



**REGIONAL CHILD RIGHTS CONFERENCE – “TAKING STOCK – THE REALITY OF CHILDREN WITHIN THE SADC  
REGION”**

**26<sup>th</sup> November - 01<sup>st</sup> December 2023; GABORONE, BOTSWANA**

## 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) was established through a Treaty in 1992, replacing its precursor, the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) which was established in 1980. It comprises of 16 Member States, namely Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The “vision of SADC is that of a common future, a future within a regional community that continue to ensure socio-economic wellbeing, freedom, social justice and peace” (SADC, 1992). Its mission is to promote sustainable and equitable economic growth and socio-economic development through efficient productive systems, deeper co-operation and integration, good governance, and durable peace and security, so that the region emerges as a competitive and effective player in international relations and the world economy. To facilitate its work and common understanding of development priorities among Member States, SADC has developed priority policy commitments in the form of treaties, protocols, and declarations. These policy commitments are operationalised into programmes through the 15-year Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) and the Strategic Indicative Programme of the Organ on Politics, Defense and Security (SIPO) adopted in 2004.

In the SADC region, most issues affecting the child are cross-cutting and thus are scattered over the different thematic concerns of the regional body. However, there are limited forums or a platform that brings all the key stakeholders together to holistically reflect on child rights commitments made in all regional, global, and continental instruments to promote and protect all rights for all children. The COVID-19 pandemic and climate change have brought multiple challenges to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as a region and to its member states which had a huge impact on the aspiration of a sustainable and equitable economic growth and socio-economic. These challenges have a huge impact on the rights and welfare of the children. Though, all countries in the SADC region, have ratified both the UNCRC and the ACRWC; the existing protocols that are in force<sup>1</sup> are not addressing children’s issues in a systematic manner. As a result, majority of countries within the SADC Region have not yet build strong child rights governance systems required to promote and protect the rights of all children.

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<sup>1</sup> SADC had promulgated 27 protocols in the areas of (1) Finance and Investment, (2) Employment and Labour, (3) Trade, (4), Science Technology and Innovation, (5) Gender and Development, (6) Extradition, (7) Mutual and Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, (8) Forestry, (9) Politics Defence and Security Cooperation, (10) Fisheries, (11) Culture Information and Sport, (12) Firearms, Ammunition and other Materials, (13) Tribunal and Rules Thereof, (14) Legal Affairs, (15) Shared Water Courses (as revised), (16) Health, (17) Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement, (18) Mining, (19) Education and Training, (20) Transport Communications and Meteorology, (21) Combatting Illicit Drug Trafficking, (22) Development of Tourism; (23) Treaty Establishing SADC on Privileges and Immunities; (24) Against Corruption; (25) Energy; (26) Facilitation and Movement of Persons; (27) Trade in Services.

As a result, millions of households including children are severely affected by this. The SADC region is also experiencing trans-boundary challenges affecting children such as displacement because of the different migration typologies, child trafficking and security issues. The sad reality is that child rights issues often get placed on the back burner of the policy priorities of most governments in the SADC region, while budgetary allocations for children's programmes are often inadequate.

Strengthening a responsive and coordinated child rights governance system remains an on-going challenge for the SADC region compounded by the lack of a child sector within the SADC organ. There is a dire need, therefore, to have a candid regional dialogue and engagement primarily to explore ways to build a systematic and sustainable regional approach for a coordinated child rights advocacy agenda that prioritise the rights and wellbeing of all children and mitigate any form of child rights violations. In view of the above, the Children Rights Network for Southern Africa (CRNSA) deemed it fit to host a Regional Child Rights Conference under the theme; ***“Taking Stock – the Reality of Children within the SADC Region”*** primarily to reflect on the living conditions of children in the region, identify the existing gaps within the regional, global and continental child rights instruments; design strategies to address the identified gaps, revive and strengthen regional child rights coordination mechanisms and develop the regional child rights advocacy agenda with clear milestones and timelines.

