



## **Statement by the SADC Executive Secretary H.E. Dr. Stergomena Lawrence Tax on the Occasion of World Food Day**

**16<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

Today, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) joins the international community to commemorate World Food Day which was proclaimed by the Conference of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation to heighten public awareness of the global problem of food absence, scarcity and to strengthen solidarity in the struggle against hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

This year, the day is being commemorated under the theme; ***Grow, Nourish, Sustain, Together. Our actions are our future***". It is a clarion call for countries, the private sector and civil society to ensure that food systems **grow** a variety of food to **nourish** a growing population and **sustain** the planet, **together**.

The 2020 World Food Day comes against a backdrop of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and the acute food insecurity in the SADC region. The 2020 Synthesis Report on the State of Food and Nutrition Security and Vulnerability in Southern Africa which was conducted by the SADC Regional Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis (RVAA) Programme estimated that 45 million SADC citizens, about 12% of the total population, are food and nutritionally insecure. The SADC region has one of the highest stunting prevalence in the world, with over 30% of under-5 children stunted, which is considered too high by the World Health Assembly. Further, in nine out of the 16 SADC Member States, diets are not diversified enough and are too cereal-based which increases the risk of micronutrient deficiencies.

It is worth noting that the food security sector in the region has not been spared from the multi-sectoral and multidimensional impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The SADC assessment on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that the response measures, including lockdowns and movement restrictions that were put in place by governments limited access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, and impacted on employment and household incomes. Due to limited access to food, some households have been pushed into adopting negative eating practices, including reduced quantity and quality of foods thereby failing to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life.

This year's World Food Day should serve as a reminder of the commitments Member States made towards ending hunger and food insecurity. We are only 10 years away to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 2 of ending hunger by 2030; five years away from the Malabo Declaration commitment of ending

hunger in Africa by 2025; and five years away from meeting the regional objective of, among others, improving access to adequate and appropriate food in terms of quality and quantity and improving utilisation of nutritious, healthy, diverse and safe food by 2025 as spelt out in the SADC Regional Agricultural Policy. It is, therefore, imperative for the region to take stock of the progress made so far and assess as to whether the region will achieve these food security and nutrition targets.

As we commemorate this day, I wish to underscore that any progressive society is measured by its ability to provide access to food as a basic necessity. One of the first measures that SADC took in response to COVID-19 was to ensure uninterrupted cross border movement of essential goods and services such as food by adopting regional Guidelines on Harmonization and Facilitation of Cross Border Transport Operations across the Region. We must continue to work together to ensure minimal disruption to the food supply chains so as to guarantee access to food and functional food markets. We must make sure that nutritious food reaches the poor and vulnerable communities while stepping up our collective efforts for continued and increased production in the new crop-growing season.

Further to this, Governments must put in place practical measures to support small-scale farmers who produce the bulk of the food in the region and support medium and large scale producers and traders that have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We must also ensure that markets are back to safe and full operation so as to increase food access and boost the economies affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.