



Guidelines for Multilateral Environmental Agreements



Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat
Plot 54385 CBD Square
Private/Bag 0095
Gaborone, Botswana
Tel: +267 395 1863
Email: registry@sadc.int
Website: www.sadc.int

ISBN: 978-99968-994-9-2

Southern African Development Community (SADC)
**Guidelines for Multilateral
Environmental Agreements**

© SADC, 2023

Citation: Southern African Development Community (SADC) LEAP Strategy 2022 – 2032, Gaborone, Botswana,

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.



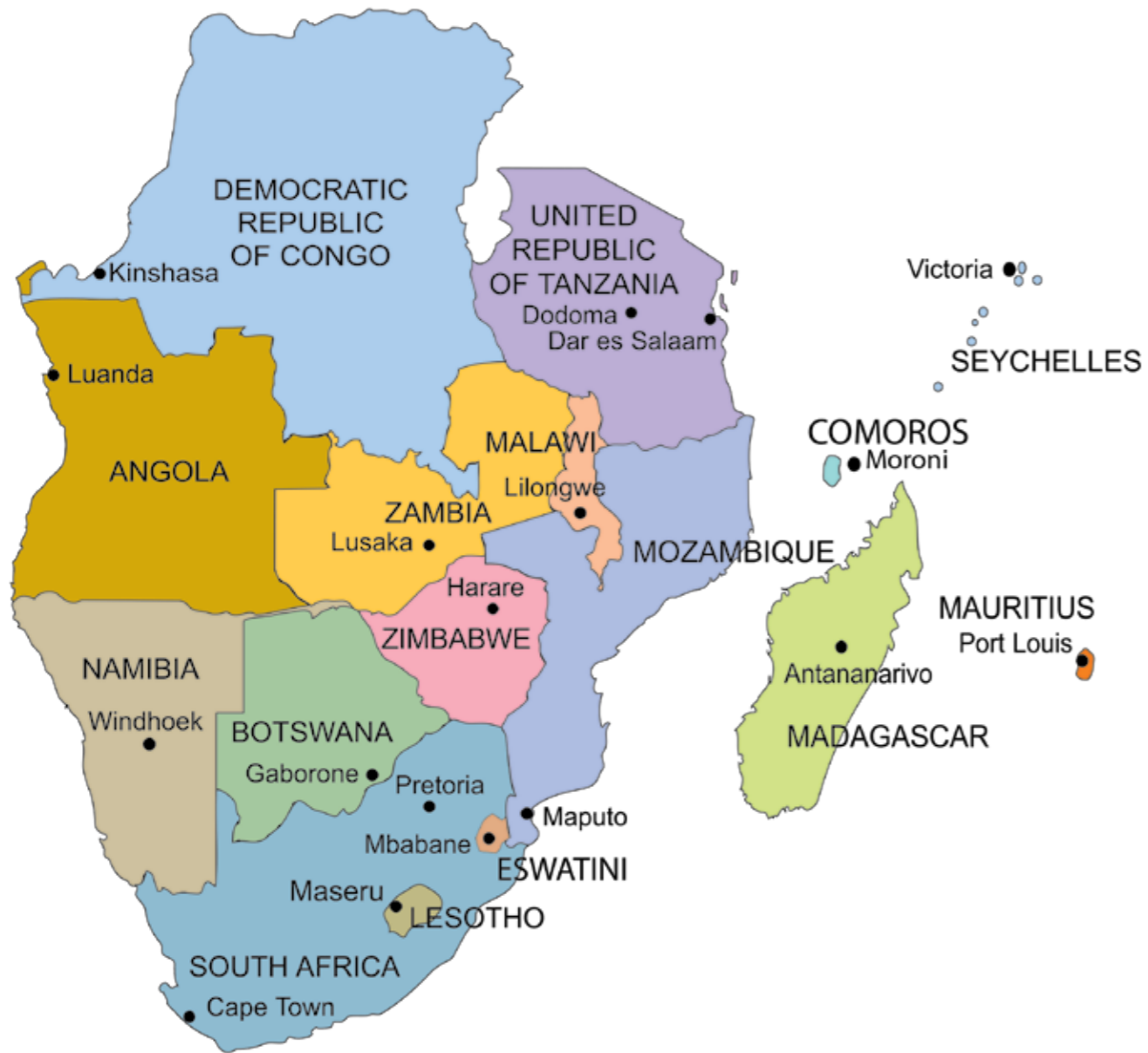


Table Of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 CURRENT SADC ENGAGEMENT WITH MEAs	3
3 SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL COMMON POSITIONS IN SADC REGARDING ENGAGEMENT AT MEAs	4
3.1 Enhancing coordination within SADC	4
3.2 Enhancing the quality and relevance of SADC common positions	5
3.3 Enhancing the effectiveness of preparatory meetings to develop common positions	6
3.4 Balancing national positions and interests in relation to MEAs versus regional common principles	8
3.5 Dealing effectively with lack of consensus and non-adherence to common positions	8
3.6 Dealing effectively with non-adherence to common positions	8
3.5 Effective engagement with other regional groupings.....	9
3.6 Effective engagement and behaviour at CoPs.....	10
3.7 Enhancing coordination between SADC governments and civil society in relation to MEAs.....	10
3.8 The need for a guideline	11
4 CONCLUSION	11
<i>Annex 1</i> Summary of the questions posed and responses received regarding the development of SADC regional common positions and engagement by SADC in MEA processes in general	12
<i>Annex 2</i> Proposed guideline for the development of SADC regional common positions at MEAs and related aspects of engagements by SADC MS in international processes of MEAs	18
<i>Annex 3</i> Best practice for virtual meetings	19

Acronyms

AU	African Union
AMCEN	African Ministerial Conference on the Environment
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CMS	Convention on Migratory Species
CoP	Conference of the Parties
EU	European Union
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADC MS	SADC Member States
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFF	United Nations Forum on Forests
USA	United States of America



1 Introduction

In response to the growing challenges facing environmental protection and sustainable development, Member States of the United Nations have negotiated several Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) to address these challenges collectively amongst the countries of the world. A multilateral environmental agreement is a treaty, convention, protocol or other binding instrument, set up between three or more countries with the purpose of reaching an environmental goal.

Using this definition, there would potentially be a very large list of MEAs, including for example some of the various Transfrontier Conservation agreements or River Basin Management agreements established by SADC Member States (SADC MS). It is thus important to differentiate amongst MEAs which require a common regional approach or a common position by SADC and those that do not. For the purposes of this paper, MEAs to which only SADC MS belong are not considered to require such a common regional approach or a common position by SADC and are not further discussed.

