

**A reflection of the workers' benefits from the
SADC growth agenda with a focus on the
RISDP: Counting the success!!**



Introduction

SADC has registered reasonable growth in its 40-year history that has impacted gradually and positively on the people of the region, in particular Labour/workers. Most of the notable achievements are visible in various areas of cooperation ranging from industry and trade, gender and health to energy, environment, and infrastructure development.

The achievements are underpinned by more than 30 legal instruments including key strategic documents such as the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) that have been developed and adopted by SADC Member States to drive forward the integration agenda. Employment and labour are vital components of economic development. A vibrant labour market attracts foreign direct investment and improves living standards for people throughout the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. This case study looks at the impact of key decisions and the broad legal mandate of SADC and the effects of its RISDP on labour and employment in the region.

Status of Employment and Labour in SADC

The SADC region has experienced strong economic growth in the past, but this growth has not been matched with increased job opportunities or better employment outcomes. At present, employment and labour productivity in the SADC Member States remains low, with a large number of people currently engaged in subsistence farming rather than formal employment. The average unemployment rates for SADC have fluctuated between 10.2% and 11.3% between 2009 and 2020 while the labor force expanded from around 104 million in 2009 to just over 142 million in the same period. However, labor force participation rates for women across SADC member states remain lower and continue to face significant constraints to participating in the labor market. This concurs with the findings from the Global Report on Women Employment that show that for every ten men in a job, only 6 women are in employment. Additionally, youth unemployment is a particular problem in most member states due to the large youth population. Although overall unemployment rates are generally low for some member states, the majority of jobs are informal, precarious in nature, and characterized by high levels of working poverty. This has been attributed to structural changes from the implementation of the SADC Free Trade Area that have affected businesses that were protected by tariffs and lack of competition, the introduction of efficient technologies reduced the demand for employment in productive sectors including oil, gas, and mining, extractive capital-intensive industries that created a barrier to entry for potential local business owners. As a result, the labour force has turned to informal systems of employment, characterised by lower incomes, insecurity, and under-employment.

To address these challenges, SADC Member States have committed to the strategic objective of achieving increased job creation with decent work opportunities for full and productive employment. The emphasis is on an employment-centered approach to growth and development, focusing on the creation of economic opportunities that the poor can access and that provide a return to their labor sufficient for raising households out of poverty.

The strategy in SADC takes cognizant of the role played by Trade Unions and the efforts to revitalize active labor market policies through enabling fiscal policies that incentivize skills development through apprenticeships as well as public works/public employment programs, especially those targeting youth.

Trade Union Role

Trade Unions in SADC are coordinated by the Southern Africa trade Union Council (SATUCC) which has enjoyed great partnership with the SADC secretariat. SATUCC itself has a good structure and is strategically well placed but has largely failed to take effective leadership. This is partly a problem of resources and of political will of the different national centres. SATUCC has played a disappointingly small role in shaping the policies developed in SADC as a result of a lack of capacity. This has limited its ability to force a labour agenda into areas where it would often rather not be had. Governments have been quite untransparent around the negotiation of trade deals and protocols. The financial problems of SATUCC have also led to a form of donor dependency that has been aggravated by a lack of a coherent programme. As a result, activities are often determined not by strategic need but by the areas in which funds are available. Weak solidarity among SADC Trade Unions – especially with respect to countries that have violations (e.g. Swaziland, Zimbabwe, DRC) remains high.

Progress To date on Labour Benefits

SADC has however developed several policies and strategies to address employment and labor issues in the region. These include:

- 1.SADC Charter of Fundamental Social Rights (2003): Aims to promote social rights and improve labor conditions in the region².
- 2.SADC Employment and Labour Policy Framework (2020-2030): Focuses on achieving increased job creation with decent work opportunities for full and productive employment².
- 3.SADC Decent Work Programme (2020-2025): Aims to promote job creation and access to productive employment opportunities for young people².
- 4.SADC Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025): Addresses labor migration issues within the SADC region².

It can therefore be noted that SADC has put in place measures to promote full and productive employment across the region. The main legal instrument is the Protocol on Employment and Labour, adopted in August 2014. However, only one SADC Member State has ratified the Protocol, meaning that it is yet to enter into force. A process to review the Protocol is underway to ensure that it incorporates changing global dynamics in the labour market.

A number of instruments have further been developed to make it easier for SADC Member States and the employment and labour sector to promote common interests through deeper cooperation among the various stakeholders. The instruments include the Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025) adopted in 2020, and the Guidelines on Portability of Social Security Benefits.

