REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

PARLIAMENT OF BOTSWANA

OUR PARLIAMENT OUR PRIDE

BOTSWANA COUNTRY REPORT

REPORT TO THE SADC-PF 59 PLENARY ASSEMBLY ON IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTIONS OF THE 58th PLENARY ASSEMBLY SESSION

(15 Mins)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mr President, allow me to present to you the country report for the Republic of Botswana, being a response to the resolutions of the Standing Committee Session of the 58th Plenary Assembly. ***Mr President***, in line with the Forum's advocacy for the signing, ratification, accession, domestication, and implementation of SADC Protocols, I am pleased to inform you that Botswana Parliament continues to be steadfast in driving the implementation and oversight on these protocols.

As with member Parliaments, Botswana is no exception in its enduring commitment to providing an enabling and thriving environment for the practicability of the domestication and implementation of these protocols and model laws through various Government Ministries and Departments, as well as the Civil Society. As the Parliament of Botswana, we believe that through these protocols we have been able to provide a legislative framework to harmonize our laws and policies to thrive in oversight on democratic governance and respect for human rights.

Allow me, therefore, ***Mr. President***, to give a brief overview on how Botswana has fared in relation to these important regional frameworks.

1. SADC PROTOCOL ON THE FACILITATION OF MOVEMENT OF PERSONS (2005)

Mr. President, in an endeavour to improve efficiency on the ease of doing business, specifically in the aspect of facilitation of employment creation, Botswana is a **signatory** to the *SADC Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons*. The following initiatives have been introduced to implement the protocol:

1.1. **Establishment of One Stop Border Posts**: The Kazungula Bridge Border Post which was officially opened in May 2021 and the Mamuno/Trans- Kalahari Border Post, whose trial run started in September 2024. We have additionally **Extended Hours of Operation to 24 hours** to the Mamuno/Trans- Kalahari Border. Through these border controls, we have enhanced trade efficiency.

1.2. **Introduction of the Use of National Identity Cards for Cross Border Travel that commenced in February 2023** between Botswana/Namibia – this has indeed eased movement of persons.

1.3. Botswana continuously **Reviews its VISA regime** to improve efficient trade and investment through which the following were introduced:

- Issuance of VISA on arrival – which commenced in February 2018
- Introduction of Online VISA Application Platform in August 2021.
- Decentralization of issuance of VISA to Botswana Missions.
- Visa abolition agreements; Botswana has Visa exemption for 13 member SADC states save for only 3 states being the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Comoros and Madagascar).

1.4. **Issuance of Botswana Blue Card:** The Botswana Blue Card programme of 2021 allows individuals who were citizens by birth or descent, but have since ceased their citizenship, unlimited stay and the right to work and invest without requiring work permits.

1.5. **Multiple Citizenship Bill –** this Bill will among others make provision for acquisition of multiple citizenships by any citizen of

Botswana who qualifies. The Portfolio Ministry is in the process of finalising implementation of the Bill, ***Mr President***.

2. SADC PROTOCOL ON EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR

Mr President, Botswana is a signatory to the SADC protocol on Employment and Labour having ***signed in August 2023***. The ***Ratification process*** of this Protocol has commenced and currently we are undertaking the due diligence process of assessing the legal, policy, institutional, financial, and socio-economic implications of ratifying this protocol.

Mr President, we cannot speak of employment and labour without mentioning the safety aspects of it. Parliament of Botswana approved the **National Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Policy** in 2025, which seeks to address the outdated & fragmented occupational health and safety legal and regulatory arrangements in the work place. Through this policy, we aim to develop systems for equitable rehabilitation and compensation for victims of occupational injuries and diseases, and to align the Workers' Compensation system with relevant International Labour Standards.

Currently consultations are being conducted with stakeholders to inform legislative reform for this Policy. I must mention that part of this Policy includes the **review of the Factories Act**.