All MEAs have legally binding provisions and most have transboundary dimensions which require a regional approach to be followed by a regional bloc such as SADC, but there has been no formal process of prioritization within SADC of which MEAs to focus on specifically. Amongst the substantial list of MEAs that SADC MS have to implement, the following four MEAs are considered to be the most topical or contentious:

- i. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to achieve stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system;
- ii. United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to preserve and conserve species; use biodiversity in sustainable ways; and share the benefits of genetic resources. In addition, CBD has the following associated Protocols:
 - a. the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, to govern the movements from one country to another of living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology; and
 - b. the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing, to share the benefits arising from utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way;
- iii. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), to improve the living conditions for people in drylands, to maintain and restore land and soil productivity, and to mitigate the effects of drought; and
- iv. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), to protect wildlife against over-exploitation, and to prevent international trade from threatening species with extinction.

Of these, the first three are United Nations Conventions and fall within the scope of the Global Environmental Facility which allocates resources for their implementation, including participation in the processes of these Conventions. CITES is not a UN Convention and has no dedicated implementation support mechanism (other than a limited fund for participation by developing countries in CoPs). All 16 SADC MS are signatories to the abovementioned MEAs and participate in their implementation and attend meetings of the Conferences of the Parties (CoPs). They also have appointed respective National Focal Points for each Convention.

Beyond the aforementioned four Conventions, SADC MS also belong to several other MEAs within the field of natural resource management such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, the Bonn Convention or the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS, but not all SADC MS are parties to it) and international processes such as the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF). SADC MS also are Parties to several other important MEAs such as the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and its related Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants as well as the Minamata Convention on Mercury, which in all or most SADC MS are implemented by the environmental ministries or departments. These MEAs are perhaps less contentious than the first four mentioned.

There are other important and strategic international processes and negotiating platforms, albeit not MEAs in the strictest sense, where it will be beneficial for SADC to adopt a common regional approach or a common position as the basis for engagement. These are:

- i. the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) considered by itself to be “the world’s highest-level decision-making body on the environment. It addresses the critical environmental challenges facing the world today. Understanding these challenges and preserving and rehabilitating our environment is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Environment Assembly meets biennially to set priorities for global environmental policies and develop international environmental law. Through its resolutions and calls to action, the Assembly provides leadership and catalyses intergovernmental action on the environment. Decision-making requires broad participation, which is why the Assembly provides an opportunity for all peoples to help design solutions for our planet’s health¹ ;
- ii. the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which describes itself as “a membership Union composed

¹ <https://environmentassembly.unenvironment.org/about-united-nations-environment-assembly> <https://www.iucn.org/about>

of both government and civil society organizations. It harnesses the experience, resources and reach of its more than 1,400 Member organizations and the input of more than 17,000 experts. This diversity and vast expertise makes IUCN the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it². All or almost all SADC MS belong to the IUCN as State members or as government agencies (noting also that numerous civil society organizations from SADC are also members). IUCN is important because of its large and mixed membership (around 1,300 NGOs are members) and that it adopts motions (by vote if there is no consensus) that makes policy recommendations to other MEAs such as CBD or CITES which are given considerable weight because of the supposed representative scientific stature of IUCN²; and last but not least;

iii. the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), which “was established in December 1985, following a conference of African ministers of environment held in Cairo, Egypt. Its mandate is to provide advocacy for environmental protection in Africa; to ensure that basic human needs are met adequately and in a sustainable manner; to ensure that social and economic development is realized at all levels; and to ensure that agricultural activities and practices meet the food security needs of the region. The measures adopted by AMCEN in seeking solutions to environmental concerns in Africa have consistently been participatory and consultative since its inception. The existence of AMCEN has had an impact on the manner in which environmental issues are being handled in the region. AMCEN has also contributed to strengthening Africa’s participation and active involvement both in global negotiations and in international agreements on the environment.

AMCEN’s role includes, among others:

- Providing continent-wide leadership by promoting awareness and consensus on global and regional environmental issues;
- Developing common positions to guide African representatives in negotiations for legally binding international environmental agreements;
- Promoting African participation in international dialogue on global issues of importance to Africa;
- Reviewing and monitoring environmental programmes at the regional, subregional and national levels;
- Providing regional strategic and policy guidance to promote sound environmental management for sustainable development
- Promoting the ratification by African countries of multilateral environmental agreements relevant to the region;
- Building African capacity in the field of environmental management³.

Interestingly, AMCEN is not listed as one of the organs or structures of the African Union (AU)⁴ despite its exclusive African scope and membership. It has its own constitution, and “formalized its existence as the permanent African Ministerial authority on the environment and sustainable development⁵”. The AMCEN Secretariat role is provided by UN Environment through its Africa Office. Elsewhere on the AU website it is nevertheless referred to as the “AU Ministerial Conference on the Environment” at least once. AMCEN has a regional structure and one of its four vice presidents represents the southern African region, elected annually.

Importantly, SADC with 16 Member States constitutes the second largest formal political bloc or grouping after the European Union (EU). The EU with its former 28 Member States (now 27 after Brexit) is widely known for its decisive role in MEAs because it operates on strict rules as a single entity (and in CITES even managed to become a Party to the Convention), despite only controlling around 15% of the membership of the typical MEAs. SADC as the second largest bloc of votes (with around 9% of membership of the typical MEAs) has not been able to do that but undoubtedly could increase its influence on international processes related to the environment and sustainable development and its impact on the MEAs if it so wish. While the number of votes is important if voting is to be done, it is the quality, relevance and coherence of engagement with MEAs and at CoPs in particular that counts. This will require a deliberate decision by SADC⁶ to make its weight count in these processes; a concerted effort to increase its preparations for engagement in such processes; and guideline for such engagement. While adopting a guideline is a once off event, the development of a SADC regional common position on key issues in MEAs is open-ended and driven by the ever-changing programmes, agendas and decisions of the MEAs. Considerable commitment and resources will therefore be required to achieve such an objective.

² The stature of IUCN has diminished in recent years after the IUCN admitted some animal rights organizations as members

³ <https://www.unenvironment.org/regions/africa/african-ministerial-conference-environment/about-amcen>

⁴ <https://au.int/en>

⁵ <https://www.unenvironment.org/regions/africa/african-ministerial-conference-environment/about-amcen>

⁶ Consideration should be given to proposing to the SADC Council of Ministers and the SADC Summit that SADC should indeed make a deliberate decision to enhance its impact in international processes concerning the MEAs through the 1) adoption of the guideline proposed in this paper and 2) mobilizing resources to implement it, especially to expand the capacity of the SADC Secretariat to support the process regarding the priority MEAs



2 Current SADC engagement with MEAs

MEAs include within their scopes and impacts issues of a transboundary nature of the environment, natural resources and trade, as well as ecosystems of the SADC region, thereby requiring a regional response. Before going to CoPs for the respective MEAs, SADC Member States endeavour to come together through a series of regional preparatory workshops to find common ground on agenda issues of the CoP. In so doing there tends to be insufficient and inconsistent coordination in these CoP preparations.

