



SADC Private Sector Forum Remarks : Chairperson Ms Tumi Mbaakanyi

Delivered at SADC Employment and Labour Sector, Senior Officials Session On 24 February 2026: Blueberry Hotel South Africa

Chairperson, Senior Officials, Social Partners, Distinguished Delegates,

All Protocols Observed

We gather at an important moment for our region. Across Southern African Development Community, enterprises are navigating intense global competition, rising costs, supply chain disruptions, and rapid technological change. Governments are balancing the urgent need for economic growth with the equally important imperative of fairness and inclusion. Unemployment is rising, particularly among our youth and women, and many households are struggling with the high cost of living.

At the same time, our region faces both structural and emerging challenges from climate change, energy insecurity, limited access to

finance for small and medium enterprises. Informal economies continue to sustain millions, yet remain vulnerable and underserved. These realities call for stronger collaboration between governments, business, and labour.

However, this moment also presents us with an opportunity. SADC has vast natural resources, a growing and youthful population, expanding regional markets, and increasing potential for value addition and industrialization. Through deeper regional integration, improved trade facilitation, digital transformation, and investment in skills development, we can unlock inclusive and sustainable growth.

As Social Partners, we share responsibility to ensure that economic transformation creates decent jobs, strengthens enterprises, and promotes social justice. Dialogue, cooperation, and practical partnerships must guide our actions.

Chairperson, Enterprises thrive only where policy is coherent, predictable, and growth oriented. Sustainable employment growth across SADC will be driven primarily by a competitive, expanding, and productive private sector. Public policy must therefore secure two objectives at once: to protect decent work and enable enterprise growth. This is not a choice between labour and business. It is a commitment to both.

If we overregulate without enabling, jobs will not materialize. If we enable without protecting, stability and fairness will erode. Our

responsibility is a disciplined, deliberate balance. Employment growth requires policy coherence, regulatory predictability, and implementation of discipline.

The credibility of our commitments will not be judged by the strength of our language, but by the number of decent, productive jobs created, youth employed, and enterprises thriving across our region. The opportunity is before us. The responsibility is ours as Government, Business, and Labour. Let us deliver.

Chairperson, the era of drafting is over. The era of delivery must begin. Implementation must take center stage. Employment must become a measurable regional outcome, not a recurring aspiration in our communiqués.

What gets measured gets managed. What gets reported gets prioritized.

Chairperson, distinguished delegates; as we discuss employment, we must recognize the realities facing the engines of job creation, our enterprises. Across SADC, employers face several challenges:

- **Regulatory Fragmentation:** Differing labour laws and compliance requirements across Member States increase complexity and reduce predictability for cross-border operations.

- **High Compliance Costs:** Especially for SMEs, inspection systems, reporting obligations, and social security contributions can be burdensome. Compliance should support growth, not stifle it.
- **Skills Gaps:** Youth unemployment remains high, yet many young people are not “work-ready” for the opportunities that exist.
- **Limited Access to Finance:** Lack of affordable credit and investment capital restricts business expansion and job creation.
- **Informality:** Widespread informal employment undermines competitiveness. Enforcement must be paired with incentives, support, and gradual integration.
- **Labour Mobility Barriers:** Differences in qualification recognition, social security frameworks, and recruitment regulations limit the movement of skilled workers across borders, constraining regional value chains.

These challenges are not obstacles, they are opportunities for collaboration. Harmonized regulations, demand-driven skills development, streamlined dispute resolution, and incentive -based formalization can transform these constraints into enablers of growth.

In conclusion, Chairperson, Senior Officials, delegates, the private sector across SADC stands ready to partner in skills development, labour market information systems, structured social dialogue, and disciplined implementation. SPSF stands ready to work alongside the SADC Secretariat and all stakeholders to build a resilient, competitive, and inclusive regional economy that leaves no one behind. Let us

move forward in a spirit of cooperation, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. Last but not least, allow me to express our gratitude to Member States who have managed to sponsor their social partners to attend this meeting. This is commendable in the spirit of tripartism. Thank you, Chairperson for hosting us.

I thank you All for your attention.