## 2. WHY THE REGIONAL CHILD RIGHTS CONFERENCE

As aforementioned, there are limited forums or a platforms that brings together all key child rights actors across the SADC Region, notably member states, children, civil society organisations and development partners to holistically reflect on children's living conditions, discuss progress made on the implementation of the past resolutions, the implementation of regional, global, and continental child rights commitments, and share emerging practices in promoting and protecting children's rights in the ever changing context and environments. Thus, the Regional Child Rights Conference presents a unique opportunity for Children, Members States, Development Partners and Civil Society Organisations to collectively reflect on the reality of children within the SADC Region, share lessons learnt over the past 10 years and jointly develop a regional advocacy agenda that calls for sufficient budgetary allocations, coordinated child rights response, and the adoption of child-rights-based sociopolitical and economic programming approaches across the region. Above all, the regional conference presents a platform to discuss and explore ways to strengthen the SADC regional child rights sector and build the child rights governance system primarily to improve child rights accountability, child rights reporting on national laws and to treaty bodies as well as effective implementations of the concluding observations and recommendations from the treaty bodies.

### 3. OVERALL GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE REGIONAL CHILD RIGHTS CONFERENCE

#### 3.1 Goal

The overall goal of the Regional Child Rights Conference is to reflect and discuss progress made in promoting all rights for all children and appreciate existing challenges and gaps to inform the regional child rights advocacy agenda.

#### 3.2 Objectives

In order to achieve the overall goal, the conference will be guided by the following interrelated and independent objectives outlined below.

- 3.1 To generate evidence and create a broader awareness about the realities of children within the SADC Region to inform the regional child rights advocacy agenda.
- 3.2 To create a platform to share good practices, discuss lessons learnt, promising practices that promote children's rights to survival, development, protection, and meaningful participation including engagements with the media and businesses.
- 3.3 To identify and discuss barriers that prevent progressive realisation of Children's Rights within the SADC Region and explore ways to strengthen regional child rights governance systems and mechanisms.
- 3.4 To reflect and discuss emerging issues that have direct impact on the lives and wellbeing of children and the required regional mitigation and prevention responses. which include amongst other climate change, online safety, substance abuse and
- 3.5 To discuss and explore ways to strengthen the SADC regional child rights coordination mechanism and accountability framework that promote timely reporting to the treaty bodies including the implementation of the concluding observations and recommendations.
- 3.6 To launch the Young Climate Voices as young climate change activists across the SADC Region primarily to raise awareness about children's environmental rights and how to safeguard it.

### 4. CONFERENCE APPROACHES AND METHODS

#### 4.1. Preparatory Activities

In view of the recurring electricity challenges within the SADC Region that affects Wi-Fi connectivity; the conference will be a physical meeting over a period of 4 days in Gaborone, Botswana, the SADC Organ Headquarters. Four months before the conference, CRNSA will conduct a rapid mapping assessment on the realities of children within the SADC Region to generate evidence that will be used to set the tone of the conference and serve as the reference point for the development of the regional advocacy agenda therefrom.

The rapid mapping assessment will target, but not limited to children's representative from the 16 SADC countries, relevant line ministries from members states, development partners and civil society organisations operating within the SADC Region. Amongst others, the scope of the rapid mapping assessment includes a) Literature review of different government reports, concluding observations and recommendations from treaty bodies, b) key informant interviews with representatives from member states, development partners and virtual focus group discussions with children's representative from the 16 members' state.

## **4.2 Conference Methods**

The conference will employ combined approaches, notably plenary, parallel sessions, and side events to stimulate active participation, discussions, engagements, and interactions between delegates and guest speakers. Plenary sessions will be used mainly for the official opening of the conference, cross cutting issues and feedback sessions from parallel sessions. The core focus of the parallel session the sub -thematic presentations, discussions and recommendations lead by small group. Sides events are dedicated to development partners, researchers and any other stakeholders who intend to host the learning sessions, disseminate research findings or skills development and capacity building. Development Partners and Strategic Partners. Child rights experts, practitioners, academics, development partners, members states and other key stakeholders will be invited to submit abstracts in accordance with the difference sub – themes of the Conference.

