

SADC REGIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Report on the COVID-19 Pandemic in the SADC Region
with a special focus on transport and trade facilitation,
climate change and the environment

Bulletin No. 7

#COVID19SADC



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ABOUT SADC

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is an organisation founded and maintained by countries in southern Africa that aim to further the socio-economic, political and security cooperation among its Member States and foster regional integration in order to achieve peace, stability and wealth. The Member States are: Angola, Botswana, Union of Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 7th Bulletin of the SADC Regional COVID-19 provides highlights of global and regional developments. The world is currently waiting for a vaccine; this report provides highlights from the recently concluded Global Vaccine Summit which provided information on the progress being made towards finding a vaccine for COVID-19. The report further outlines some key impacts of COVID-19 on, among others, the health work force, health systems, trade and transport, economy as well as on climate change and the environment.

Trade and transport facilitation continue to remain high on the SADC agenda, including during this period of COVID-19. To that end, the developments on these sectors continue to unfold, and the report highlights these emerging issues including joint efforts involving the SADC, East African Community (EAC) and COMESA to harmonise the respective guidelines.

Key recommendations for Member States to consider, include;

- The need for Member States to position themselves for the upcoming interventions such as vaccines, given the importance of vaccines in addressing COVID-19.
- The importance of continued implementation of public health measures such as hand hygiene, using masks in public as well as maintaining social distancing at all times.

- Importance of planning and forecasting human resource needs to address the expected demands in health workers as the pandemic progresses, this may include recruiting retired/semi-retired and other cadres to address human resource gaps that may be experienced.
- Continuous engagement with the private sector, who not only provide resources to support governments, but who also facilitate local production of supplies such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and other essential products.
- Implement broad based policies including those related to sound debt management and transparency; good governance; effective regulation and supervision; and prudent macroeconomic policies to address economic impacts including in the post COVID-19 recovery phase.
- Continue to implement the SADC Regional Guidelines on Trade and Transport Facilitation.
- Adopt and implement safe waste management practices to minimize COVID-19 infections at health facilities and domestic settings.

1. GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS

1.1 The Global Vaccine Summit

The UK-hosted Global Vaccine Summit heralds a new era of global health collaboration as world leaders show overwhelming commitment to equitable immunization coverage and global health security in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The new pledges will enable GAVI, the Global Vaccine Alliance, to protect the next generation and reduce disease inequality by reaching an additional 300 million children with vaccines by 2025. The Summit also highlighted how important a safe, effective and equitably accessible vaccine will be, in controlling COVID-19.

The backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic is a sobering reminder of how much individual health depends on collective health and the critical role that vaccines play in keeping the global population safe and healthy. The Summit also highlighted how important a safe, effective and equitably accessible vaccine will be in controlling COVID-19. It's clear that vaccines only realize their true power when they are deployed to protect the poorest and most vulnerable. The COVID-19 pandemic is unravelling many of the gains that have been made, with vaccination campaigns for polio, cholera, measles, diphtheria, and meningitis.

Thanks to vaccines, hundreds of millions of deaths have been prevented. Polio has been pushed to the brink of eradication, and just in the past few years' new vaccines have become available for Ebola and malaria," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General.

1.2 Vaccine pipeline for COVID-19

As of May 2020, the COVID-19 pipeline remains robust with over 150 therapeutic and Vaccine candidates under development. 150 companies including large scale and small scale companies are participating in the development of treatment and vaccination against novel corona virus infection (COVID-19).

1.3 COVID-19 Vaccine Snapshot Report

COVID-19 pipeline comprises of 153 drug candidates under development as of May 2020. The pipeline is characterized by the presence of both large scale companies and small players. Large companies including Novartis, Pfizer, Zydus, Roche, Sanofi and GlaxoSmithKline continue to invest in treatment options vaccination candidates.

Of the 153 drug candidates in development, 10 drug/vaccine candidates advanced to Phase 3 while 13 candidates are in Phase 2. Five candidates are in Phase 1 and 42 candidates are in the preclinical study phase. Further, the number of drug and vaccine candidates in the research study phase stood at 83.