The main purpose of the preparatory workshops is to bring SADC MS together to discuss the CoP agenda items. The meetings discuss potential variations in country-level positions on the agenda issues, towards agreeing on which issues the SADC MS will, by regional consensus, support, oppose or abstain from at the CoP deliberations. The list of common regional issues which Member States agree upon by consensus through the process of preparatory workshops is referred to as a “SADC Common Position for the CoP”. During a CoP meeting Member States are expected to be guided by the SADC Common Position.

These preparatory workshop approaches improve the active and coordinated participation as well as transparency of voting by countries at the CoP on agreed issues that may have negative or positive impacts on the SADC MS. Common positions have resulted in high visibility of SADC’s participation at MEA CoPs. There is need, however, for a regional guideline to provide a wellinformed and streamlined approach for conducting effective preparatory workshops that develop harmonized common positions in preparation of CoPs by SADC MS. A more streamlined and standard approach will further enhance the impact of SADC common positions in informing the international community about the realities faced and practical solutions as well as defending SADC principles and policies.

Against this background, SADC should develop a general guideline that will document a standard approach and best practices for developing common positions; and provide a general framework for engagement at MEA CoPs.



3 Situational analysis of the current state of the development of regional common positions in SADC regarding engagement at MEAs

This section is largely based on a questionnaire survey of opinions from SADC MEA focal points on the development of regional common positions and related issues in SADC regarding engagement at MEAs to which relatively few but nevertheless important responses were received.

It is important to note that there is generally agreement amongst the respondents, also reflected in the SADC Secretariat's background document (terms of reference) that the current state of affairs is undesirable. In particular, there is consensus that the capacity of the SADC Secretariat to support engagement with MEAs and the development of regional common positions on key issues needs to be strengthened significantly.

Annex 1 summarizes the questions posed and the responses received.

3.1 ENHANCING COORDINATION WITHIN SADC

Effective coordination in general is the outcome of a number of factors such as timely planning, availability of sufficient resources, effective processes, leadership and efficient communication. Less than 20% of the SADC MEA focal points who participated in the survey considered that there is a high level of coordination and consensus in SADC on MEA issues. This should be a matter of concern to the broader SADC community. The predominant reasons for this situation (ranked from

highest to lowest) were

- Different levels of capacities in different Member States
- Dissimilarity of experiences, aspirations and ambitions amongst focal points
- High turnover amongst focal points
- Inadequate preparation at national level

Other reasons include the inadequate capacity of SADC to plan meetings on time, problems related to notifying focal points of meetings, external pressure from international partners in some instances and that no SADC coordination at all occurred for some MEAs (UNFF, CMS).

Different capacities at national level (and insufficient capacity due to resource constraints at the SADC Secretariat) and potential differences in the prioritization of MEA issues in SADC MS may account for a large part of the perceived low level of coordination. Inadequate preparation, however, may be caused by the lack of timely communication on issues, although each Party to a MEA is informed through channels established by each MEA of upcoming proposals, agendas and meetings. Where SADC MS have not designated sufficient staff members to take responsibility for the coordination of specific MEA implementation, inadequate preparation may result, noting that most MEAs have huge workplans and loaded agendas and produce large volumes of documentation. In some instances it also seems as if there is a flurry of activities as important meetings of MEAs approach but a much lower level of engagement and awareness concerning such MEAs and their implementation in the rest of the year. This may be the result of not having fully integrated implementation obligations concerning MEAs in annual workplans.

Potential remedies for the current situation may include the following:

- Assign staff members as focal points for each MEA, using experienced and wellqualified staff or ensuring that where focal points are mostly junior staff, that a capable supervisor oversees their work
- Fully integrate implementation obligations concerning MEAs in annual workplans;
- requiring that focal points participate in all training programmes occasionally offered by MEAs
- Strengthening the capacity of the SADC Secretariat to plan MEA-related meetings on time
- Establish a direct line of communication between the relevant SADC Secretariat technical officer responsible for a particular MEA and the SADC MS focal points for that MEA
- Mobilizing resources for the implementation of the strategic decisions and action plans of MEAs
- Developing a lobbying strategy for the common position for buy in and support

3.2 ENHANCING THE QUALITY AND RELEVANCE OF SADC COMMON POSITIONS

Less than a third of the SADC MEA focal points considered that SADC common positions were of high standard. This should be a second matter of concern to the broader SADC community. The predominant reasons for this situation (ranked from highest to lowest) were

- Different levels of capacities in different Member States
- Inadequate preparation at national level
- Dissimilarity/similarity of experiences, aspirations and ambitions amongst focal points
- High turnover amongst focal points

Other reasons include the inadequate capacity of the SADC Secretariat to coordinate regional positions in some instances and that no SADC coordination at all occurred for some MEAs (UNFF, CMS).

The quality and relevance of national positions as well as the SADC regional common position depend on the level of effort invested in understanding the technical aspects of MEA proposals and interpreting these in relation to SADC policies and programmes. Such research should go beyond the actual CoP agenda document to include a review of assessments of the same issues by others. There are a number of respected organizations that support developing country interests that generally can be relied on, e.g. certain components of the IUCN and IIED. A further decisive factor is the level of convergence of national interests and ambitions and how these can be reflected in a representative regional common position. To a large extent such convergence has been achieved at the level of principles through the strategic processes of SADC but at a more detailed level individual MEA issues may not have been covered by existing SADC consensus⁷. A major part of developing a common position is rather obviously understanding SADC MS national interests and ambitions and similarly the collective SADC interests and ambitions on a particular issue. This needs to be achieved through a well-coordinated and candid consultative process supported where necessary by credible external input, e.g. technical expertise outside the relevant government entities.

⁷ SADC interests are well defined in the Treaty itself and policies such as the Protocols and Strategies which should guide SADC MS at all times.

Further, if SADC wants to be more impactful in the way that MEAs are implemented and therefore influence the outcomes of CoPs, it will be necessary to make sure that common positions are thoroughly researched, strategic and that efforts are made to understand the positions of proponents, protagonists, opponents, other regional groupings and major economic blocs or powers. This is not an easy task as not all of these entities are candid about their positions but several such as the EU and the USA tend to publish provisional positions which can be accessed in the public domain. In other instances, on important issues, the diplomatic representatives in each country can be consulted.

