important to review some of the response initiatives that countries in the region had taken with a view to galvanising reconstruction, recovery and building resilience.

8.2 The presenter noted that from the time the first case was discovered in Egypt on 14th February 2020, African countries had stepped up their capacity to test and trace cases of infection. In that respect, African countries had proven that in a short space of time they could develop their capacities and strengthen their health care systems- a positive

development which Africa and the region should build on for future resilience.

- 8.3** In terms of national emergency response measures, the presenter noted that most countries either declared the pandemic a state of emergency or a national disaster, both of which are governed by national constitutions and are subject to Parliamentary oversight. These declarations were both legitimate and appropriate and allowed States to muster the resources necessary to fight the pandemic timeously. However, it must be noted that some of the emergency measures, including national lockdowns, had had a severe and lasting impact on the economies of SADC countries in terms of income generation and employment. An increasing number of people had lost their livelihoods, among them cross border traders who were mostly women, tour operators, small and medium enterprises. It was thus urgent and imperative for policy-makers to start factoring this into the planning process for post-COVID recovery and job creation.
- 8.4** Ms Hartzenberg also reminded the Committee that the rule of law is not suspended during states of emergency/national disasters. It was, therefore, the role of Parliament to ensure that the rule of law is observed and further that the measures adopted are legitimate and appropriate within the ambit of the state of emergency. The presenter highlighted that national emergency measures do not only impact on the national territory but can go further to adversely affect neighbouring countries. For instance, the closure of a border has an immediate impact on neighbouring countries particularly in view of the configuration of the SADC Region which has a number of landlocked countries. This impacts on trade routes and renders access to food supplies difficult thus making food security a major concern. Access to medicinal requirements and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was also disturbed by the closure of borders. Additionally, international agreements, among them, Article 9 of the SADC Protocol on Trade, allow for exceptions during states of emergency and enable countries to place restrictions on exports while allowing imports by, for example, lowering import duty on certain goods. However, when governments entertain these measures they recognise the impact that it will have but the measures are adopted to protect the interests of their citizens even if they have an impact beyond their national jurisdiction or boundaries. Thus the pandemic also affected trading across borders.
- 8.5** On a positive note, the COVID-19 pandemic had enhanced the use of information and communication technology. The presenter noted that some countries had begun accepting e-certificates of origin in payments, e-certificates for standards and communicating digitally to expedite decisions and facilitate trade. The lesson to be learnt was that if digital trade solutions work in the Region during the time of the pandemic, then there was need to seriously consider adopting them post-COVID as they

bring significant cost and time savings and reduce the transaction cost of doing business which disproportionately impacts SMEs. However, the region must remain wary that digital trade is contingent upon network connectivity and energy security which the Region has to improve.

- 8.6 Conversely, the coronavirus had exposed Africa and the region's vulnerability. The presenter pointed out that Africa as a continent is home to thirty-three (33) of the world's forty-seven (47) least developed countries. Of those 33, fourteen (14) are landlocked which brings its own challenges while some are also small island countries which brings additional challenges. To this end, the budgets of the majority of nations had been stretched to the limit in attempting to mitigate the pandemic leaving them largely dependent on external support. While this support was welcome, the presenter cautioned that some of the support would only worsen the national debt post-COVID 19. This would have a bearing on reconstruction and recovery efforts. It was, therefore, important for Parliaments to closely monitor the national debt with a view to ensuring that it does not adversely affect the country's resilience in future.
- 8.7 Ms Hartzenberg also flagged the strain that had been placed by the COVID-19 pandemic on diaspora remittances as one of the economic effects of the pandemic. She noted that in some countries, diaspora remittances make a significant contribution to financial inflows at the household and national level. As such they were critical for livelihoods and access to essential services and supplies. Regrettably, the World Investment Report predicted that foreign direct investment to African countries would decline by between 25% and 40% which is a very significant reduction particularly in view of the fact that most African countries did not generate enough savings to translate into domestic investment. National Parliaments were, therefore, duty-bound to initiate dialogue and find solutions to the heavy dependence on diaspora remittances going forward.
- 8.8 The presenter noted that though generally the statistics appeared to show that there was a greater infection rate among men than women in the SADC Region, there was an unfortunate dearth of statistics in relation to how the pandemic was impacting on women and girls at the household and national level. It was imperative, therefore, for solid, evidence-based research to be carried out to determine the economic and social impact of the pandemic on women and girls at the household and community level.
- 8.9 The pandemic had also resulted in a significant reduction in commodity prices on the international market due to a decline in demand resulting from the closure of borders and national lockdowns. For instance, the price of oil had gone down leading to a concomitant reduction in the price of fuel in some countries. Additionally, the pandemic had also culminated in an inevitable shrinking of the tourism sector and related downstream sectors

by 3.3%. The Region's recovery was thus inextricably tied to the recovery of the global economy.

- 8.10 True to the maxim that says "necessity is the mother of invention," the pandemic had also exposed the ingenuity of business people and young people in the Region. UNICEF had launched a COVID-19 Design Innovation Challenge and youths from the length and breadth of the continent had responded positively with new products and new digital solutions. A case in point was the 23-year old Malawian national who had developed an offline mobile learning application. The majority of inventions were digital innovations which would put the Region at a competitive advantage on the global market post-COVID.
- 8.11 The presenter commended Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the SADC PF for issuing Guidelines and recommendations to assist SADC countries in the fight against the pandemic. She noted that the Guidelines developed by the SADC PF, which called for co-operation among Member States, had been proactively issued in April, shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic, which demonstrated the Forum's responsiveness to issues affecting the region. However, she noted with dismay that whilst the Guidelines provided a comprehensive reference point for adaptive strategies, the major drawback was that they were not binding on Member States and thus could not be enforced. She called upon the Committee to find ways of ensuring that the Guidelines are implemented.
- 8.12 In view of the foregoing impact of the pandemic, the presenter made the following recommendations:
- She called on Africa and the region to focus on enhancing its productive capacity by harnessing the intellect of students at universities and tertiary institutions to repurpose the Region's productive capacity.
 - She stressed the need for consultation, co-operation and a co-ordinated regional response in customs and border management, harmonisation of tariffs and trade facilitation, among other issues.
 - She implored policy-makers in the Region to initiate discussions on post-COVID recovery, reconstruction and resilience. The discussions ought to centre on diversification and developing productive capacity, food security in terms of linking agriculture to industrial development, trade facilitation, development of the services sector, that is, health care, education, transport, communications, including digital health care solutions which remained untapped, and enhancing Governments' capacity to respond to and manage crises.
- 8.13 In the ensuing deliberations, the Chairperson expressed the Committee's

appreciation to Ms Trudi Hartzenberg for an informative and eye-opening presentation. The Chairperson conceded that, indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic had thrown the spotlight on the need for SADC countries to work together in fighting the pandemic following the realisation that what affected one country was likely to affect its neighbours. To that end, the Committee undertook to use the presentation as an informative baseline in lobbying for the implementation of the Guidelines.

9.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In her concluding remarks, the Chairperson thanked the Secretariat for laying the groundwork for a successful meeting. She also reiterated the Committee's appreciation to Ms Hartzenberg for taking time off her busy schedule to deliver an enriching and mutually edifying presentation. She averred that the information they had been given would allow the Committee Members to make evidence-based interventions during deliberations in their national Parliaments and at the Forum.

10.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no further business to transact, the meeting adjourned at 12:12 hours.

Hon. Bertha Ndebele, MP
INTERIM CHAIRPERSON

Mr. Dennis Gondwe
COMMITTEE SECRETARY