1.4 Global epidemiological summary by 14 June 2020

Situation in numbers (by WHO Region)		
Total (new cases in last 24 hours)		
Globally	7 553 182 cases (142 672)	423 349 deaths (5 055)
Africa	161 254 cases (5 492)	3 867 deaths (167)
Americas	3 638 525 cases (77 934)	196 440 deaths (3 496)
Eastern Mediterranean	737 641 cases (21 490)	16 260 deaths (313)
Europe	2 378 958 cases (20 005)	187 468 deaths (579)
South-East Asia	439 348 cases (16 523)	12 126 deaths (481)
Western Pacific	196 715 cases (1 228)	7 175 deaths (19)

Table 1

1.5 SADC Region Epidemiological summary by 14 June 2020

The epidemiological situation on the African Continent is summarized in table 1 above. In the SADC region, the total number of cases stands at 72,072 with associated 1526 deaths. It is expected that the numbers of cases will continue to rise at an unpredictable rate as countries scale up the testing and ease lockdown measures.

It is therefore important for Member States to strengthen public health measures such as; regular hand washing or sanitization, social distancing and use of face masks in public spaces regardless of whether lockdown measures have been lifted or not. Member States are also urged to follow the Updated WHO Guidance on the use of face masks. Additional information for reference in on the link [https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks&publication=advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)-outbreak](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks&publication=advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov)-outbreak)

1.6 Impact on Health Systems

To date, most hospitalised COVID-19 patients in the region have not reached the stage of requiring intensive care. Many experts predict, however, that the health impact of COVID-19 for Africa in general and Southern Africa in particular, could actually be lower than what has unfolded in other parts of the world. This is due to the continent's different demographic and geographic characteristics. For example, a recent report from the UK shows that about 80% of patients with COVID-19 admitted to ICUs in the UK are above 50 years old. Put into context, the share of Europe's population above the age of 50 is 40% (population pyramid.net). Comparatively, this share is only 10% for sub-Saharan Africa.

Therefore, the full potential health impact of the pandemic in Africa is however not yet known. Since we do know that Africa is the region of the world least prepared to manage the impacts of a global pandemic, we do not have time to wait to find out.

If infection rates rise to the levels seen in other regions of the world, health systems will collapse and hundreds of thousands of people could die.

1.7 Impact on Health Workforce

Shortages of health workers present a huge dilemma, shifting medical staff to COVID-19 care exacerbates shortages in other areas, these shortages might have consequences that surpass those from COVID-19. There is no short cut to addressing this situation, health workers need to be trained and deployed, which takes much more time than COVID-19 allows. The strong likelihood of losing health workers to COVID-19 would also have a major impact on Region's health provision when staffing numbers are so low to start with. Member States are urged to start planning and re-deploying health care workers adequately across other areas and interventions, this could be done through recruitment of retired/semi-retired personnel to bolster the waning capacity in the Member States. In addition, Member States should continue to provide PPEs to support and protect Health Care Workers as they undertake their duties.

1.8 Impact on Routine Immunization

The dramatic decline in available flights, compounded by lockdowns in countries where airports were closed impeded UNICEF's ability to ship vaccines as per country and supplier shipment plans. Costs have increased significantly above the budgeted estimates funded by donors and countries for shipments, although they are starting to be more predictable to increase options to secure financing. WHO, UNICEF, and the GAVI, the Global Vaccine Alliance are conducting monthly pulse surveys to assess programmatic disruptions due to COVID-19 response measures. In the last cycle of the survey, a number of countries reported suspensions of their immunization programmes as well as disruptions. As a result of slowdown of demand, countries are experiencing a risk of vaccines reaching expiry before they can be used, and there are delaying shipments of some vaccines, further putting stress on suppliers that have produced vaccines in accordance to planned forecasts. The expiration of vaccines places a financial burden on Member States as vaccines will go to waste.

