

Communiqué

Democracy, Poverty and Development: Perspective and Lessons from SADC Island States

We the representatives of 24 civil society organizations from Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles and South Africa, meeting in Port Louis, Mauritius from 19th-20th July 2007 at a round-table policy dialogue on "Democracy, Poverty and Development: Perspectives and Lessons from SADC Island States (SIS)", noted and resolved the following:

Democracy, Human Rights and Development

- That the SADC Island States of Mauritius, Madagascar and the Seychelles promote and strengthen a culture of good governance and democracy that goes beyond the mere setting up of the institutions and mechanisms of the same. Governments [working in conjunction with civil society] should enhance civic education and human rights awareness and support access to justice for poor and marginalized groups;
- That SADC Island States make further progress in strengthening formal democracy through supporting election processes and reforms, supporting dialogue among and within political parties and creating an environment for parliaments and civil society to play their legitimate role in holding government accountable;
- Economic growth and stabilization policies are not fully addressing poverty, social exclusion and marginalization in the SADC Island States. Therefore, stronger emphasis should be placed on researching poverty, inequality and social exclusion with a view to developing targeted and effective social protection programmes for such groups that create empowerment rather than a culture of dependency;
- That SADC Island States should welcome civil society actors as valid and credible partners and provide more meaningful opportunities (even institutionalised mechanisms) for greater dialogue and participation by CSOs in policy formulation and implementation. SADC member states should commit to an open information policy, making information and research on poverty, development, democracy and human rights accessible to enable this type of engagement.

Gender Equality and Women's rights in the SADC Island States

- That all SADC countries sign, ratify and swiftly domesticate the proposed SADC Gender and Development Protocol to be tabled at the Lusaka SADC Heads of State Meeting in August;
- That SADC Heads of State at the Lusaka Summit table an urgent resolution for the African Union to appoint a Special Rapporteur on the rights of women;
- That SADC Island States urgently ratify and domesticate the Protocols to the African Charter on the Rights of Women and on the creation of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. They should promote exchanges of experience in gender mainstreaming among member states;
- That SADC Island States, as a matter of urgency, commit to addressing the worrying increases in incidents of violence against women in their countries. Governments in

the SADC Island States must take urgent action to create an environment of “zero tolerance” on violence and ensure that women live free from fear and violence;

- That parliaments in the SADC member states (including the SADC Parliamentary Forum-- SADC-PF) enhance their capacity to play a more active role in addressing gaps in gender legislation and in strengthening their oversight role over the executive on issues of gender equality and the protection of women's rights.

Trade and its Impacts on Development

- That SADC Island States demand the front-loading of aid for trade, financing and space to enable them deal with supply side constraints. They should also emphasise support for accompanying measures to mitigate the social implications and fall out that will be an inevitable part of the currently proposed trading arrangements (in particular, the Economic Partnership Agreements – EPAs);
- That SADC Island States that are heavily reliant on the production of primary commodities urgently commit to the restructuring and diversification of their economies to move away from primary commodity production to the production of finished goods and other competitive industries;
- That African governments commit to greater coherence, unity and mutual support in all trade negotiations and that they demonstrate commitment and resolve to build expertise for effective trade negotiations (in ways that benefit their people);
- That civil society organisations (CSOs) in the SADC Island States develop stronger capacity and activism in issues relating to trade, and mobilize in more effective ways to hold their governments accountable for higher standards of economic and corporate governance and accountability;
- That domestically, SADC Island States seriously and urgently address the twin challenges of a heavy level of indebtedness within their populations on the one hand, and a high level of dependence on state welfare on the other. Governments should urgently explore ways of targeting more effective social protection measures for identified socially excluded groups in ways that are sustainable and in ways that empower such groups.

Climate Change and its Impact on Development

- That SADC Island States commit to enacting and implementing policies that address sustainable consumption, sustainable waste management and the protection of biodiversity on the islands;
- That SADC Island States should push further for the enactment of sanctions against major polluters. Compensation mechanisms for developing countries for the negative impacts of climate change should be made more effective and accessible;
- That SADC Island States work more closely with CSOs on the islands to prioritise education, disseminate information and create awareness on the impacts of climate change and positive actions that can be taken individually and collectively;
- That CSOs should be allowed access to environmental justice including putting forward public interest litigation in cases where corporations undertake projects with damaging impacts on the environment.

Signed by representatives of the following organizations:

National Human Rights Commission (Mauritius)
LUNGOS
CEFRAD
Stra Consult
CEDREFI
University of Antananarivo-Madagascar
Women in Action and SolidarityEcole pour la Solidarite et la Justice (ESJ)
Mouvement pour le Progres de Roche-Bois (MPRB)
Labourwatch
MACOSS
PILS
Seychelles Women's Commission
Association of the Seychelles Craftsmen
University of Mauritius
Conflict & Governance Facility (CAGE)
MRIO-GEMSA
SOS Pauvrete
FAWE-Madagascar
Southern Africa Regional Poverty Network (SARPN)
Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace-Mauritius
SAHRINGON – Mauritius
ATD-Quart Monde
Media Watch - Mauritius