

Southern African Leadership Changes: The Challenges and Future Development Perspectives

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The Southern African Development Community (SADC) held the 41st Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government in Lilongwe, Malawi on 17 to 18 August 2021 with a limited number of participants. The modest symbolism associated with the gathering was to observe strictly the COVID-19 protocols.

The summit held under the theme “Bolstering Productive Capacities in the Face of COVID-19 Pandemic for Inclusive, Sustainable, Economic and Industrial Transformation” was preceded by a Council of Ministers meeting held in hybrid format whereby limited number of delegates attended physically, while others participated through virtual platforms.

The chosen theme seeks to review the past and explore further effective ways to accelerate the implementation of the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-2030, in particular, the Industrialization and Market Integration pillar.

During the summit, **Dr. Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera**, President of Malawi took over the chairpersonship of SADC from **Filipe Jacinto Nyusi**, President of Mozambique who assumed the topmost position of SADC on 17 August, 2020 during the 40th SADC Summit.

Dr. Chakwera, the new Chairman of SADC and the President of the hosting country, in his speech underscored a number of significant points. He reassured to pursue two key documents for the region: the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-2030 and the SADC Vision 2050, as well as the establishment of SADC Humanitarian and Emergency Operations Center (SHOC).

As the incoming leader, he indicated to work on the inequalities and disparities in accessing COVID-19 vaccines that are seriously hindering efforts to save the lives of millions within the SADC and the task must be tackled head on. The inequalities and disparities in the distribution and production of COVID-19 vaccines are symptomatic of an old geopolitical framework that is no longer working, no longer sustainable, and no longer acceptable. African countries are full members of the global community.

The time has come to work on the African Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and to seek economic sustainability, especially at a regional level like SADC. It is necessary to utilize the

productive capacities and turn the economies into engines for sustainable growth. It is necessary revitalizing the agricultural sector, enhancing value addition, facilitating trade, and simplifying rules of origin. The African Continental Free Trade Area has availed SADC the opportunity to become the breadbasket and export basket of Africa.

“But we must seize the moment. We must fully implement the SADC Industrialization Strategy and Road-map, SADC Regional Agriculture Policy and SADC Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plan, among others,” he stressed in his speech.

In line with the new SADC theme, the Government of Malawi is currently implementing the Malawi 2063, a vision focused on three drivers towards middle-income status for the economy: Agricultural Productivity and Commercialization, Industrialization, and Urbanization.

In this regard, one of Malawi’s flagship projects is the Shire Valley Transformation Programme (SVTP) for the period 2018 to 2031 valued at \$563 million. Its aim is increasing agricultural productivity and commercialization for targeted households in the Shire Valley, and to improve the sustainable management and utilization of natural resources.

The true potential of this project lies in the opportunities for private sector participation from member states, for value addition chains towards industrialization. Such initiatives also benefit greatly from the Annual SADC Industrialization Week, which facilitates business linkages and promotes trade opportunities between member states.

“These are the tools for regional integration I promise to push for during my tenure as chair, because the time has come to turn our talk on regional integration into our walk. That is why Malawi will ensure that the 5th SADC Industrialization Week is held here sometime this coming November to make this year’s theme a reality,” Dr McCarthy Chakwera said, taking over the mantle of leadership of SADC.

Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, President of Mozambique, in handing over speech highlighted the following points: revitalizing trade across borders, enhancing industrial production within southern borders, and accelerating recovery of key sectors such as tourism.

The revival of the economies depends on the collective ability and step up the efforts toward economic stability, overcoming serious challenges together to eradicate poverty, food insecurity, and infrastructural underdevelopment, and build our region back better.

“We must therefore tackle the roadblocks standing in the way of our quest to reach this goal. One critical roadblock we must confront is the toxic nationalism that is causing some nations in the world to hoard millions of vaccine doses and deny other nations access to the same. Similarly, we must confront the toxic nationalism that is causing some regions in the world to deny other regions like SADC the rights to produce vaccines for their own populations,” he said.