In early May 2020, a total of 99 countries reported the suspension of immunization campaigns for the following antigens: measles/measles rubella, polio (including for vaccine derived polio virus response activities), meningococcal A, yellow fever, typhoid, cholera and tetanus/diphtheria. Vaccine campaigns have largely been put on hold by countries and disruptions in childhood vaccines will have greater impacts for countries as they will experience disease outbreaks in the future. It is critical for countries, as they resume routine programmes to ensure there is a space available in their supply chains for vaccines to support campaign activities that have been postponed.

1.9 Engagement with the private sector

The WHO Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan and COVID-19 Strategy update outlines public health measures needed to support countries to prepare for, and respond to COVID-19. In this effort,

the private sector has a critical role to play at all levels in the response. Countries are encouraged to engage the private sector on the following areas for the private sector to take concrete actions.

- Put business continuity plans into action, in coordination with local/national authorities
- Prioritize supply chain continuity of essential health and non-health products (food, soap, etc.).
- Maintain essential support infrastructure and services (water, transport, electricity, hygiene and waste management, etc.)
- Protect jobs to retain skills and experience
- Produce locally, where possible, essential supplies according to official specifications, national laws, regulations
- Repurpose, where feasible, production facilities towards these essential supplies (e.g., personal protective equipment (PPE) from garment industry facilities, or hand sanitizer from fragrance industry facilities, etc.)

2. ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE: IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 FOR DEBT SUSTAINABILITY

SADC region has faced a dual public health and economic crisis with risks overwhelming healthcare systems, destroying livelihoods, and scarring the region's economic prospects for years to come. The economic impact of COVID-19 depends on factors that are difficult to predict that include the progression of the pandemic, the intensity and efficacy of containment efforts, the extent of supply disruptions, the repercussions of the dramatic tightening in financial market conditions, shifts in spending patterns, behavioural changes (such as people avoiding crowded areas such as shopping malls and public transportation), confidence effects and volatile commodity prices.

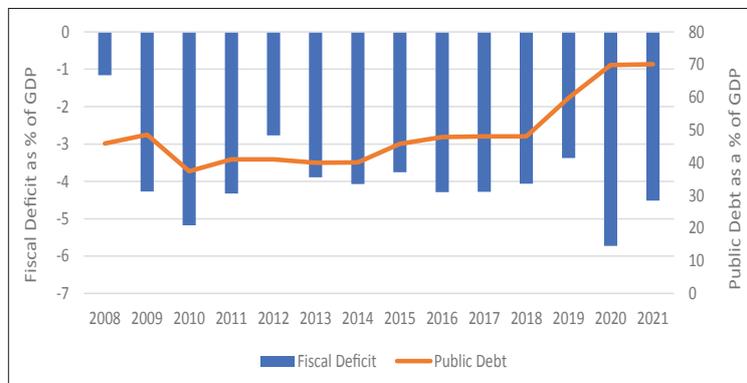
As economies were still recovering from the effects of the global financial crisis of 2008, SADC Member States entered this crisis in a vulnerable state characterised by sluggish growth, high debt levels and limited fiscal space to support the health sector and the flagging economy.

Given the limited scope of the conventional monetary policy when interest rates are low, fiscal policy has played a prominent role during the pandemic through economic support packages that include increased health spending, loans, guarantee and tax breaks to the private sector and significant social spending in safety nets for the vulnerable population. This will lead to widening fiscal deficits from increased public spending and shrinking government revenues due to economic disruptions.

Public debt continued on an upward trend on the brink of breaching the regional threshold of 60 per cent of GDP. The region's public debt averaged 59.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019 up from 48.8 per cent of GDP recorded in 2018.

Increased public spending related to fiscal response to COVID-19 is expected to result in the SADC regional average fiscal deficit deteriorating thus translating to a significant increase in public debt to about 70 per cent of GDP in 2020 as shown in the figure below.

