



STATEMENT BY THE SADC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, HER EXCELLENCY DR, STERGOMENA LAWRENCE TAX ON WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

5 June 2020

On 5 June, 2020 the Southern African Development Community (SADC) joins the international community in commemorating the World Environment Day. The day which has been commemorated since 1974. This year, the day is commemorated world-wide under the theme; *Time for Nature-Biodiversity*. We are at a time when the world is witnessing unparalleled events affecting biodiversity as manifested in recent bushfires in Australia and the United States of America, locust invasions in parts of Africa, and the death of coral reefs. All these point to the urgent and existential threats that our biodiversity faces.

The SADC region is not spared, as it faces a number of challenges in conserving biodiversity, which include, amongst others, increasing human population relative to resource availability; agricultural expansion coupled with declining land productivity; continued reliance on wood fuel; increasing land degradation; and climate change.

We cannot achieve sustainable development without conservation and sustainable use of our biodiversity. To this end, SADC has adopted instruments that reflect its resolve and commitment to biodiversity conservation. These include, SADC Protocol on Environmental Management for Sustainable Development, and SADC Regional Biodiversity Strategy, which aim to preserve and ensure sustainable use of the region's biological resources in support of SADC's commitment to the global environmental agenda. We also note with pride that all SADC Member States have ratified and domesticated the provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), a multilateral treaty, whose main objective is to ensure the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of biodiversity. In the same vein, I wish to call upon Member States to expedite the ratification of the SADC Protocol on Environmental Management for Sustainable Development which will allow SADC Member States to achieve sustainable use and management of the environment.

This year's commemoration is coming against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a stark reminder that the planet's health is linked to human health. As we fight the COVID-19 pandemic, and start to plan to revamp our socio- economic development, we must put nature at the heart of our decision making. As a region, we must act in solidarity to tackle the existential threat posed to our biodiversity, as we have done in our collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On this day, I call upon all stakeholders, including governments, private sector, civil society, media and community leaders, to take collective action in preventing biodiversity loss and unlock the wealth in the region's biological resources. Let us sustainably use biodiversity through value addition and bio-trade to reap the benefits of nature, while preserving it for the present and future generations.

As we commemorate this year's World Environment Day, we must all take a moment to think deeply about the indivisible part of nature to our very survival. The water we drink, the air we breathe and the soil we use for agricultural production are just a few examples of the benefits that we derive from nature. This is reason enough to motivate all of us to take action towards the restoration of biodiversity, as a means for human survival and achieving the region's socio-economic development.

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