All these dealings ***Mr President***, are steps to ensure our readiness to ratify this SADC protocol.

3. SADC PROTOCOL ON HEALTH (1999) AND SADC STRATEGY FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR) 2019–2030

Mr President, Botswana remains committed to the implementation of any regional health frameworks, including the SADC Protocol on Health and the SADC Strategy for SRHR.

To this effect, Botswana continues to align its national health policies, strategies and programmes to regional and global standards with a

commitment to improving sexual and reproductive health outcomes, reducing maternal and neonatal mortality, combating HIV and AIDS, preventing gender-based violence, and ensuring universal access to quality SRHR services.

In collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Botswana successfully developed and officially signed its FP 2030 Country Commitments in 2026, reaffirming its commitment to strengthening access to family planning and reproductive health services. The commitments were developed through a consultative process involving government ministries, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and development partners. Thorough this FP 2030, we wish to create an enabling legal and policy environment for equal access to family planning information and services whilst improving the availability, accessibility, acceptability, affordability and uptake of quality modern contraceptives.

We remain steadfast in expanding the financing landscape for SRHR, such that services are accessible to all, particularly adolescent girls and young women to reduce unintended pregnancies, and ensure availability of SRHR commodities.

Mr President, Botswana joined countries in the East and Southern African (ESA) region to endorse the 2030 ESA Commitment in 2021, which seeks to expand the focus from Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and Youth Friendly Health Services (YFHS) to the health and well-being of adolescents and young people.

The overall ESA commitment is to ensure the inclusion of adolescent SRHR within the national Universal Health Coverage packages by investing in high quality, evidence-based, gender-transformative, and age-appropriate sexuality education. By so doing we will address the structural factors that increase the vulnerability of adolescents and young people to HIV and STIs infection.

Domestication:

Mr President, Botswana has **domesticated** the principles and objectives **of the SADC Protocol on Health and the SADC SRHR Strategy** through various national policies, strategic plans and health programmes. These include maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health initiatives, HIV prevention, treatment and care programmes, family planning services, cervical cancer prevention through human papillomavirus or HPV vaccination, gender-based violence prevention and response programmes, and integrated sexual and reproductive health services.

Mr President, we have also **domesticated the SADC Child and Adolescent Health Strategy** through the development of national health policies, and youth-friendly health services. The Ministry of Health has also integrated adolescent health into the National Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal, Child and Adolescent Health, Active and Healthy Aging plus Nutrition Strategy (RMNCAH-N).

In line with these commitments, ***Mr President,*** the Ministry of Health is currently reviewing and updating the RMNCAH-N National Strategy to incorporate aspects of Active and Healthy Aging and Mental Health, thereby promoting a comprehensive life-course approach to health care from birth through old age.

Mr President, Botswana remains one of the hard-hit when it comes to violence against women and young girls. The Ministry of Health has therefore integrated GBV prevention and survivor support services within the health sector while expanding youth-friendly health services that provide reproductive health information, counselling, HIV prevention, family planning, and post gender-based violence care.

To **cement our further commitments in domestication**, Botswana remains a regional leader in HIV prevention, treatment, and the elimination of mother to child transmission (EMTCT). Botswana remains the only high HIV burden country in the world to have achieved the World Health Organisation's prestigious Gold Tier status for the path to

eliminating mother to child transmission. The country continues to implement high impact interventions aimed at sustaining epidemic control, with a strong focus on adolescents, young women, and key populations. We continue to integrate all HIV services within broader SRHR platforms.

Botswana intends to commit to fulfilling its obligations through continuous policy reforms to advance Universal Health Coverage to improve the life course of its citizens.

4. SADC PROTOCOL ON TRADE

Botswana **signed** the SADC Protocol on **Trade on 24 August 1996** at the SADC Summit held in Maseru, Lesotho. The Protocol was adopted to promote regional economic integration through the progressive elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers and the establishment of a free trade area among SADC Member States.