According to him,

“the key pillars of regional integration must be pursued and the goal of regional integration must be attained. We all agree that if we truly want inclusive and sustainable economic transformation across SADC, then regional integration is non-negotiable. We must enhance cross-border trade and investment in our region through

the existing SADC mechanisms and where need be, introduce new ones.”

President Filipe Nyusi added:

“We must fully embrace industrialization as the most effective means of achieving the main goals of SADC namely: increased economic productivity; stronger regional integration; and reduced poverty for people living in the region. We must facilitate the free movement of our peoples in a manner commensurate with our shared conviction that we are truly a community of shared values and shared interests.”

Among other key highlights at the gathering, the Executive Secretary of SADC, **Dr. Stergomena Lawrence Tax**, bade farewell to the SADC Heads of State and Government after serving for 8 years and on other hand, welcomed a new SADC Executive Secretary. Coincidentally, Lawrence Tax was sworn in as the SADC Executive Secretary at the 33rd SADC Summit, which Malawi last hosted in Lilongwe in August, 2013.

In this position, her key responsibilities have been engaging all the members as an economic bloc, overseeing, and implementing various programmes and projects in the Southern African region.

In her farewell speech, she highlighted the achievements of SADC over the years, in terms of peace and security, consolidation of democracy, macro-economic convergence, industrialization, intra-trade, regional connectivity, access to energy, financial integration and inclusion, and mobile penetration.

The region remains stable and peaceful, notwithstanding, isolated challenges. This is attributed to solid systems and measures in place, such as our regional early warning, preventive and mediation mechanisms, which facilitate timely detection and redress of threats and challenges, and effective deployments of organization’s electoral observation missions.

The tail-end of my term of office encountered challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, which remains a major concern and a challenge globally, and in almost all SADC member states. That, however, SADC has exhibited determination, solidarity and has undertaken several coordinated regional responses and put in place various harmonized measures to fight the pandemic and to mitigate its socio -economic impacts.

Whereas, the region has progressed in terms of its objectives, it is yet to achieve its ultimate goal of ensuring economic well-being, improvement of standards of living and quality of life for the people of Southern Africa.

As a national of the United Republic of Tanzania, Lawrence Tax also expressed her gratitude to the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania for the trust, and for nominating her for this position in 2013. She particularly expressed satisfaction on the progress made in empowering women, both economically, and in leadership positions in the region, and called for sustained and accelerated progress in women empowerment, and there still grounds to be covered.

Notwithstanding some differences in political culture, national policies and approaches towards development issues, the history, shared principles and values, and common agenda have always enabled the region to find common grounds.

In general, SADC had come a long way since the days of the liberation struggles, and the

Region owed its cooperation, unity and development to the founders of this great organization whose sacrifices have enabled the level of transformation and successes it is enjoying today.

The summit featured the following meetings and events: SADC Public Lecture under the theme: Promoting Digitalization for Revival of SADC Industrialization Agenda in the COVID era; Meeting of Standing Committee of Senior Officials and Finance Committee Meetings; Meeting of SADC Council of Ministers and SADC Organ Troika Summit.

The summit took stock of progress made in promoting and deepening Regional Integration in line with SADC's aspirations as espoused in the RISDP 2020-2030 and Vision 2050, which envisage a peaceful, inclusive, competitive, middle- to high-income industrialized Region where all citizens enjoy sustainable economic well-being, justice, and freedom.

Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission; Dr. Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa; Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank; Heads of Regional and International Organization; and Head of Mission and Members of Diplomatic Corp were present at the summit in Malawi.

SADC in Brief: SADC is an organization of 16 Member States established in 1980 as the Southern African Development Coordinating Conference (SADCC) and later in August, 1992 transformed into the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The mission of SADC is to promote sustainable and equitable economic growth and socio-economic development through efficient, productive systems, deeper cooperation 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.

Member States are Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. [...]

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Kester Kenn Klomegah, who worked previously with Inter Press Service (IPS), is now a frequent and passionate contributor to Global Research.

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