



Republic of Mauritius



CONCEPT NOTE

54TH PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

SESSION HOSTED
BY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

22ND - 26TH NOVEMBER 2023

“THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN PROMOTING COORDINATION FOR ENHANCED DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND RECOVERY PLANNING IN THE SADC REGION”

I. BACKGROUND ON THE NEED FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

1. Since the last decade, the SADC region has faced weather events which are increasingly severe and hazardous, resulting in unprecedented casualty counts and unforeseen economic shocks. It is now firmly established that global warming occasioned by the release of greenhouse gas emissions in the earth's atmosphere cause a notable increase in the earth's temperature, which exacerbate the devastating strength of weather events. According to the Climate Change 2023 Synthesis report¹, the continued release of greenhouse emissions may result in rise in temperatures well above 1.5 degrees which would threaten both aquatic and human life in diverse ways. The rise in the sea level, flash floods, heatwaves, droughts and intense cyclones are common consequences of global warming in the SADC region.

¹ IPCC, 2023: Sections. In: Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 35-115, doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647

2. For instance, Cyclone Idai in 2019 left a devastating trail of thousands of homeless and injured people and a death toll exceeding 1200 whilst it swerved through Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Similarly, Cyclone Freddy in 2023 was one of the longest-living cyclones in history and perniciously hit both island States and continental Southern Africa causing vast infrastructural damage and human casualties. Humanitarian teams on the field have reported over a hundred settlement relocations which were necessary due to the vehemence of the cyclone's destructive passage. After heavy rainfall periods in summer months, the effects of climate change in winter invariably lead to the onset of dry weather conditions that cause the onset of droughts and immense losses to agriculture. Moreover, fish and animal migration due to the abrupt weather changes cause losses to biodiversity and affect food security.

3. According to the United Nations, limiting global warming to the target of a maximum of 1.5 degrees entails that greenhouse gas emissions may peak before 2025 at latest but must later decline to 43% by 2030². Whilst human-induced climate change is being addressed by measures taken to reduce carbon emissions under the Paris Agreement (2015) regarding climate change planning and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), there is also a dire need for the international community to strengthen their disaster and risk management and recovery plans in view of mitigating the number of casualties and limiting weather damage to the minimum possible extent.

II. DOMESTICATION OF DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND PREPAREDNESS FRAMEWORKS BY PARLIAMENTS

4. Already, several countries in SADC have subscribed to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) which aims to provide a new perspective to disaster management by motivating for a pro-active rather than reactive approach, that moreover includes economic, structural, legal, health, cultural and technological considerations that may strengthen countries' resilience to prepare for the onset of disasters, be it natural or man-made.

² UN Climate Change "What is the Paris Agreement" available at <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement#What%20Is%20The%20Paris%20Agreement?> (Accessed on 23rd October 2023).

The Sendai Framework *inter alia* envisions to reduce the global disaster mortality rate, mitigate economic loss that affects global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and ensure that countries are equipped with local and national risk reduction strategies. The concept of “Building Back Better” under the framework relates to promoting recovery and reconstruction which takes into account previous shortcomings in view of consolidating future disaster preparedness plans.

5. While Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness Plans (DRRPPs) are implemented by the Executive, Parliaments are considered as vital agents of socio-economic change to enact legislation, exercise oversight and represent communities on disaster risk management strategies and ensure that they remain concerns which rank as high-priority items on the Government’s agenda. As the voice of the people whom they represent, Parliamentarians across SADC are expected to assess the grassroots concerns of communities concerning disaster risk management and ensure that mitigation strategies are devised to protect constituents. Furthermore, MPs can ensure that yearly State budgets are sufficiently robust to invest largely in disaster risk reduction which would save costs in the future.
6. According to the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), *“Every dollar spent in reducing risks can save fifteen in post-disaster recovery costs. Every dollar invested in making infrastructure disaster-resilient saves four that would otherwise have to be spent rebuilding³.”* Accordingly, Parliaments are at a vantage point with regards to monitoring measures for Disaster Risk Reduction, especially since the various constitutional functions of Parliaments empower them to hold Governments to account on progress made regarding investments in DRRPP. It is thus of paramount importance that Parliaments work together with the Executive to domesticate Disaster Risk Reduction frameworks such as the Sendai Framework as well as regular environmental guidance issued by the international community. This is in line with Parliament’s inherent role to implement the Sustainable Development Goals

³ UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), key message available at <https://www.undrr.org/our-work>.