There is a difference in protecting and pursuing SADC regional interests (which may be limited to certain MEA agenda items) versus SADC participating in MEAs to influence the operations and impacts of such MEAs. Focusing only on specific or high profile technical agenda items that directly may have an impact on SADC would not increase the political stature of SADC at CoPs. SADC MS also need to pay attention to administrative, planning, reporting and compliance aspects of MEAs and actively take part in debates on these. Potential remedies for the current situation may include the following:

- Thorough research and deep analysis of the issue at hand is essential, including familiarity with all MEA documents on the issue including all previous proposals and decisions
- A well-coordinated consultative process is essential within SADC, commencing as soon as possible after an agenda and working documents have become available
- SADC focal points for individual MEAs should establish their own group communication channels for the sharing of information, papers and opinions. This can be achieved through the establishment of a group email address and a social media group. Internet teleconferences have become invaluable in the conduct of work during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this modality of work can be used for the consultative process. The SADC Secretariat should provide the technical support for such;
- Where it is possible, credible technical expertise outside the relevant government entities can be tasked to do the required research and summarize the issues as the basis for discussion by the SADC MS. Such technical expertise could be recruited within the SADC region on a short term basis linked to a MEA business cycle.
- Where external technical input is not possible, there is no other option than the SADC MS doing this work themselves
- Strengthening the capacity of the SADC Secretariat to both coordinate the process and to contribute to the analysis of issues and formulation of common positions is essential
- Given resource constraints, it may be necessary to prioritize MEAs that require formal SADC common positions
- Some degree of prioritization withing MEA agendas may be necessary in light of resource constraints but should not entirely exclude administrative, planning, reporting and compliance aspects of MEAs which typically get less attention from developing countries but have systemic impacts on both the MEA and the region
- SADC to occasionally review the costs vs benefits and/or relevance of the MEAs or their resolutions as well as their alignment to and compatibility with the objectives of the SADC Treaty.

3.3 ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PREPARATORY MEETINGS TO DEVELOP COMMON POSITIONS

Preparatory meetings to develop common positions are indispensable. Travel costs and hosting such meetings may nevertheless be prohibitive, but the internet teleconferencing through e.g. Zoom provides a strong alternative. Most SADC MS focal points would have been exposed to and become accustomed to such virtual meetings in the past year and although these are not ideal in all respects, a great deal of work can be accomplished through them. Annex 3 provides some guidance on the technical aspects of virtual meetings.

Reasons given for the fact that preparatory meetings have not yet been entirely successful thus far were (ranked from highest to lowest):

- Inadequate funding to attend
- Inadequate preparation
- Some Member State representatives not able to give national positions on key issues;
- Lack of attendance by some Member States
- Workshops being too short or too long
- Attendance by the wrong people
- Differences in the seniority levels of participants
- Lack of continuity amongst focal points
- Inadequate preparation at home before attending
- Language barriers (e.g. documentation and presentations not being available in all three working languages of SADC or lack of interpretation)
- Proceedings being dominated by some Member States

Another rather important reason is that it would seem that in some or perhaps most Member States insufficient or perhaps no specific resources are allocated for the implementation of MEAs and focal points are poorly resourced or have not been designated in all instances. Many focal points do not arrange multi-stakeholder workshops at national level to tease out national positions on specific subject matters, which may lead to the views of the focal point taken as the national position. There was also concern expressed that some preparatory meetings are financed by international organizations, who mostly use their own facilitators with pre-determined positions, and that concerning some MEAs (e.g. CMS) or UNFF, there have not been any preparatory meetings at all.

There is always a risk of asymmetric engagement, e.g. a meeting being dominated by some participants as mentioned, but also that proceedings can be disrupted by participants that are not well-prepared or unfamiliar with issues. This was not considered to be a major problem by the respondents to the questionnaire survey and the great majority of respondents felt that all should be free to participate in technical discussions on any issue, whether they are on target or not. Good chairing is nevertheless necessary in such situations to ensure that the meeting meets its objectives.

On the matter of using a technical specialist, advisor or coordinator appointed by SADC to support the preparatory process, there was complete unanimity that this will be beneficial, as long as such external input comes from within SADC.

Potential remedies for the current situation may include the following:

- The use of internet teleconferencing will largely overcome the limitations on funds to attend preparatory meetings and the length of meetings, as the participants themselves can decide on the length. Internet teleconferencing will further greatly assist participation at technical level by the Indian Ocean Member States who have tended to be represented only by diplomatic representatives based on the mainland. To avoid the lack of participation by some Member States, a number of free internet-based polling systems⁸ are available to find a date that suits all.
- Internet teleconferencing can be done with verbal interpretation into all the official languages of SADC. More attention is needed though to ensure that conference materials are available in all official languages. It is advisable for the SADC MS to agree to make use of the informal but increasingly good (and cost free) machine translations of working documents or PowerPoint presentations, neither of which are official SADC documents at that time
- Adequate preparation for preparatory meetings is essential, both at national level as well as for the conduct of the meeting itself. This is the personal responsibility of all participants
- Adequate preparation can be enhanced by making use of a technical specialist, advisor or coordinator appointed by SADC to support the preparatory process
- Invitations to Member States to participate in preparatory meetings, in addition to providing the motivation for the importance for the Member State to participate, should be accompanied by advice against the nomination of participants who have no familiarity with and no direct work responsibility for the subject and the desired level of seniority
- Focal points should always participate, and it is unavoidable that the seniority level of focal points will differ from country to country. In some instances it would be very desirable to have other technical persons or representatives from the foreign affairs ministries/departments participate as well. It is not advisable that only representatives from the foreign affairs ministries/departments participate without technical officials from the line ministry/department, or that only persons e.g. advisors to Ministers participate without technical officials from the line ministry/department
- To ensure the effective management of preparatory meetings, internet-based or in-person, high quality chairing is essential. The practice is that the Member State currently chairing SADC should chair all subsidiary meetings, making it therefore essential that the currently chairing Member State should 1) ensure to allocate an experienced chairperson for such meetings, and 2) ensure that this person is available to participate in all such meetings. An alternative is to make use of the troika arrangement to find a suitable chairperson.
- Member States to regularly submit implementation updates to be consolidated at the regional level as reference for the discussions.

An important issue is to ensure that participants are familiar with their national positions and are given a clear mandate to express these. National positions can be qualified as provisional or undecided when necessary. The more important issue seems to be the tendency that insufficient consultations amongst stakeholders are held at national level to inform national positions. This goes beyond the scope of the current paper but is an essential part of democratic and participatory governance, principles enshrined in SADC.

⁸ For example, Doodle Poll

3.4 BALANCING NATIONAL POSITIONS AND INTERESTS IN RELATION TO MEAs VERSUS REGIONAL COMMON PRINCIPLES

The questionnaire survey showed interesting aspects of perceptions on situations during the preparatory process where national positions differ from regional common principles or common positions. More than half of the respondents indicated that there are cases where the national position differs from the regional position. The only specific example of such issues given, was however, the common understanding on the sustainable use of natural resources. No one reported that they were at any time prevented from expressing the national position and the great majority felt that it is possible to achieve reconciliation of positions through consultation and negotiation. Respondents considered that it will be helpful in resolving differences between national position and regional positions to have better technical discussions at preparatory meetings (all), updating SADC policies and plans to better reflect current situations on important issues in MEAs (88%), and referring contentious issues to the Ministers responsible for environment (all).

