

## COMMUNIQUE TO THE SADC HEADS OF STATES AND GOVERNMENT 13 August 2021

The Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance, a network of national women's rights networks in 15 SADC countries, and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) partners in Malawi met virtually across the region, and face-to-face in Malawi as part of the Regional Civil Society meeting ahead of the SADC Heads of States meeting on the 17 August 2021.

The meeting noted with concern that COVID-19 has resulted in an escalation of the already high levels of Gender Based Violence (GBV); increase in teenage pregnancies; child marriages; harmful practices and unsafe abortions, as well as disruptions to health services, including those for HIV and AIDS, family planning, menstrual and maternal health.

In addition, women constitute 70 percent of frontline health workers, home-based care givers and of those who have been most affected by the pandemic through loss of jobs; disruption to the informal sector and of cross border trade.

Only 4% of the 360 million people in SADC have been partially vaccinated and only 2% have been fully vaccinated. This is lower than the global average of 14% and much lower than the average in most developed countries, where over half the population has been vaccinated.

The Southern African Protocol Alliance and the SRHR partners in Malawi are calling on SADC leaders to accelerate vaccine roll out, provide sex disaggregated data to monitor distribution and ensure that gender-related barriers are addressed.

A #VaccineGenderJustice petition calls on Heads of State meeting in the Malawi to challenge "*vaccine apartheid*" globally and ensure rapid, equitable distribution of effective #COVID-19 vaccines in the region.

In addition to sex, age and region disaggregated data, the petition calls on Heads of State to:

- Remove barriers to widespread delivery and uptake of effective vaccines across SADC.
- Ensure that all SADC citizens, especially women and marginalized groups have access to, and information on, the most effective vaccines, as soon as possible.
- Negotiate access to vaccine science, as it is everyone's right to benefit from scientific progress and its applications including in healthcare.
- Support the World Trade Organisation Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) to waive intellectual property rights protections for technologies needed to prevent, contain, or treat COVID-19, including vaccines and vaccine-related technologies.
- Provide budgetary allocations to bridge the digital divide to ensure that all citizens in SADC member states have access to information and modern platforms for equitable access to education.

The Alliance and SRHR partners in Malawi are also calling on SADC Heads of States and Governments to:

- Implement the regional, continental and global human rights and SRHR instruments that SADC member states have signed or ratified.
- Urgently adopt policies and legislation to ensure that safe abortion is available and accessible on demand in all SADC member states.
- Redouble efforts to reduce maternal mortality, which is unacceptably high in all but two SADC member states (Seychelles and Mauritius).
- Remove value added tax (VAT) from menstrual health products and provide these free in schools.
- Adopt and implement policies and strategies to ensure access to SRHR information and services, and the meaningful participation by youth in advancing their SRHR.
- Adopt laws and mount campaigns to end child marriages, in line with the commitments to make 18 the minimum legal age of marriage and domesticate the SADC Model Law on Child Marriages.
- Ensure that there are strategies in place to strengthen prevention, response and support to address teenage pregnancy including school re-entry programmes.
- Apply the lessons on gender justice in the COVID-19 pandemic to bold and visionary approaches to achieve climate justice for the future generations of SADC.
- Allocate resources to support the implementation of gender responsive public health services towards the realization of Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

***Presented by:***

Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance (comprised of SAFAIDS; Platform da Mulheres Accao – Angola; Botswana Council of NGO’s; Union Congolaise des Femmes des Medias – GEMSA (UCOFEM – GEMSA) – Democratic Republic of Congo; WLSA Lesotho; Fédération Pour la Promotion Féminine et Infantile) – Madagascar; Malawi NGO Gender Coordination Network; Mauritius Media Watch Organisation – GEMSA; Forum Muhler – Mozambique; Namibia NGO Forum; Seychelles GEMPLUS – GEMSA; South African Women in Development Eswatini Young Women’s Alliance; Tanzania Gender Networking Programme; Zambia Women in Law Southern Africa; Women’s Coalition of Zimbabwe), SADC Council for NGOs and National Partners (Council for Non-Governmental Organizations in Malawi (CONGOMA), Coalition for the Prevention of unsafe Abortion (COPUA), Ipas, Banja La Mtsongolo (BLM), Options, Family Planning Association (FPAM), SRHR Alliance, Care Malawi, OXFAM, Feminist Macro Economics Alliance (FEAM), Power to Youth (PtY))