The conference will use both English, French and Portuguese languages to cater for all SADC member states, children, development partners and Civil Society Organisations.

## **4.3. Conference Activities**

### **4.3.1 Child – led Dialogue**

The conference will start with 1. 5 days of child – led dialogue a weekend before the main conference, targeting 8 children's representatives per SADC member state. Thus, in total the child – led dialogue will be attended by a minimum of 120 children's representatives across the SADC region. The primary purpose of the child – led dialogue is to create a space and opportunity for children to collectively share and discuss their lived experiences and realities based on their local contexts and living conditions, discuss and operationalise the Children's Climate Change declaration from the AU Climate Summit, to prioritise and present their advocacy asks directly to the representatives of the SADC Member States, the SADC Secretariat, the SADC Parliamentary Forum, and Civil Society Organisations. In addition, children will use this opportunity to identify their peers who will represent them as the SADC Young Climate Voices.

### 4.3.2 Fundraising Gala Dinner – CRNSA@10

CRNSA turned 10 years in May 2023, thus as part of the Fundraising Gala Dinner under the theme, “Safe the Environment for the New Generation”, CRNSA will launch the Young Climate Voices to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Young Climate Voices will be a group of 22 Children across the SADC Region who will be supported to lead awareness raising on children’s environmental rights and advocate for child – sensitive climate financing, policies, and programmes. Above all, the fundraising gala dinner is used as a vehicle to generate resources to develop and implement child – led advocacy programme on climate change and children’s environmental rights within the SADC Region. Though the primary target for the fundraising gala dinner are conference delegates, concerted efforts will be made to reach out to businesses, foundations, and trusts within the region.

### 4.4 Conference Sub - themes

The scope of the regional child rights conference presentations, discussions, debate, and engagements will be guided by these interrelated sub-themes.

#### 4.4.1 Realities of children within the SADC Region

*Presentations and discussions about situation of children across all vulnerabilities, socio – economic conditions of children and gender with specific focus on the rights to survival, development, protection, and meaningful participation.*

#### 4.4.2 Knowledge sharing and dissemination

*Presentations and discussions of lessons learnt and promising practices that promote children’s rights to survival, development, protection, and meaningful participation.*

#### 4.4.3 Systematic and Structural Barriers

*Presentations and discussion on systematic and structural barriers that prevent progressive realisation of Children’s Rights within the SADC Region.*

#### 4.4.4 Child Rights Governance System Strengthening

*Presentations and discussions of strategies and modalities to strengthen regional child rights governance, coordination mechanism and accountability framework.*

#### 4.4.5 Emerging issues and their impact

*Presentations and discussions on emerging issues that have direct impact on the rights and wellbeing of children and the required regional mitigation and prevention responses. (Climate change, online safety, substance abuse, etc)*

## 5. TARGET AUDIENCE

Through this Conference, CRNSA and its partners are targeting a maximum of 1000 delegates drawn from key government ministries responsible for children, National Child Rights Networks, Child – Led Organisations, Development Partners, the academia, Business, Children’s Representatives, SADC Organ Secretariat, SADC NGOs, SADC PF and the ACERWC.

## 6. TOTAL BUDGET

CRNSA requires a total amount of P650 000.00 to successfully host the Regional Child Rights Conference and the Fundraising Gala Dinner to cover the Conference package, traveling and accommodation, Gala Dinners (i.e., venue, catering, entertainment, deco, drinks and guest speaker related costs), token of appreciations for guest speakers, communication and branding, printing cost, consultancy fees for the rapid mapping assessment, development of child friendly materials, interpretations services and costs towards Child-led dialogue.