



**STATEMENT OF**

**THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF SADC  
H.E. DR STERGOMENA LAWRENCE TAX**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE COMMEMORATION OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

**MARCH, 2015  
GABORONE, BOTSWANA**

Director of Ceremonies  
Invited Guests  
SADC Secretariat staff

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) joins the rest of the world in commemorating International Women's Day 2015 under the theme "**Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity: Picture it.**" Women empowerment is a multi-dimensional concept with many aspects, which include social, economic and political. At the social level, women empowerment refers to the attitudinal changes at the individual level which include feeling proud of being a woman, emotional balance, self-acceptance, self-confidence, optimism, self-esteem and sense of worth, while economic empowerment refers to the greater participation of women in the economic activities, earnings and women's freedom to pursue an occupation of their own choice. Economic empowerment is a relatively long-term process that requires dedicated efforts and commitment by a number of stakeholders, including women, men, decision makers. Thus women empowerment cannot be realized if it is not inclusive of all these aspects.

This year's commemoration of international women's day coincides with two very important global processes in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment i.e. the 20 years of the Beijing Declaration and Platform For Action and the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. This is an opportune moment for SADC to join the global community to reflect on progress made towards the implementation of the commitments made in these important instruments. This also comes at the time when the review of the Millennium Development Goals and targets set for 2015 is almost completed and the goals are due to be replaced with the new

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) to be deliberated upon and approved by the UN General Assembly in September 2015.

### **Ladies and gentlemen**

I am glad to note that SADC Ministers Responsible for Gender/Women's Affairs have actively participated in the Beijing+20 Review processes, where a consolidated African Continental position has been agreed upon, that the Post 2015 Development Agenda should (i) include a pillar on "Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment, and Women's Rights"; and (ii) that gender be mainstreamed across all the other pillars.

Although SADC has made significant strides to empower women in some areas, there are still many challenges that lie ahead. SADC Member States have achieved significant progress in access and equity in primary education and, for some countries, secondary and tertiary education. Overall, the gap between boys and girls in schools is decreasing within the SADC region. However, retention at secondary to tertiary levels is a challenge due to high drop-out rates for girls, hence the gross-enrolment ratio for tertiary education is still very low.

At the health front, there has been significant reduction in new HIV infections. All Member States are proactively implementing interventions to increase Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) coverage and antiretroviral provision services. While Child mortality rates have stabilized, maternal mortality still remains a challenge.

All SADC Member States have put in place legislative and policy frameworks to address all forms of gender based violence (GBV), including trafficking in persons. Despite these initiatives, the SADC region is still characterized by high incidences of Gender Based Violence(GBV) in particular violence perpetuated against

Women and Girls which are fuelled by gender inequality, patriarchal and harmful cultural and traditional norms, beliefs, practices, attitudes and mindsets.

The SADC region has made great achievements in the area of women's participation and representation in politics and decision making with a steady and upward trend. On average the region's representation of women in parliament is about 25% with seven of the 15 Member States having more than 30% representation of women in Parliament (three of which has reached 40%). While there are regressions in the recent elections, generally the same upward and consistent trends have been noted in women's representation in the managerial positions of the public sectors; with the private sector remaining a challenge.

### **Ladies and gentlemen**

Women are the majority of those involved in the informal economy especially informal cross border trade (ICBT) which features prominently among women's efforts towards self-employment and livelihood sustenance. Of the Informal Cross Border trade that takes place in Southern Africa, about 70% of it is conducted by women and it contributes 30-40% of intra SADC trade. Women in SADC have also commendably been participating in regional and United Nations peacekeeping in the police, military and civilian missions. Women's role in peacekeeping has evolved over the years and in many instances they are ready to take on combat roles as necessary. SADC commends all the positive achievements, and special gratitude to all women who continue to come forward and take up the challenges and to all men who continue to support women empowerment.

Empowering Women is indeed Empowering Humanity as women are the backbones of our economies and they are the majority of

those involved in agricultural production for subsistence livelihoods and food security. Since women make up the majority of the poorest in our region, there is no doubt that only their empowerment will make a difference in addressing poverty and reaching the set targets of poverty reduction/ eradication. Therefore, we should all endeavor to integrate a gender perspective in our different policies, programmes and activities across all sectors of regional integration so that we can realize the SADC vision of ensuring economic well-being and improvement of the standards of living and quality of life of the people of Southern Africa.

I wish you an enjoyable commemoration of the International Women's Day.

I thank you all for your kind attention.