



**Statement by the SADC Executive Secretary, H.E. Dr Stergomena Lawrence Tax,
on the Commemoration of the Africa Industrialisation Day,
20 November 2020**

On this day, the 20th November, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region joins the rest of the world to commemorate Africa Industrialization Day, a day that was proclaimed by the 25th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in July 1989, and the UN General Assembly, on December 22, 1989.

This year's commemoration is under the theme *"Inclusive and Sustainable Industrialisation in the era of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)"*. The theme underscores the importance of policy harmonization and alignment across national borders as a pre-requisite for cross border investment and for the movement of goods, capital and people.

This year's commemoration comes at a time when the region, and the world at large are confronted with an unprecedented public health crisis of COVID-19 with far-reaching social and economic consequences. The virus has exposed the deep inequalities that continue to exist in the SADC region and across the African continent. It has clearly shown how far we are from realizing the developmental goals and responsibilities to the SADC citizens. On a positive note, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how the region is able to successfully work together to overcome its challenges, even during times of unprecedented crises.

As a major driver of the planned transformation for the region, the industrial sector is one of the sectors significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important that SADC Member States understand and appreciate the extent of the damage that the pandemic has on their economies, and respond with appropriate measures to ensure that the disruption does not seriously negate key developments in the industrialisation drive of the region.

SADC understands that industrialization, with strong linkages to domestic economies, will help SADC Member States and African countries, to enhance productivity, diversify their economies, achieve high growth rates, and thus, reduce exposure to external shocks. This will substantially contribute to poverty eradication through employment and wealth creation.

SADC has over the years been at the forefront in driving the industrialisation agenda by putting in place policies and strategies to boost and catalyse industrialisation and transformation of the region. The transformation of SADC economies aims to create decent jobs, promote value adding development approaches, and improve the welfare of citizens, and ultimately eradicate poverty in the region.

Through the SADC Industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap (2015-2063), SADC values the private sector as the driver of industrialisation, and in particular, the need to strengthen the role of Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs) as they constitute a crucial economic and social factor in terms of employment, growth, incomes and development.

SADC also appreciates the contribution of informal cross-border trade (ICBT), as a significant feature of regional trade in the region which must be supported as it generates substantial income and employment, food security and household livelihoods. According to the SADC Financial Inclusion Strategy, small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) constitute between 75 percent and 95 percent of total firms and account for 48 percent of the region's employment, with women and youth constituting a bigger proportion of cross-border trade in the SADC region.

As we commemorate this year's Africa Industrialisation Day, SADC commends both the public and private sectors, including SMMEs, for remaining vigilant and adapting their responses to the changing methods of doing business, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. SADC implores all players to scale up responses to COVID-19, in order to minimize the effects of the pandemic on business operations and create more employment opportunities for the people. In the same vein, we call on Member States to continue improving the business environment to enable the private sector recover from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and more importantly, to partake of the opportunities created by SADC integration programmes.

This year's Africa Industrialisation Day should serve as a reminder for the region to unite and take collective action to accelerate industrialization and drive the regional and continental industrialisation agenda.

In the last nine months since the outbreak of COVID-19, we have witnessed a remarkable act of unity that has been our strength in saving lives and supporting the vulnerable population. With the same measure of unity, the region will come out of this pandemic stronger and ready to counter the challenges that lie ahead, especially as the SADC region seeks a peaceful, inclusive, middle to high income industrialised region as envisioned in the SADC Vision 2050.