3.5 DEALING EFFECTIVELY WITH LACK OF CONSENSUS AND NON-ADHERENCE TO COMMON POSITIONS

In situations where no consensus can be found during the preparatory process or at CoPs when new issues emerge, internal consultation is likely to resolve most such cases, but a common understanding is needed to facilitate such resolution, or in the worst case, have an agreed approach when no resolution can be found.

If SADC Member States cannot reach consensus on an issue, this does not mean that they should abstain from discussions on that issue at the CoP. They should be able to express their national positions even if these are in conflict with other SADC Member States, but they should not portray their national position as a regional common position. It would be important for the SADC spokesperson to state that SADC does not have a collective position on that issue.

This scenario should nevertheless be avoided as far as possible. It erodes the stature of SADC internationally; it highlights divisions amongst its members; and it seriously harms the ability of SADC to effect a desired outcome at a CoP.

3.6 DEALING EFFECTIVELY WITH NON-ADHERENCE TO COMMON POSITIONS

Situations may arise where Member States do not adhere to common positions. This type of situation – likely to be rare – can present a real dilemma for SADC and derail its objectives and harm relationships amongst Member States. Importantly, it is also hugely harmful to SADC's reputation internationally and highly detrimental to the negotiating power of SADC and humiliating to the SADC spokesperson on that issue. Non-adherence to common positions should thus be avoided at all costs and there should be serious consequences if this were to happen in public at international events such as MEA CoPs.

The root causes of non-adherence may be complex, but lack of participation and candour at preparatory meetings may be to blame. Overall improvement in the holding of preparatory meetings as discussed above should be able to address such potential harmful factors.

Safeguards to prevent this harmful situation would be ensure that common positions agreed within SADC at technical level be presented for endorsement by the Ministers of Environment. The outcomes of preparatory meetings at the technical level are in most cases not the final SADC common position. A second cause could thus be non-acceptance or non-adherence of a proposed common position at the political level in one or more Member State. For this reason it is important to have Ministers also participate in the finalization of an agreed SADC common position, whether by meeting in person, meeting on the internet or by round robin.

If any Member State were to change its position after such an engagement, it must timeously inform the other Member States and the SADC Secretariat of its change of position, to create room for further engagement or to at the very least allow for a tactical approach at the CoP to avoid embarrassment to SADC. This is not necessarily done at present.

A third cause of non-adherence could be the impact of lobbying or negotiation at CoPs. The pressure from NGOs and other Parties at CoPs could be intense. To mitigate such, it is vital that SADC MS negotiate together and not separately, and that NGO positions or pressures are discussed collectively.

The way that Member States are represented at CoPs is very important. It is highly advisable that persons, including political leaders, do not attend CoPs and speak on the SADC position or their national position without being 1) thoroughly briefed on the importance of projecting SADC consensus to external audiences and 2) thoroughly familiar with the SADC common position.

It is also very important that regular coordination meetings of SADC should be held on the margins of CoPs to reaffirm SADC regional positions. It is in these coordination meetings that Member States can if so warranted negotiate or indicate their change of position, and be persuaded to adhere to common positions.

From the questionnaire survey, strong opinions were expressed by the majority of respondents about the consequences of not-adhering to an agreed SADC regional common position (and also not informing the other member States about that). These opinions ranged from holding such representatives to account one way or the other, checking with the national capital if national positions are correctly being reflected and placing the matter on the agenda of the Summit.

Non-adherence to common positions within a regional economic community such as SADC is such a serious matter that there have to be consequences and personal accountability. Nonadherence should thus be taken up by the Executive Secretary with the relevant Minister and if need be to report the matter to the Summit.

Consideration also should be given to the possibility of publishing agreed SADC common positions. Doing so will make it harder for Member States or their representatives to disown a common position, and it further serves to inform the public and the international community of the SADC stance on issues. Other large economic groupings such as the EU or large economic powers such as the USA do this, but not necessarily on all agenda items, specifying that some issues require further negotiation. The disadvantage is that in some instances advance notice of the SADC regional common position may undermine negotiations or create further debate and polemics from those that were not part of the consultative process. Both options have advantages and should be applied in individual situations based on collective judgement.

A further tool identified through the questionnaire survey is the use of key messaging. This is a useful way of communicating general positions, principles, points of emphasis and desirable outcomes on international processes. Some SADC MS (and other countries) already employ this method, but it could be done at SADC level as well through a communique.

3.5 EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER REGIONAL GROUPINGS

Engagement and negotiation with other regional groupings are important parts of the MEA process. It is also the first test of a SADC regional common position against an external audience. The great majority of questionnaire respondents felt that SADC has been able to maintain and defend its common position when engaging larger regional groupings. The practice of communicating SADC regional common positions at larger regional groupings by a single representative of SADC is effective and should be maintained. This role should generally be played by the SADC MS chairing SADC at the time of the meeting, but the chairperson should be supported by other SADC MS as may be required.

The dynamics within Africa in some MEAs are often difficult and in CITES in particular. When different groupings in Africa are as divided on key issues as they are in CITES, little can be achieved at the technical level. In such instances the role of AMCEN and the AU become very important and thus engagement at the political level.

There are important political points based on agreed principles enshrined in AU instruments that can be made at the level of AMCEN and the AU, which SADC has not previously done. Africa has already agreed to very important principles that must guide its engagement on problematic issues concerning natural resources.

First, the African (Banjul) Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the principal AU rights instrument states *inter alia* that (relevant components underlined for emphasis):

- Article 21 1. **All peoples shall freely dispose of their wealth and natural resources. This right shall be exercised in the exclusive interest of the people. In no case shall a people be deprived of it.**
2. In case of spoliation the dispossessed people shall have the right to the lawful recovery of its property as well as to an adequate compensation.
3. The free disposal of wealth and natural resources shall be exercised without prejudice to the obligation of **promoting international economic cooperation based on mutual respect, equitable exchange and the principles of international law.**
4. States parties to the present Charter shall individually and collectively exercise the right to free disposal of their wealth and natural resources with a view to strengthening African unity and solidarity.

This important provision in paragraph 1 of Article 21 elevates the matter of freedom of disposal of natural resources to a human right and people's right (thus a national right) recognized by and legally binding for the AU. The interference and obstruction of this right by African States in e.g. CITES thus go against the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Secondly, the Revised African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources states *inter alia* that (relevant components underlined for emphasis), derived from the UN Charter which is legally binding on its members:

Preamble

Confirming as we accepted upon declaring our adherence to the Charter of the Organization of African Unity, that it is our duty to harness the natural and human resources of our continent for the total advancement of our peoples in spheres of human endeavour

Re-affirming that States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, a sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their environmental and developmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction

Re-affirming further that States are responsible for protecting and conserving their environment and natural resources and for using them in a sustainable manner with the aim to satisfy human needs according to the carrying capacity of the environment

Importantly, the Revised African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources reaffirms the sovereignty principle of exploitation of natural resources and the duty of harnessing natural resources for the advancement of people. This creates further support for a possible engagement within the AU.

