



*Investing in People for Social & Economic Justice*

## WEEKEND READER

### TOWARDS A PEOPLE CENTRED POST-COVID RECOVERY PLAN

#### SAPSN SG's Address to the SADC People's Summit 2020

Comrades, sisters and brothers! Citizens and friends of the Southern African Region! We gather in this time of profound hardship and unmet needs following the unprecedented Global Covid-19 crisis. This global crisis has spared no region including ours. Over the past few months, we have witnessed the wholesale reversal of years of developmental progress. We have also seen the deepening of inequalities especially between the haves and the have nots, between men and women, between the politically powerful and the weak and indeed between the different countries and regions of Southern Africa. At the root of the injustices and inequalities so painfully exposed by Covid-19, are the structural and systemic factors that render our Region woefully unprepared to address the complexities of a world beset by an endless stream of crises. In contrast to this emerging reality, the people of the Region still envision a future in which citizens living in just and equitable societies can collectively pursue democratic efforts to ensure dignity, peace and prosperity for all.

The Region's poor and vulnerable, particularly, women and youths are struggling to cope. Overwhelmed public health systems and weak social protection mechanisms, result in the shifting of public responsibilities to already overstretched families and communities. Yet we know and understand that the plundering of the Region's capacity to respond to major crises, is a result of deliberate policy and political choices. Years of austerity measures, privatisation of public services, structural adjustment measures and the mass transfer of public funds into private hands have weakened the public sector, undermined democratic order and opened the door for vested interests to plunder the Region's resources. The Covid-19 crisis as does other underlying crises, including high maternal mortality rates, lack of access to water, housing, energy and other basic amenities for large swathes of the Region's people, is a wake-up call for the Region to change course towards justice and equality.

As the Summit's theme invokes, we want a **people's centred post Covid recovery plan**. We want to see the same willingness deployed by our Leaders to institute emergency measures deployed to address the root and structural causes of growing poverty and

inequality in the Region. Our concerns with the reality of Regional economies shrinking and thereby limiting the resources available to tackle the crisis, heighten our concerns with endemic and unaddressed resource leakages stemming from corruption, illicit financial flows and crippling debt burdens. We need to see sound and sustainable debt management as our governments increase borrowing to address Covid-19 impacts. In this time of crisis, we need to see the suspension of odious debt conditionalities imposed on our governments and a moratorium on debt repayments to pave way for robust responses to this crisis.

The urgency of the situation is coming in stark relief as the Region approaches the peak of the lean season in which more citizens will face heightened food insecurity at the mercy of both climate and Covid-19 induced disruptions to food supplies. Cross boarder Traders have gone for months without stable incomes. Artisanal miners, smallholder farmers, vendors and informal traders face severe loss of incomes as producer prices stagnate and markets shrink. Most children of the region having spent months out of school, daily remind us of the realities of information asymmetries and the growing digital divides whose long-term impact will be an even more unequal society.

The economic devastation and in some instances the unravelling of fundamental freedoms and democratic processes dash young people's confidence in the possibility of a secure future in the Region. It is time to allow the voices and agency of the Region's young people to inform the way forward! It is time for an unprecedented resource transfer to secure the future for young people including through universal basic income grants and accessible health and education!

There are many instances of the disruptive impacts of Covid-19. However, what is unmistakable is the fact that women and young girls are disproportionately impacted. It is women who shoulder the burden! It is mostly women and young girls who daily mitigate the impacts and care for the affected in an unremunerated, unprotected and vastly under-supported care economy as public services shrink and get retracted!

As SAPSN we salute the achievement of 40 years of regional cooperation amongst the peoples' and countries of Southern Africa. SADC was created to further the socio-economic, political and security cooperation among its member states and to foster regional integration in order to achieve peace and security, economic growth, to alleviate poverty and to enhance the standard and quality of life of the people of Southern Africa. This vision of regional cooperation and integration remains central to the realisation of our hope for a coordinated regional response and collective actions to mitigate the widespread impacts of the Covid-19 crisis.

The escalating toll of the Covid-19 crisis on the livelihoods, well-being and developmental prospects of the Region's people, warrants a robust and unprecedented regional response. However, the prevailing reality is that of under-resourced, uncoordinated and increasingly inward-looking responses by individual national states. This goes against the spirit and ethos of SADC's foundational principles. As we meet both as concerned citizens of the Region and as representatives of a diverse range of social movements, our tasks are to provide the feedback from the ground, critical analysis and viable alternatives for a comprehensive and effective response to COVID-19. For SAPSN, this Summit is a significant opportunity to provide a people-centred perspective to help the Region to rethink and remould our public

health systems, to redefine our socio-economic systems, to further democratise our political governance architecture, and above all to ensure the enjoyment of all human rights by all the people of the Region.

Long live the people's struggle for peaceful, just and prosperous Southern Africa!

Amandla!

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