Fig 1: SADC – Fiscal Deficits and Public Debt



Source: Member States and IMF WEO April 2020

Resultantly, the high debt levels and the increasing debt accumulation will likely leave most SADC Member States in debt distress. The increasing public debt levels will put additional burden to stretched resources as debt service costs increase. The level of regional and global debt distress will be determined by the severity of the pandemic and the fading prospects of a robust economic rebound amid possible second wave of outbreaks.

Notwithstanding the precarious debt situation in the SADC region, Member States can weather the adverse economic effects of COVID-19 and protect the lives and livelihoods of the people by considering the following broad-based policies: sound debt management and transparency; good governance; effective regulation and supervision; and prudent macroeconomic policies.

Sound debt management and transparency is critical to ensure that today's debt can be repaid tomorrow and that borrowing costs are kept in check, debt sustainability is eventually restored, and fiscal risks are contained. If central banks contribute to fiscal financing, frameworks ensuring a return to pre-pandemic monetary policy can encourage investor confidence. Creditors, including international financial institutions, can spearhead efforts in this area by promoting common standards.

Good governance ensures that money is spent wisely. Borrowed funds should go towards purposes that raise export proceeds, productivity, or potential output, especially in light of the dramatic economic disruption in the current global economy, sound bankruptcy frameworks are needed to help prevent debt overhangs from weighing on investment for prolonged periods.

Effective regulation and supervision assist policymakers to identify and act on emerging risks. As the recovery gets underway, deeper financial markets can help mobilize domestic savings, which may be a more stable source of financing than foreign borrowing.

Prudent macroeconomic policies (monetary, exchange rate and fiscal policies) can safeguard the resilience of an economy in a highly fragile economic environment. Current market pressure limits foreign currency exposure, but flexible exchange rates can soften blows on the domestic economy in the short term. In the longer term, flexible rates can discourage the build-up of substantial balance sheet mismatches and ward off large exchange rate misalignments. Amid today's financing pressures, revenue and expenditure policies must be adjusted to expand fiscal resources for priority spending on health and support for vulnerable groups. Invoking escape clauses to fiscal rules during the crisis may be necessary, but it is these rules that will help restore fiscal sustainability when recovery gets underway. Once the recovery is underway, fiscal rules and frameworks that ensure the eventual unwinding of stimulus and return to fiscal sustainability will be essential.

3. TRANSPORT AND TRADE FACILITATION

3.1 Developments regarding cross border transport movement and related bottlenecks

As the region begins to reopen its economies, it also begins to record increasing numbers of truck drivers recording COVID19 positive test results. Measures are being put in place through the implementation of the Regional Guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). This need is important for protecting drivers and crews and the people that they come into contact with especially frontline public health, regulatory and law enforcement officers, local communities and other persons along the supply and transport chain. In the absence of a vaccine, the SADC region has to allow safe trade and transport facilitation for economic growth, jobs and poverty reduction while containing the spread of the corona virus. In a recent meeting of the SADC Expanded Technical Committee to Monitor the Implementation of the SADC Protocol on Health Regional Coordination to COVID-19 Emergency Response it became clear that there is need for the region to harmonise the approach of testing in order to protect both drivers, crews and communities within the transport corridors.

SADC on behalf of the Tripartite Regional Economic Communities of COMESA, EAC and SADC and the European Union Delegation to Botswana and SADC have signed addendum for additional resources to the Tripartite Transport and Transit Facilitation Programme (TTTFP) for the development and implementation of the Corridor Trip Monitoring System (CTMS) in East and Southern African regional transport corridors. CTMS will assist Member States in the implementation of SOPs for safe transport and trade in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The CTMS is an electronic system that records driver health status especially COVID-19 test results and allows public health officials to verify results, monitor and track the movement of the driver or crew member and when necessary perform contact tracing and thereby facilitates management of safe transit in cross border road transport operations.