3.6 EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND BEHAVIOUR AT COPs

How a regional economic community such as SADC engages others and behaves in international processes and at CoPs in particular, is of great strategic and political importance. SADC should have two overarching objectives with such engagements, i.e. 1) to achieve its negotiating objectives and avoid that harmful decisions are taken; and 2) to build on the good international reputation that SADC already has as a means of expanding its stature and influence internationally. How such engagements are done is therefore of the utmost importance, especially considering that engagements are led by technical officials and line Ministers and not professional diplomats.

The questionnaire respondents all agreed that SADC common positions should be communicated at CoPs by a single representative of SADC who generally should be the SADC MS chairing SADC at the time. It is thus very important for SADC MS chairing SADC at the time of important international processes and MEA CoPs to be represented by very capable persons and for the other member states and the Secretariat to work closely with designated chairs. Although the lead should be taken by the chairing country, there is always room for additional support and emphasis by representatives of other Member States.

Some MEAs have voting procedures, and how the SADC region exercises its votes should 1) be guided by its common position on issues and 2) the principle of maintaining solidarity at all times. SADC MS should never vote against each other, as a matter of principle and based on the solidarity and cooperation towards a common purpose enshrined in the SADC Treaty. It is a moral duty to vote the same as other SADC MS even if there is a secret ballot⁹. If SADC MS cannot maintain a common position, they should rather abstain from voting altogether.

Some MEAs operate by consensus and no voting is done. In this situation the question arises whether SADC MS should ever speak publicly in opposition to other SADC MS. All respondents to the questionnaire agreed that this should never happen. While every Member State has the right to speak, coordination is key to express solidarity (and leaving differences for internal discussion). SADC should adopt this as a procedural rule for international engagement.

The importance of daily coordination meetings at CoPs to help maintain cohesion and coordination amongst SADC MS cannot be stressed enough. Support from a technical specialist, advisor or coordinator appointed by SADC in such a role is also considered to be beneficial in ensuring coordination and preparation at CoPs. Some respondents felt that the SADC MS chairing SADC at the time of the CoP should nevertheless take the lead in the coordination role and be supported by the SADC Secretariat and technical specialist as appropriate. Nonetheless, SADC has in the past appointed external experts to play the role of coordinator at CoPs and that has been proven to be effective, especially where multiple issues are on the daily agendas at the CoP.

Engagement at CoPs and the impact of such engagement can further be enhanced by ensuring that there is a gender balance within delegations and that the youth and potentially other stakeholders are also included.

3.7 ENHANCING COORDINATION BETWEEN SADC GOVERNMENTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN RELATION TO MEAs

MEAs generally provide for participation by civil society (NGOs) and communities at some or other level. There is a growing presence of SADC-based NGOs and community organizations at MEA CoPs and a need for coordination and cooperation between SADC MS representatives and such entities to avoid contradictory or conflicting approaches and statements. The majority of questionnaire respondents agreed that there is adequate coordination and adequate explanation of government positions to them. There is nevertheless a need to better coordinate communities in the region as not all Member States have assisted communities in particular to attend and participate in MEA processes. It is important that in-country consultation occurs between MEA focal points and civil society delegations attending MEA events, to explain key issues and procedures.

Civil society can strengthen SADC negotiations but support from civil society should not be taken for granted. Other regional groupings have experienced embarrassing situations where NGOs from those regions have publicly contradicted what their governments have said at MEAs. It is thus worth investing in the relationship and staying in contact with other entities from SADC during CoPs.

⁹ This was one of the main reasons why the EU became a party to CITES after a long process to amend the text of the Convention and getting that amendment ratified to make this possible. From voting results at CoPs it became apparent that not all of the EU Member States were always voting in unison as they were supposed to do. The European Commission intended to cast the votes on behalf of all its members to ensure that the will not happen. This procedure was nevertheless rejected by the other Parties who did not agree to amend the rules of procedure to make that possible.

3.8 THE NEED FOR A GUIDELINE

As evident from the discussions above and endorsed by all respondents to the questionnaire, there is a need for a guideline for the development of SADC regional common positions and related aspects of engagements by SADC MS in international processes of MEAs. A proposed guideline is given in Annex 2.



4 Conclusions

The envisaged guideline should be periodically reviewed and updated as the SADC Member States may require. In addition to the dimensions already discussed, the questionnaire respondents emphasized that a guideline alone will not solve all problems. The capacity of the SADC Secretariat on MEAs is inadequate and must be strengthened, for which additional resources are required. Technical officers in the Secretariat should in addition be able to coordinate directly with MEA focal points in the Member States as opposed to the current practice, which can be accomplished without excluding communications to the national focal point for SADC or foreign affairs who can be copied in such communications.

Annex 1

Summary of the questions posed and responses received regarding the development of SADC regional common positions and engagement by SADC in MEA processes in general

Responses are expressed as a percentage of the total (noting that the total number of responses received differed from question to question). Additional comments made are given in italics.

Questions	Percentage of respondents who indicated 'Yes'	Percentage of respondents who indicated 'No'
Regarding coordination and consensus in SADC		
<i>How do you rate the current level of coordination and consensus in SADC on the MEA that you are responsible for?</i>		
High	18.2	
Medium	36.4	
Low	45.5	
<i>What are the reasons for that?</i>		
Similarity of experiences, aspirations and ambitions	25.0	75.0
Dissimilarity of experiences, aspirations and ambitions	75.0	25.0
Different levels of capacities in different Member States	100	
Adequate preparation at national level	25.0	75.0
Inadequate preparation at national level	50.0	50.0
High turnover amongst focal points	55.5	44.5
If any other reason, please elaborate:		
Inadequate capacity of SADC to plan meetings on time		
Communication break when requests or invitations are sent via a third party, e.g. Head of Ministry or Department/Section, which communication may not reach the intended Focal Point or the Focal Point becoming aware very late		
Challenge with outside pressure, particularly from international partners (funders of programmes)		
No SADC coordination at some MEAs (UNFF, CMS) at all		
Regarding the quality and relevance of SADC common positions		
<i>How do you rate the quality and relevance of SADC common positions on the MEA that you are responsible for?</i>		
High	27.3	
Medium	45.5	
Low	27.3	
<i>What are the reasons for that?</i>		
Similarity of experiences, aspirations and ambitions	50.0	50.0
Dissimilarity of experiences, aspirations and ambitions	37.5	62.5
Different levels of capacities in different Member States	88.9	11.1
Adequate preparation at national level	37.5	62.5
Inadequate preparation at national level	55.5	44.5
High turnover amongst focal points	37.5	62.5
If any other reason, please elaborate:		
Inadequate capacity within the SADC Secretariat to coordinate regional positions in preparation for UNFF Sessions. Furthermore, there is lack of appreciation of the role of forests and their contribution towards addressing national and regional developmental challenges		
No SADC coordination at some MEAs (UNFF, CMS)		

