

Poverty reduction strategies in SADC not meeting Millennium Development Goals targets

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Summary & Comment: The MDGs are a set of eight goals agreed by world leaders at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000: to end extreme poverty and hunger; improve health, education and gender equality; combat communicable diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a Global Partnership for Development. The goals of deeper integration and poverty eradication need to be addressed urgently.

Poverty reduction strategies in SADC not meeting Millennium Development Goals targets

The SADC region is experiencing unparalleled peace, political stability and security at the beginning of a new year 2004, but poverty reduction goals remain elusive. "The reduction in poverty achieved so far through poverty reduction strategies is not in tandem with the minimum targets as reflected in the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs)," the SADC Executive Secretary, Dr Prega Ramsamy said at his year-end briefing, and the challenges are "quite enormous". With about 40 percent of the population in the SADC region living with less than US\$1 per day, Ramsamy said, resource and capacity constraints need to be addressed urgently.

The MDGs are a set of eight goals agreed by world leaders at the *UN Millennium Summit in September 2000*, to end extreme poverty and hunger; improve health, education and gender equality; combat communicable diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a Global Partnership for Development. Each goal has quantifiable targets for implementation, mostly by 2015.

Poverty in the SADC region has been aggravated by cycles of drought and floods, insecurity and conflicts, and by the HIV and AIDS pandemic, malaria and other communicable diseases. Other challenges include a low proportion of electrified households across most countries in the region, poor telecommunications facilities with low fixed line teledensity, low access to personal computers as well as radio and television, and high illiteracy levels. Despite sluggish growth rates, however, some SADC member states are emerging as continental leaders in terms of micro-economic policies and poverty reduction strategies as well as institution building, including Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa.

On the political front, the SADC region is experiencing unparalleled peace, political stability and security since the signing of the *Angolan Peace Accord* in April 2002 and the installation in the Democratic Republic of Congo of a transitional government on 30 June 2003. The regional political situation is characterised by political pluralism and regular democratic elections. Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa are expected to hold elections in 2004 and Mauritius, Tanzania and Zimbabwe in 2005.

The SADC Executive Secretary urged member states to use the forthcoming elections as an opportunity to achieve the minimum 30 percent of women's representation in political and decision-making structures by 2005. He said that while progress has been made in implementing the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, and its 1998 Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children, this is mainly in parliaments and cabinet. The proportion of women in parliaments indicates that half of SADC member states are at 16 percent and above, led by South Africa with 31.3 percent and Mozambique with 31.2 percent, followed by Seychelles and Tanzania. On the proportion of women in cabinet, South Africa is leading with 33.3 percent, followed by Botswana at 26.7 percent, Lesotho (25 percent) and Zambia (22.7 percent).

Turning to the 15-year development plan approved by *SADC Heads of State and Government* in August 2003, Ramsamy said this will provide strategic direction, and facilitate the measurement of progress through targets and timeframes. The purpose of the *Regional Indicative Strategic Development* (RISDP) is to deepen regional interegration through a comprehensive programme of long-term economic and social policies. The RISDP reaffirms the commitment of SADC member states to good political, economic and corporate governance entrenched in a culture of democracy, full participation by civil society, transparency and respect for the rule of law.

Regarding the *New Partnership for Africa's Development* (NEPAD), SADC member states are integrating agreed priorities into national development plans, in areas such as agriculture, health, information, communication and infrastructure development. "Summit directed that we convene a high level ministerial meeting on NEPAD to facilitate the integration of NEPAD into SADC's regional integration programme activities," Ramsamy said. "The African Union's NEPAD Programme is embraced as a credible and relevant continental framework, and the RISDP as SADC's regional expression and vehicle for achieving the ideals contained therein."

Speaking at SADC headquarters in Gaborone, the Executive Secretary stressed that the goals of deeper integration and poverty eradication require the following actions in 2004:

- Intensifying the fight against HIV and AIDS;
- Gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women;
- Rapid adoption and internalisation of Information and Communication Technologies;
- Diversification of regional economies through industrial development and value addition;
- Liberalisation in the movement of factors of production;
- Research, science and technology innovation, development and diffusion;
- Creation of an enabling institutional environment;
- Productivity and competitiveness improvements;
- Private sector development and involvement; and
- Development of a balanced and socially equitable information and knowledge-based society.

On SADC restructuring, Ramsamy said that *all four Directorates have been established*, for Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment; Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources; Infrastructure and Services; and Social and Human Development and Special Programmes. The study on the *New SADC Organisational Structure* has been approved and implementation should commence in April 2004, with the four Directors to be recruited by August 2004. Other major achievements include the establishment of the intergrated Committee of Ministers and in most members states, the SADC National Committees.

The next meeting of the SADC Council of Ministers will be held in February/March 2004 in Arusha, and will approve the budget for the Secretariat for the year 2004/05. (SARDC)

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