The CTMS process will require the transport operator or driver undertaking a journey to register a cross border road transport trip directly or through his

representative on the CTMS prior to departure specifying origin and destination and specific border posts to be crossed and estimated departure and arrival dates/times. The operator must identify vehicle(s), driver(s) and other crew members for the trip and their compliance with prescribed health requirements, such a checklist of COVID-19 symptoms for each of the crew members, who must have negative COVID-19 test certificate prior to departure, including medical insurance, infection/immunity status, location and date of last medical examination or test, as well as the results thereof, and details relating to cargo carried. All this information must be uploaded on the CTMS using handheld device before departure.

A webinar has been held to orient stakeholders on how CTMS can promote safe and efficient transport and trade facilitation while at the same time reducing the spread of COVID-19 in the region especially among frontline personnel such as medical staff, regulators, law enforcement personnel and truck drivers. CTMS will be ready for piloting in the months of June and July 2020 in the following road corridors; Trans Kalahari Corridor, Walvis Bay – Lusaka and Johannesburg – Lusaka respectively.

3.2 A comparative Analysis COMESA-SADC and EAC Guidelines has been undertaken to;

- To establish how the three RECs responded to the challenges faced in terms of trade and transport facilitation;
- To gather information on the institutional arrangements established to coordinate monitoring and implementation of the guidelines
- To make a comparison of the successes in the implementation of the REC Guidelines; and
- To draw the lessons that can be considered in the development of the Tripartite-wide guidelines.

The analysis revealed that the RECs guidelines were very similar and that the RECs are experiencing similar challenges. Lessons that can be drawn from these experiences include the need for agreements on testing, validity of test certificates, mutual recognition of results, among others.

4. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

4.1 Air and Water Pollution, and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The worldwide disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in numerous impacts on the environment, natural resources and the climate. With most industries not operating at full scale, there has been a significant decline in solid waste from industry, contributing positively towards improvement on air, water and environment quality.

A significant population in the SADC region lacks access to safely-managed drinking water and others do not have safely-managed sanitation services; yet access to clean water and sanitation services is key

for public health and reducing transmission of infectious diseases such as COVID-19. In other parts of the world, since the outbreak of the virus, the water in canals and rivers has cleared and they are experiencing greater water flows and visibility of fish and other aquatic species. There is therefore an improvement in water quality, a decrease in pollution and decrease in disturbance along the waterways. On the contrary, the demand for fish and fish prices have both decreased due to the pandemic, and fishing fleets around the world sitting mostly idle.

4.2 Waste generation, management and recycling

The COVID-19 pandemic also raises challenges regarding waste generation, management and recycling practices. Governments need to treat waste management, including medical, household and other hazardous waste as an urgent and essential public service in order to minimise possible secondary impacts upon health and the environment. Medical waste generation increases exponentially in an epidemic outbreak such as COVID-19 and it may, if improperly collected or treated, accelerate disease spread and pose a significant risk to medical staff, patients and waste collection and treatment staff. Medical and hazardous waste include infected masks, gloves and other personal protection equipment. The safe and environmentally sound handling, treatment and final disposal of this waste is therefore essential to prevent negative effects on human health and the environment. WHO, 2020 has recommended best practices for medical waste, include assigning responsibility at all governance levels and sufficient human and material resources to safely dispose off such waste.

Household waste also needs to be properly managed during the COVID-19 emergency. The generation of cleaning and disinfecting waste has increased as part of the protocols for managing the spread of the virus. The realisation that the virus can be transmitted through various surfaces caused waste and recycling workers to be at high risk of exposure to the virus. This has prompted some municipalities to alter their collection policies, with instances in which they decided to stop collection and sorting of recyclables from household waste altogether. This has further impacted waste-collectors who generate income from sorting and selling waste to recycling facilities.

4.3 Impact on Environmental Diplomacy

The outbreak of COVID-19 has also disrupted environmental diplomacy efforts, including causing the postponement of important meetings and global engagements such as the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 16) and the 2020 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 26) to 2021 which are instrumental in guiding the global climate change and environment agenda.



1 REGION, 16 NATIONS WORKING TOWARDS A COMMON FUTURE

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