The **Protocol entered into force on 25 January 2000**, following the attainment of the requisite number of ratifications. **Botswana subsequently signed the Amendment Protocol on Trade on 7 August 2000, which entered into force on the same date**. The Amendment Protocol introduced modifications aimed at facilitating the implementation and administration of the regional trade regime.

The Protocol provided the legal basis for the establishment of the SADC Free Trade Area (FTA), which was officially launched on 17 August 2008. Through the FTA, Botswana committed itself to liberalising intra-regional trade and strengthening economic cooperation within Southern Africa.

Domestication:

Botswana gives effect to the SADC Protocol on Trade through the Customs and Excise Duty Act (Cap. 50:01) and customs regulations administered by the Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS).

By incorporating the provisions of the Protocol into its domestic legal framework, Botswana facilitates the duty-free and quota-free movement of goods within the SADC Free Trade Area, provided that such goods comply with the SADC Rules of Origin. The domestication of the Protocol

has strengthened customs cooperation, enhanced trade facilitation and improved Botswana's integration into regional and continental markets.

Implementation:

- **Tariff Liberalisation:** Since the launch of the SADC Free Trade Area on 17 August 2008, Botswana has implemented duty-free and quota-free trade in goods originating in participating SADC Member States, provided that such goods comply with the SADC Rules of Origin.
- **Rules of Origin Compliance:** Traders seeking preferential treatment under the Protocol are required to ensure that their products are wholly obtained, sufficiently processed or manufactured locally in accordance with the SADC Rules of Origin.
- **Certificate of Origin:** Exporters must obtain a SADC Certificate of Origin through the Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS), which serves as proof that the goods satisfy the origin requirements and are therefore eligible for duty-free and quota-free treatment.
- **Regional Trade Integration:** Botswana's trade with Africa is heavily concentrated within the SADC region, which captures over 99% of both its exports and imports, underscoring the dominance of neighbouring regional partners. South Africa accounted for 79% of Botswana's intra-African exports.

5. SADC PROTOCOL ON INDUSTRY

Mr President, Botswana **signed and ratified the SADC Protocol on Industry on the 7th May 2021.**

Domestication and Implementation:

Mr President, Botswana is currently reviewing the Industrial Development Act (2019) to align it to the SADC Protocol on Industry. The review is scheduled to be completed by 31st March 2027. Therefore, the line Ministry is in the process of domesticating laws to align to the Protocol. We do not have a documented plan of action towards implementing the SADC Protocol on Industry, however each year, the Ministry identifies priority focus-areas to address regional, continental and global assignments.

Mr President, both the SADC Protocol on Trade and on Industry remain key instruments for advancing regional economic integration and supporting trade growth for Botswana and other states within the Region, as they provide strategic platforms for expanding exports, promoting industrial development, and diversifying the economy.

6. THE SADC PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES GOVERNING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

As a Member State, Botswana continues to subscribe to the provisions of this instrument. Botswana has without fail implemented the Election observation manual in its electoral process and has complied with its regional standards.

Mr President, we cannot speak of business of elections without the independence of the Election Management Body (EMB). In Botswana, our EMB's independence and impartiality are guaranteed under the Constitution, detailing the appointment, composition, tenure and functions of the Commission.

Universal suffrage is guaranteed in the Constitution which protects the right of eligible and qualified citizens to vote (Section 67) and the right to candidacy in an election (Section 33 - for election as President, Section 61 - for election to National Assembly and Section 15 of the Local Government Act - for election to Council/Local Government).

The Election Petition process is provided for in the Electoral Legal Framework and it is through this process that the EMB addresses any complaints, challenges, disputes, claims, recalls and contestations relating to the electoral process and provides a platform for hearing and adjudication of the same.

In line with the Electoral Act, any election-related dispute may be presented to the High Court within 30 days after the day on which the result of the election was declared. Such election-related dispute shall be tried and determined by the High Court within 90 days of presentation.