Among the major achievements by SADC that have promoted the growth of the labour market and creation of jobs and opportunities include, but are not limited to;

- The establishment of a Labour Market Information System that tracks progress using 23 key labour-market indicators. The system provides Member States with information on demand and supply of labour and market trends to facilitate planning.
- The development of Cross-Border Portability of Social Protection Instruments which aid the exportation/transfer of benefits gained by a migrant worker in one Member State to his/her country.
- The Approved SADC Youth Employment Promotion Policy Framework and Strategic Plan in 2016 which is being implemented by all SADC Member States, including minimum standards of social protection for youth
- The SADC Industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap 2015-2063 which has set SADC's technological and socio-economic transformation path, and implementation started with the alignment of regional activities to the new policies. Studies were undertaken to profile the priority Mineral and Pharmaceutical sectors and identify the potential for value chain development, addition and beneficiation. Both studies indicated great potential for domestic, regional and global value chains and a high potential for manufacturing medicines and health commodities, specifically for HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.
- Development of the SADC's Vision 2050 which is a long-term vision based on the existing SADC Vision as articulated in the Treaty and the RISDP. The body resolved to strengthen this foundation by incorporating emerging regional and international issues. The idea to develop a SADC Vision 2050 was initiated during an Extraordinary Summit in Angola in June 2012.
- The adopted Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plan at the 32nd SADC Summit 2027 is to be implemented over a 15-year period 2013-2027. This will provide a key strategic framework to guide the implementation of efficient, seamless development initiatives in the region.
- The approved Industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap 2015 – 2063 at an Extra-Ordinary Summit held in Harare, Zimbabwe on 29 April 2015, hosted and Chaired by President late Robert Gabriel Mugabe. The strategy is anchored on three pillars of Industrialisation, Competitiveness, and Regional Integration, and is expected to ensure that the region fully benefits from its vast natural resources.
- In almost all its summits, the Heads of government and state committed to ensuring that the focus of development of the region was on the need for youth to take an active role in advancing and shaping the regional integration agenda. Various platforms have been created to capture the voices of the youth,

including active participation at the Southern Africa Internet Governance Forum in Durban, South Africa in November 2018. A SADC Youth Forum was initiated as an official structure in December 2018, following youth deliberations on infrastructure development and the productive sectors for employment creation. Youth empowerment has been mainstreamed in the SADC agenda with a long-term perspective and enabling framework.

- The new SADC Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025) was adopted by the employment and labour sector to promote skills transfer and matching of labour supply and demand for regional development and integration. The SADC Guidelines on Portability of Social Security Benefits were adopted to ensure workers moving within the SADC region maintain social security rights and benefits acquired under the jurisdiction of different Member States.
- Monitoring of the SADC Strategy on Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities and Treatment in the Workplace; approval of the SADC Action Plan on Social Security for Workers, including women in particular; establishment of national productivity centres; and implementation of the SADC Guidelines on Labour Dispute Resolution and Prevention.

Call To Action

In appreciating this tremendous progress and recognising the challenges of the SADC Secretariat and its member states, *visa viz* the capacities of Trade Unions in these countries, there remains a serious need for collaboration and capacity enhancement for labour to fully explore the benefit from these initiatives. While massive employment has been created, there is a need to promote social protection benefits as the majority of these employment opportunities are project-based. Hence the need for infrastructure development that will create sustainable employment and social benefits to the People of SADC must be promoted. More important, SATUCC needs to revisit its objectives and strategies to ensure that it ably coordinates the work of trade unions in the region while making meaningful contributions for policy changes within SADC for the betterment of the workforce in SADC.

There is a further need for continued assessment and resources on the impact of climate-induced disasters in the region. SADC Member States must adopt and enforce regulatory frameworks on fossil fuels, provide incentives and set targets for renewable energy, and encourage sustainable finance practices. On the other hand, developed partners including the private sector should be urged to provide fair climate finance for adaptation, with an emphasis on grants rather than loans, to support the adoption of renewable energy and ensure a just transition, particularly to mitigate the impact on women and indigenous peoples. More so, appreciating the one border post initiative, member states must still be called to implement cost-effective transboundary infrastructure networks in an integrated manner in the six sectors of Energy, Transport, Tourism, ICT and Postal, Meteorology, and Water to allow for increased opportunities for employment.

References

ILO. (2018). World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2018–Global Snapshot. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/trends-for-women2018/WCMS_619577/lang--en/index.htm.

SADC Major Achievements and Challenges (2021). 25 Years of Regional Cooperation and Integration SADC Major Achievements and Challenge. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-12/Achievements_booklet.pdf.

SADC and SARDC. (2022). SADC Gender and Development Monitor 2022 8th Edition. Women in Politics and Decision Making. SADC, Gaborone. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2022-08/Gender_Monitor_2022_English_final.pdf.



THE SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS
CENTER FOR
AFRICA

Contact Us

+260-211-410-098

**Plot 406 Kudu Road,
Kabulonga, Lusaka**

Lusaka@cuts.org

www.cuts-lusaka.org

Also at Nairobi, Accra, Hanoi, Geneva, Delhi, Calcutta and Washington, D.C