Questions	Percentage of respondents who indicated 'Yes'	Percentage of respondents who indicated 'No'
Regarding preparatory meetings to develop common positions		
<i>What are the reasons for preparatory workshops in preparation for MEA CoPs in SADC not being entirely effective?</i>		
Inadequate preparation	77.8	22.2
Wrong timing, either too far in advance of CoPs or too close to CoPs	55.5	45.5
Lack of prioritization amongst the many agenda items for CoPs	12.5	87.5
Inadequate funding to attend	88.9	11.1
Attendance by the wrong people	50.0	50.0
Differences in the seniority levels of participants	50.0	50.0
Lack of continuity amongst focal points	50.0	50.0
Inadequate preparation at home before attending	45.5	55.5
Proceedings being dominated by some Member States	37.5	62.5
Language barriers (e.g. documentation and presentations not being available in all three working languages of SADC or lack of interpretation)	42.9	57.1
Workshops being too short or too long	50.0	50.0
Some Member State representatives not able to give national positions on key issues	62.5	37.5
Lack of attendance by some Member States	62.5	37.5
If any other reason, please elaborate:		
It would seem that many focal points do not arrange multi-stakeholder workshop/s at national level to tease out country positions on specific subject matters, which may lead to the views of the focal point taken as country position		
Many of the meetings are financed by international organizations, who mostly use their own facilitators to facilitate the sessions with pre-determined positions		
At CMS there have been no or rather, there have never been SADC level meetings. We only meet at the CoPs		
<i>What should SADC Member States do on issues that do not directly affect them?</i>		
Participate in technical discussions on such issues	85.7	14.3
Not participate in technical discussions on such issues	42.9	57.1
<i>Will a technical specialist, advisor or coordinator appointed by SADC in such a role be beneficial to the preparatory process?</i>		
Yes	100	
No	0	
<i>Technical specialists should be provided in all MEAs as some specialists do not have expertise in all issues</i>		
<i>Coordinator should be from within SADC</i>		

Questions	Percentage of respondents who indicated 'Yes'	Percentage of respondents who indicated 'No'
Regarding lack of consensus and non-adherence to common positions		
<i>If SADC Member States cannot reach consensus on an issue, should they:</i>		
Abstain from discussions on that issue at the CoP?	28.5	71.4
Express their national positions even if these are in conflict with other SADC Member States?	54.5	45.5
<i>Do SADC Member States hold the common positions that were agreed?</i>		
Yes	80.0	
No	10.0	
Sometimes	10.0	
<i>Do SADC Member States communicate in advance of CoPs to other Member States that they have changed their positions and no longer feel bound by the common positions that were agreed?</i>		
Yes	20.0	
No	80.0	
<i>What do you think should be done within SADC about Member States not adhering to common positions?</i>		
Persuade/convince them to join common position		
Check with capital if national positions are reflected		
Regular coordination meetings of SADC should be held on the margins of the sessions to reaffirm SADC regional positions.		
Raise awareness to adhere to the common position		
It is their sovereign rights		
This is an issue that needs to be tabled during preparatory meetings		
They must be reprimanded through a formal letter and the matter must be placed on the agenda of the SADC Summit		
They should be encouraged to adhere to common positions		
Should be called to account		
Persuade them to join so as not to tarnish the region in international fora		
<i>Should common positions agreed within SADC at technical level be presented for endorsement to:</i>		
Ministers of Environment at national level	100	0
Cabinets	16.7	83.3
SADC bodies such as the Committee of Ministers responsible for environment	12.5	87.5
SADC Council of Ministers	50.0	50.0
SADC Summit	37.5	62.5
<i>Should SADC common positions be publicized in advance of MEA CoPs?</i>		
Yes, that will help to ensure that common positions are maintained by all Member States	62.5	37.5
<i>Key messages documents are key</i>		
No, that will harm the negotiations to be held at MEA CoPs	71.4	28.6

Questions	Percentage of respondents who indicated 'Yes'	Percentage of respondents who indicated 'No'
Regarding national positions and interests in relation to MEAs versus regional common principles		
<i>In relation to the MEA that you are responsible for, are you aware of:</i>		
Any particular issues where your country has a different interest or national position than most other SADC Member States and which have prevented your country from joining SADC common positions	55.5	45.5
If so, what are these, please elaborate: Common understanding on sustainable use of natural resources		
Do you feel that at any time in preparatory meetings for MEAs that you were prevented from explaining your national position?	0	100
If you did not explain your national positions on contentious issues at preparatory meetings for MEAs, why not?	No responses	No responses
Have you tried to explain the variances in your national position on contentious issues in relation to what appears to be the SADC common position to your Minister or Cabinet?	50,0	50,0
Do you think that it will be possible to reconcile your national interest or national position on these matters with regional interests and positions?	75.0	25.0
<i>What do you think is necessary to achieve such reconciliation?</i>		
Negotiation		
Continuous consultation		
To have a regional common position to maximize to win negotiations		
Clearly explain the position supported by technical advisors where appropriate		
<i>Do you think that you are bound by positions taken at SADC or AMCEN?</i>		
Yes	100	
No	0	
<i>Will any of the following be helpful in resolving differences between your national position and regional positions?</i>		
Better technical discussions at preparatory meetings	100	0
Updating SADC policies and plans to better reflect current situations on important issues in MEAs	87.5	12.5
Referral of contentious issues to the Ministers responsible for environment	100	0
Regarding engagement with other regional groupings		
Is SADC able to maintain and defend its common position when engaging larger regional groupings?	80.0	20.0
Should SADC common positions be communicated at larger regional groupings by a single representative of SADC?	100	0
If so, should that necessarily be the SADC Member state chairing SADC at the time of the meeting with the larger regional groupings?	81.1	18.2
<i>Are there any other issues concerning engagement with larger regional groupings that need to be addressed? If yes, please elaborate</i>		
SADC Chair must lead when engaging larger groupings but should be supported by other SADC member states with more capacity to enable better negotiations		