(SDGs) on the road to 2030 and to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16).

III. THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN SADC TO PROMOTE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND PREPAREDNESS

7. Weather experts and observers across the Southern Hemisphere have already established that the El-Nino (global warming) weather patterns will continue to adversely influence the climate in the summer of 2023-2024. This also applies for the SADC region where heatwaves and soaring temperatures have already been felt in certain locations since September 2023. It has also been observed that weather events in SADC disproportionately affect the most vulnerable individuals such as disabled persons, women and children. In this regard, it is imperative for Parliament to reduce inequalities and for instance, support gender mainstreaming in climate change responses such that disaster preparedness becomes an inclusive process which includes the voice of both women and men. Indeed, the theme of the 2023 UN theme for the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, commemorated on the 13th October, was “Fighting Inequality for a Resilient Future” which also resonated with the need for Parliaments to act to assemble and lead inclusive partnerships that can enhance structured Disaster Risk Reduction strategies.

8. Therefore, it is imperative that the subject of disaster risk reduction and preparedness is addressed by the 54th Plenary Assembly of the Forum in view of enhancing the capacity of SADC national parliaments to respond to disaster risk reduction and prepare for the future. In particular, Parliaments may look into the existence of disaster risk reduction legislation, the establishment of a focal point for disaster management, the setting up of multistakeholder committees to respond to disasters, the conduct of environmental assessments, the evaluation of departmental plans and programmes to deal with post-recovery, the timeliness of interventions by emergency services (police, hospitals, fire brigades), and the constant dissemination of weather surveillance reports, to cite but a few areas of intervention.

9. The 54th Plenary Assembly will also be in a position to deliberate on the regional aspect of disaster risk reduction such as mutual exchange of information and the sharing of lessons learned by disaster risk reduction authorities. In addition, SADC Parliaments may also exchange lessons and best practices on the consolidation of disaster reduction regimes and obstacles encountered along the way, particularly since the geographical region is likely to face weather events of similar nature.

IV. THE OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE 54TH PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE FORUM

10. The 54th Plenary Assembly of the Forum will take place in the Republic of Mauritius from the 22nd - 26th November 2023 under the theme **“THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN PROMOTING COORDINATION FOR ENHANCED DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND RECOVERY PLANNING IN THE SADC REGION”** in view of enhancing the capacity of Member Parliaments to prepare for natural disasters from a multi-sectoral approach and to ensure a swift recovery that does the least damage to national economies.

11. The specific objectives and expected outcomes of the 54th Plenary Assembly will thus be to:

- a) promote inter-parliamentary cooperation, diplomacy and solidarity amongst SADC Member Parliaments, and to celebrate the SADC identity;
- b) take stock of the legislative frameworks for Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness Planning (DRRPP);
- c) deliberate on the role of Parliaments in ensuring DRRPP within SADC countries, including by domestication of the Sendai Framework;
- d) consider avenues of cooperation between SADC Parliaments to improve on existing regional frameworks for DRRPP;

- e) commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on the 25th November 2023, and to discuss the importance of women's participation in formulating DRRPP policies.
- f) consider and approve reports of Standing Committees, the Regional Women Parliamentary Caucus and other organs of the Forum;
- g) consider motions and statements by MPs which are in line with the theme of the Plenary Assembly; and
- h) promote inter-parliamentary policy among SADC Member Parliaments with respect to shared values and common agendas.

V. VENUE

12. The 54th Plenary Assembly will be a physical session hosted physically by the National Assembly of the Republic of Mauritius, located at Port Louis, Mauritius.