Mr President, I am pleased to announce to this gathering that in the history of our conduct of Elections, the region has continuously deemed us Free and Fair! Being amongst the few the countries as shining examples of democracy in the region – an accolade we take with the

humility and earnestness. We have managed this by conforming to the democratic principles and guidelines from SADC.

We intend to hold a comprehensive constitutional review following which amendments to subsidiary legislation including the Electoral Act will be undertaken. Should this process reveal any gaps in the existing electoral legal framework, appropriate steps will be undertaken.

7. REVISED SADC PROTOCOL ON GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT (2016)

Mr President, we remain committed in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in line with the SADC protocols. Our efforts are guided by the principle that gender equality is fundamental to sustainable development, social justice, economic growth, and inclusive governance.

Signing and Accession:
Botswana **signed and acceded to the Revised SADC Protocol on Gender and Development on 10th May 2017.** Since the signing, Botswana has continued to align national policies, legislation and programmes with the provisions and objectives of this Protocol. Guided by this Protocol, our legislative reforms have strengthened interventions aimed at eliminating gender disparities and gender-based violence which we are predominantly experiencing.

Mr President, we have made notable progress in **implementing** the provisions of the Protocol having achieved effective oversight on the realisation of the objectives of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

For example, in 2021, Botswana amended the Penal Code, to strengthen the legal provisions relating to the protection of vulnerable groups and addressing various forms of violence and abuse. In the same year, Botswana enacted the Sexual Offenders Registry Act to establish a legal framework for maintaining a registry of convicted sexual offenders and enhancing public protection, particularly for women and children. These legislative measures demonstrate Botswana's commitment to creating a safer environment and strengthening accountability for sexual and gender-based offences.

In addition, the Government has intensified efforts to improve access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence. In 2020, the Administration of Justice established the Gender-Based Violence Specialised Courts to facilitate the timely handling of cases and improve outcomes for survivors.

In this regard, Government is working towards strengthening the National Gender Commission to enhance its oversight, coordination and monitoring functions. Through this Commission, we endeavour to have an effective mechanism in tracking implementation of gender commitments, promoting accountability and advising Government on emerging gender issues.

8. THE SADC DECLARATION ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT (2015)

Mr President, Botswana reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the full implementation of this Protocol tthrough legislative reforms, institutional strengthening, enhanced oversight and strategic policy interventions.

Regarding this Protocol, Botswana continues to support all efforts aimed at developing and empowering young people as espoused in the Declaration. We cannot over-emphasise the fact that when young people are empowered, Botswana will achieve her future aspirations. This Declaration recognises the capabilities of young people to lead, and Botswana has demonstrated this by appointment in 2024 of the Minister of Youth and Gender Affairs, Hon. Lesego Chombo, at only 27 years. A true testament that when youth are given a chance to shape their future, they do so diligently.

Botswana has done a lot in ensuring that the five pillars of this Declaration are implemented. In the pillar, to *Economically Empower the Youth,* Botswana has managed to develop its first ever Youth Employment Strategy aligned to the National Employment Strategy with a focus on job creation pathways for the youth. We have also recently reviewed the Youth Development Fund (YDF) which is a seed capital programme aimed at assisting young entrepreneurs to start their businesses.

Another milestone worth noting is the revision and development of the 2026-36 National Youth Policy and Action Plan which were recently adopted by Parliament. This Policy will structure youth empowerment through 5 different pillars:

a) Education, Skills Development & Innovation
b) Health, Well-being & Social Protection
c) Economic Empowerment & Employment
d) Civic Engagement, Peace & Governance
e) Environmental Sustainability & Global Citizenship

I am pleased to inform you ***Mr President***, that through the line Ministry, we are in the process to the ratification of the African Youth Charter which will go a long way in ensuring that we uphold rights and freedoms for young people.

I hereby submit Mr President, this country report for the Republic of Botswana.

I thank you.