Questions	Percentage of respondents who indicated 'Yes'	Percentage of respondents who indicated 'No'
Regarding engagement and behaviour at CoPs		
Should SADC common positions be communicated at CoPs by a single representative of SADC? SADC is poorly coordinated so this does not apply More than one representative would be ideal	100	0
If so, should that necessarily be the SADC Member state chairing SADC at the time of the CoP? SADC Secretariat should coordinate meetings with a recognized chair Cannot be a SADC (Secretariat) representative Ideally, two would be necessary, the chairperson and his deputy	50	50
Noting that some MEAs have voting procedures, should SADC Member States:		
ever vote against each other?	87.5	12.5
In MEAs where there is no voting done, should SADC Member States ever speak publicly in opposition to other SADC Member States? Every MS has the right to speak, coordination key to express solidarity No, there has to be procedural rules	100	0
Regarding the coordination between SADC governments and NGOs in relation to MEAs		
Noting that some MEAs have procedures or structures that enable civil society or communities to participate, is there:		
Adequate coordination with such civil society or communities	77.8	22.2
Adequate explanation of government positions to such civil society or communities	87.5	12.5
Any other issue with regards to civil society or communities attending CoPs that requires attention. If so, please elaborate There needs to be better coordination with communities in the region as in the past community work has only focused on some countries		
Does attendance at daily coordination meetings at CoPs help to maintain cohesion and coordination amongst SADC Members?	100	0
Will a technical specialist, advisor or coordinator appointed by SADC in such a role be beneficial to ensure coordination and preparation at CoPs? Representative of SADC Member State chairing SADC should perform the coordination role. SADC Secretariat, including the technical specialist, advisor or coordinator should merely provide secretarial and administrative support to the chair. No, there is no need for a specialist. Member States will choose their representatives	88.9	11.1
Are there any other issues concerning engagement and behaviour at CoPs that need to be addressed? If yes, please elaborate Preferential treatment to youths and gender balance is key		

Questions	Percentage of respondents who indicated 'Yes'	Percentage of respondents who indicated 'No'
Regarding the need for a guideline		
Do you think that establishing a guideline for preparation and coordination will be beneficial in enhancing the impact of SADC at CoPs? Guidelines should be developed by Member States, no involvement of specialists from outside the region	100	0
If so, is there anything not yet mentioned in any of the questions above that you would like to see as part of that guideline?		
SADC needs a focal person to do proper coordination and not one person who gets overwhelmed. SADC should find a way to coordinate directly with focal points of MEAS as opposed to the current practice. But still necessary to copy overall MEA focal point of the country as well as foreign affairs		
The SADC Secretariat's structure on Environment is very weak both in terms of staffing and organizational issues. It needs to be restructured and recruit highly effective people on different issues of MEAs		
The capacity of SADC Secretariat needs attention. We are forever being told there is no capacity of SADC Secretariat to coordinate work		
The financing of SADC programmes is mainly from international partners whom at many instances provide funding with restrictions of appointing specialists from those counties. This presents a challenge, because at the end the projects put forward are those that benefit the funders. The funders also have a way of persuading other SADC Member States to convey their position. Maybe SADC should consider having a new funding model for programmes		
Organization of meetings before CoPs and international fora to mature positions in advance		

Annex 2

Proposed guideline for the development of SADC regional common positions at MEAs and related aspects of engagements by SADC MS in international processes of MEAs

Responses are expressed as a percentage of the total (noting that the total number of responses received differed from question to question). Additional comments made are given in italics.

Annex 3

Best practice for virtual meetings¹⁰

Note: These best practice notes are written in a form suitable for sending out to participants in virtual meetings.

Before the meeting

- 1 When you first receive the email inviting you to participate in a virtual meeting, please confirm your participation or decline (there will be buttons on the screen for this purpose). Organizers want to know who will attend the meeting to facilitate preparations.
- 2 All virtual meeting software programmes require prior installation of a software programme and registering as a user.
- 3 Please confirm that you have the software programme that is required for the specific meeting loaded on your computer, if not, please search for it on the internet and download it.
- 4 Some virtual meeting software programmes with a higher level of security require a prior process based on a specific invitation to you that the host will provide.
- 5 Please locate the email or the calendar invitation from the host of the meeting in which the identity number of the virtual meeting as well as its access code is given.
- 6 Follow the instructions on the screen. You will be able to join after the host has admitted you. This may take a few minutes, so be patient. The host can see when you are trying to join.
- 7 Kindly ensure to join the call at least 10 to 15 minutes before the start, so that the meeting can start on time and if you have any connection issues you have time to resolve them.
- 8 The quality of the call will depend on one's personal internet speed.
- 9 Ensure that your location is as noise free as possible to minimize background noise interference.
- 10 Make sure your microphone is working but keep it on mute throughout the meeting, except when you wish to make a comment or ask a question.
- 11 Speak clearly and with sufficient volume into the microphone – you need to be heard but there should not be a need to raise your voice unduly.
- 12 Please mute your microphone after speaking. Remember that the other meeting attendees will hear any other sounds i.e. eating or drinking sounds, if you forget to mute your microphone.
- 13 Please note that interpretation may be available. Select your preferred language option if interpretation is provided. You will only hear this language being spoken.
- 14 The chairperson or host may request participants to briefly turn on their cameras at the beginning of the conference for introduction and greeting purposes.
- 15 After the introduction kindly switch off your camera during the meeting to ensure that you have maximum internet bandwidth to participate in the meeting.
- 16 It may be easier to concentrate and hear clearly if you use headphones or headsets as these will cut out any background noise in your location.
- 17 Please ensure to put and keep your mobile phone (and any other devices close by) on silent mode, or switch them off if you do not need them.
- 18 Make sure that all the devices you need for the meeting are fully charged or connected to power from the start of the call if there is any doubt that their remaining battery life is enough for the expected duration of the call.
- 19 Be well prepared, assemble all you need in good time, including any papers for the meeting, writing materials for note taking and to join the call.
- 20 Be aware that the entire meeting can be recorded. The host or chairperson will usually announce if this is done, but you should also see on the screen if this function has been activated. You can also request verbally that the meeting is recorded and to receive a copy of the recording.
- 21 When a presenter shows a document or a PowerPoint presentation on the shared screen, you will not be able to access your own screen to see any other document. It is helpful to have a second device on which to see such documents e.g. a mobile phone or a tablet.
- 22 If you wish to present a document it is better to send it in advance to the host.
- 23 Try not to speak across others or interrupt and where possible wait to be invited to speak by the Chairperson. If you do start to speak simultaneously with someone else, pause and offer them the opportunity to go first. The Chairperson will come back to you. You can see who is speaking by displaying the list of participants.
- 24 If you wish to contribute to the meeting, please ensure to make use of the raise-your-hand button. The Chairperson will give the respective person the floor. Please remember to put your hand down after you have made your contribution.
- 25 Most virtual meeting software programmes enable you to send messages to the other participants e.g. through a chat function. This function can be used to make comments or share information.
- 26 Virtual meetings can be long and tiring. The chairperson may announce a health break or rest, if not, you can propose that.

¹⁰ Modified and expanded from the ground rules for virtual meetings used by the African Wildlife Consultative Forum

MEA



SADC House, Plot No. 54385
Central Business District Private Bag 0095
Gaborone, Botswana

+267 395 1863

www.sadc.int

In partnership with:



Implemented by: **giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH