Introduction

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Emma Kaliya, Chair of the SADC Gender Protocol Alliance_leading an Alliance VoiceandChoice campaign march. Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Key points

- This is the 15th Barometer that is tracking the region's progress in meeting the commitments which governments have made in the SADC Gender and Development Protocol and it is the fifth Voice and Choice Barometer, which focuses on SRHR in SADC. This Barometer is being launched under the shadow of war, conflict and genocide across the globe as well as deep uncertainty emanating from fast moving and quite dramatic changes that are following the inauguration of President Trump in the United States.
- Regionally, many SADC countries have not fully recovered from the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic but now face the effects of climate change disasters as well as prolonged war and conflicts in some countries, including DRC and Mozambique.
- As a result of these crises, the hard-won rights achieved for women and LGBTQI+ people over the last three decades are being eroded.
- The 2024 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Progress Report shows that progress has stopped and even regressed across some areas despite renewed commitments by member states. Just 17% of the SDG targets are on track to be achieved by the 2030 deadline.
- This Barometer shows that the women's movement in SADC must redouble its efforts to protect our hard-won rights and resist regressive forces attempting to restrict women's fundamental human rights.

This is the fifth Southern Africa Gender Protocol Voice&Choice Barometer to focus on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in the SADC region. Since the last Barometer was published in 2022, the world has continued its recovery from the COVID pandemic which eroded many human development gains, adding to the vulnerabilities of millions of marginalised groups and communities. Escalating conflict and war across the world, combined with the devastating impacts of climate change, pose existential threats to people and the planet. Southern Africa is not immune to these threats, and the most vulnerable, including women in all their diversity, children, and LGBTQI+ people, are impacted most. Now, more than ever, we need to protect the fragile gains made for women's and LGBTQI+ rights.

The Barometer measures 100 indicators covering menstrual health, maternal health, family planning, adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (ASRHR), safe abortion, HIV and AIDS, GBV, harmful practices and sexual diversity. The Barometer shows that while there has been progress across the region, many countries are far from reaching the goals in the SADC Gender Protocol, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and related normative frameworks. It also shows that progress is uneven in countries across the region. It highlights the importance of the continued policy and advocacy work of the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance on SRHR issues, in particular access to safe abortion, adolescent SRHR, as well as to address teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

This introductory chapter outlines the current global and SADC context regarding the significant challenges we face - escalating war and conflict, shrinking democratic space, and the climate crisis. The chapter also sets out the methodology underpinning the Barometer. It highlights the work of the SADC Secretariat and member states to advance women's rights in this context and the work of women's movements, specifically the Gender Protocol Alliance.

Global and regional political context

Since the release of the 2022 #VoicandChoice Barometer, numerous global crises have significantly affected women's human rights, especially in terms of their health and SRHR. As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing wars and conflicts have created additional humanitarian crises across various regions, further exacerbating the challenges faced by women and girls. The rapid and sometimes drastic changes that have been introduced by the new Trump administration in the United States have had far-reaching implications for global health.

Elections in the USA

The recent election in the United States signals a turning point for women's sexual and reproductive health rights in the United States and also globally. Almost immediately, President Trump issued a series of executive orders which had swift and devastating impacts on the world in general and on delivery of SRHR more specifically. These include:

- Planned withdrawal of the USA from the WHO (World Health Organisation). The USA has been the largest single contributor to the WHO. Threats to withdraw and/or withhold funding from other multilateral organisations.
- Suspension for 90 days of all foreign assistance through USAID, including the President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) which

has been the largest funding programme for HIV and AIDS programmes, with a focus on 25 countries of which 12 are in SADC[1]. Although there have been some reprieves announced, especially for treatment programmes, there is massive confusion and definite disruption of many critical programmes. At the time of writing this barometer, some organisations had stopped disbursing HIV medications purchased with U.S. aid, even if the drugs had already been obtained and were sitting in local clinics.[2]

- It is unclear what form US foreign assistance will take if and when it resumes.
- Reinstatement of the Mexico City policy, which limits US funding for any programmes through all organisations which support abortion. For now this is a moot point as all foreign assistance has been suspended. If assistance is re-established this order will have serious impacts for access to safe abortion as well as for access to other SRHR services.
- Homophobic pronouncements and orders to defund educational establishments in the US which support transgender athletes. The prevailing homophobic environment is emboldening for very conservative groups that are promoting such ideology across the globe, including resistance to comprehensive sexuality education in various SADC countries.
- Cancelling all Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programmes in the USA. Such moves promote racist and anti-disability sentiments globally.
- Planned withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement, severely weakening global efforts to slow, address and respond to climate change.
- Upending global trade with enactment of broad sweeping tariffs. These are likely to have negative impact on the economies of smaller and poorer countries such as those in SADC.

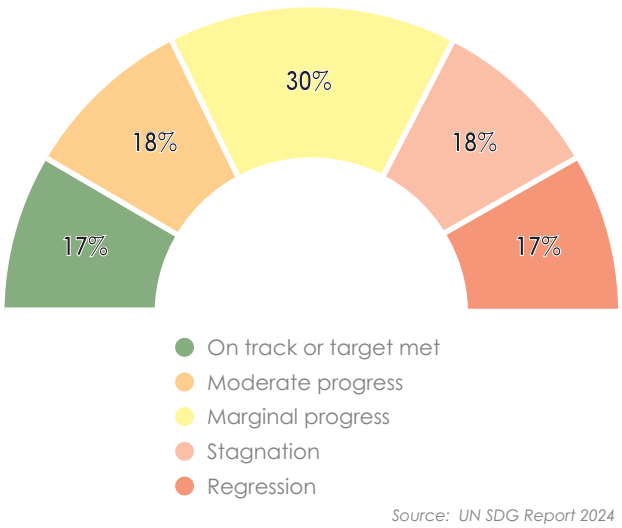
This Barometer shows that the anti-gender and LGBTQI+ rights movements are becoming more robust and better organised. Human rights in general and women's and LGBTQI+ rights in particular are under grave threat. Rights movements must work together more cohesively to resist and push back against these regressive forces.

Progress towards achieving the SDGs

With almost five years to go before the 2030 deadline, this global context and rolling back of rights will have a strong bearing on whether countries achieve the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

Three SDGs include SRHR outcomes. A standalone gender goal, SDG 5, aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. SDG 3 ensures healthy lives and promotes well-being for all ages. SDG 6 ensures the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. They include eight targets on maternal and neonatal mortality; universal access to SRHR, services and education; and access to water and sanitation. These targets are highlighted in the relevant chapters of the Barometer.

Figure 1.1: Overall progress across SDG targets based on 2015 - 2024 global aggregate data

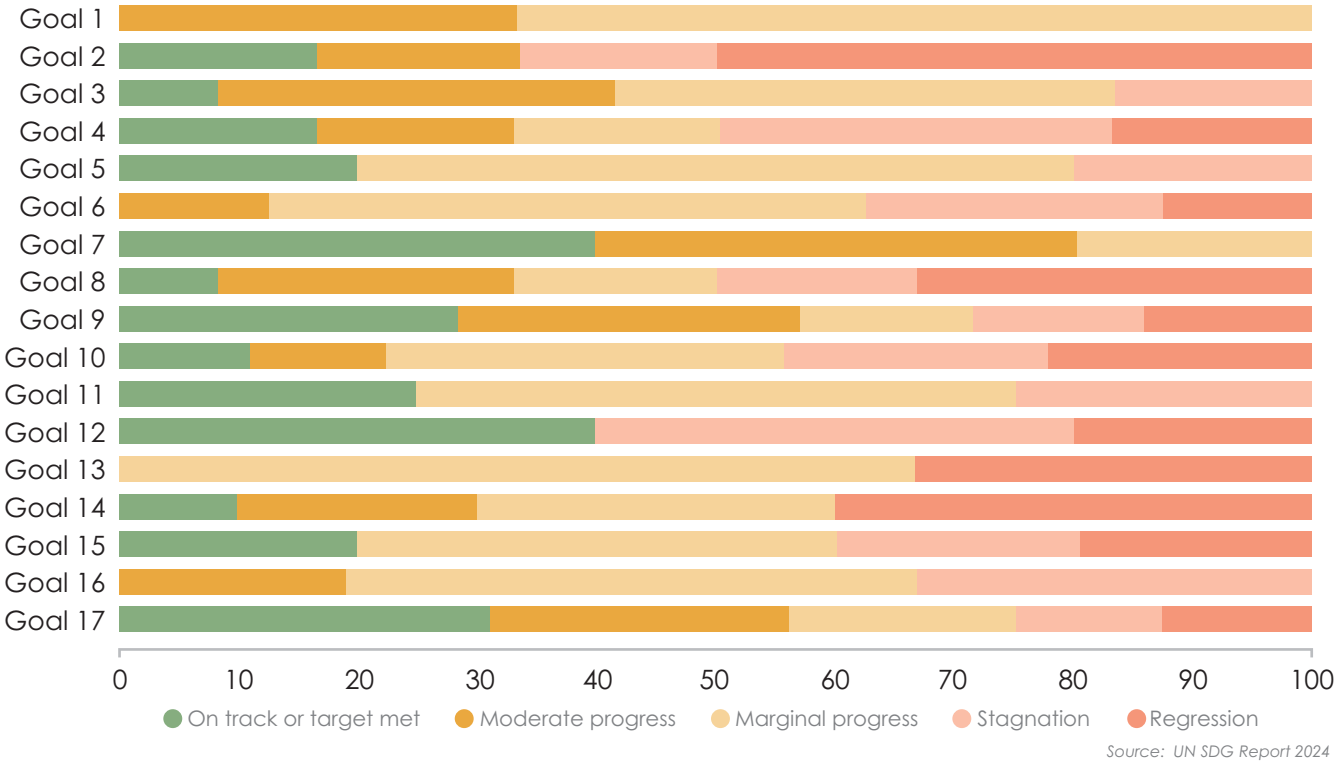


Source: UN SDG Report 2024

The 2024 Sustainable Development Goals Report paints a bleak picture. The latest data shows that global progress has stopped or regressed across some areas despite renewed commitments. Figure 1.1 shows that the world is on track to meet 17% of SDG targets; moderate progress has been made on 18%; marginal progress has been made on 30%; there is stagnation for 18% and regression for 17%. The ongoing effects of COVID-19, conflicts, the climate crisis, and economic instability have worsened existing inequalities. Globally, an additional 23 million people fell into extreme poverty, and over 100 million more experienced hunger in 2022 compared to 2019. While some health indicators have improved, global health progress has significantly slowed since 2015. The COVID-19 pandemic has erased nearly a decade of gains in life expectancy with the rate plummeting from 73.1 to 71.4 which was the level that it was in 2012.

Global progress towards achieving gender equality by 2030 is lagging. While there is decline in harmful practices, the rate of decline does not match the rate of population growth. Shockingly, one in five girls is still forced into marriage before reaching the age of 18. An alarming 230 million girls and women have been victims of female genital mutilation. Additionally, a significant number of women are still unable to exercise their right to make decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. Moreover, violence against women continues to be a pervasive issue, with women with disabilities being disproportionately affected.[3]

Figure 1.2: Progress for the 17 goals based on assessed targets, by goal (%)



Source: UN SDG Report 2024

[3] United Nations, 2024. Sustainable Development Goals report 2024, New York. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

Figure 1.2 illustrates that countries have made mainly moderate progress in achieving Goals 3 and 5; fewer than 25% have progressed sufficiently to achieve these goals by 2030. Countries are not at all on track to meet the Goal 6 targets.

Education, a cornerstone of sustainable development, is seriously threatened as many countries report declines in students' math and reading abilities, putting essential skills crucial for future prosperity at risk.[4] Approximately 300 million African learners were out of school and mainly unable to learn for over a year due to COVID-19 in 2020-21. Some benefitted from programmes such as online learning, but many could not participate in them. The African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), conducted a rapid assessment of the perspectives of education stakeholders on the projected long-term impacts of COVID-19 on education in Africa. The assessment was conducted with senior Ministry of Education officials and partner programme staff in seven African countries, including Malawi and Mozambique in SADC.[5]

The findings were:
Children lost much learning and have tried to catch up in accelerated programmes, which is not ideal and may appear as poor outcomes later in their lives. Many learners have dropped out of school and have not returned. Learners were impacted by mental health issues, many of which have probably not been resolved. This is likely to result in more SGBV, crime and increased child marriage.

Teachers, who were "the forgotten frontline workers of COVID-19," were subject to great psychosocial and economic distress. Many found alternative sources of income and did not return to teaching. The same teachers were expected to help learners overcome their psychosocial stresses without help to them for their own well-being.

Schools that could afford it adopted technology and improved their water and sanitation. However, schools that service the most vulnerable could not adopt these.

Without intervention, the researchers concluded that the long-term impact of COVID-19 will be regression in advances towards gender equality and empowerment for women and girls. It is well known that good quality education, especially secondary education, is protective against HIV acquisition, GBV, and child marriage. Thus, ensuring that the quality of education is rapidly restored is critical.

African Union on violence against women and children

The African Union (AU) has demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing violence against women and children through the development of comprehensive policies and legal frameworks. Central to these efforts is the African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU-CEVAWG), the first continental legal instrument for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in the world which was recently adopted at the Heads of State meeting in February, 2025.[6] The convention aims to eliminate all forms of violence by addressing root causes, strengthening legal and institutional mechanisms, and promoting gender equality and human rights. It is an outcome of the AU presidential initiative on positive masculinity, which was initiated by President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa during his tenure as Chair of the AU. The first conference on Positive Masculinity in Leadership for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) in Africa in 2020 was postponed due to COVID-19 and it took place in 2021 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), chaired by President Felix Tshisekedi. This meeting adopted a declaration which pledged action and resources to address the scourge of Gender Based Violence which was adopted as a decision of the full AU Assembly in February, 2022.

[4] United Nations, 2024. Sustainable Development Goals report 2024, New York. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).
[5] Namatende-Sakwa, L. and M. Ngware. (2023) The long term impacts of COVID-19 threaten gains in education in Africa. https://www.gpekix.org/blog/long-term-impacts-covid-19-threaten-gains-education-africa Accessed 27 October, 2024.
[6] The African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls | African Union (no date). Available at: https://au.int/en/aucevawg (Accessed: 21 February 2025).

President Tshisekedi was named the first AU Champion on Positive Masculinity. The second high level meeting in Dakar, Senegal, in November 2022 led to a historic decision of the AU Assembly in February 2023 to negotiate an AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU CEVAWG).

Additionally, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) has established guidelines to prevent and respond to violence against children, emphasising the need for robust legal, policy, and institutional frameworks, as well as comprehensive child protection systems.[7] The AU's broader legal initiatives focus on dismantling gender power imbalances, ensuring accountability for perpetrators, and safeguarding the fundamental rights of women and girls to life, dignity, and socio-economic development.[8] Collectively, these efforts underscore the AU's dedication to fostering a safer, more equitable environment for women and children across Africa.

Political context in Southern Africa

Overall, the political context in Southern Africa is characterised by a mix of stable democracies, such as Botswana and Namibia, and countries facing challenges related to corruption, economic instability, and political repression, such as Zimbabwe. Socio-economically, the region grapples with poverty, inequality, and governance issues and faces ongoing political and economic uncertainties. DRC and Mozambique are both experiencing increasing war and conflict. Five SADC countries (DRC, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe) held national and/or local elections in 2023.



Lesotho held Local Government Elections in September 2023, a year after the National elections. Voter turnout continues to decline, with just 26% of eligible voters turning up to vote, down from a low of 29% in the 2017 elections. While the local government level allows voters to have a direct say in who will make the most impact in their local town and village, voters chose not to exercise their democratic right to vote.



Mozambique held their sixth local elections in October 2023, and the ruling party, FRELIMO, was declared the winner in 64 out of 65 municipalities. However, the results were contested by the main opposition party, RENAMO, who called the outcome a mega-fraud. Mass demonstrations led by RENAMO's president to repudiate the results resulted in post-electoral violence. There were allegations of electoral bodies changing results to benefit FRELIMO in towns where the opposition had won. Independent election observer groups and partner countries expressed concern and called for the appeals lodged by the opposition to be decided with impartiality and transparency.[9]



The **DRC** held elections in December 2023, and President Felix Tshisekedi won re-election with more than 70% of the vote. However, the opposition and some civil society groups called for the vote to be rerun due to massive logistical problems, questioning the outcome's validity.[10]



National and local government elections took place in **Zimbabwe** in August 2023, in a context of fear and oppression. Zimbabwe's President, of the ruling ZANU PF party, Emmerson Mnangagwa, won 53% of the vote compared to 44% for Nelson Chamisa, his primary challenger. The elections were marred by delays that fuelled opposition accusations of rigging and voter suppression.[11]

[7] https://www.acerwc.africa/sites/default/files/2024-05/Guidelines%20on%20Ending%20Violence%20against%20Children%20in%20Africa_Eng.pdf
[8] The African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls | African Union (no date). Available at: https://au.int/en/aucevawg (Accessed: 21 February 2025).
[9] https://issafrica.org/iss-today/fraudulent-municipal-elections-cripple-democracy-in-mozambique , accessed 1 October 2024
[10] https://www.africanews.com/2023/12/31/president-felix-tshisekedi-declared-winner-of-drc-election// accessed 1 October 2024
[11] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/27/zimbabwes-president-mnangagwa-wins-second-term-opposition-rejects-result, accessed 1 October 2024

Across Southern Africa voters in 2024 expressed their dissatisfaction with those that have been leading them since independence. Voters, especially those that are young and in urban centres, are frustrated with poor economic prospects and high unemployment.



South Africa was the first country that went to the polls on 29 May 2024. The election was the most highly contested since the advent of democracy thirty years ago when the ruling African National Congress (ANC) won 63% of the vote. As predicted, the party lost significant ground, attaining just 40% of the vote and losing its outright majority for the first time since it came to power in 1994. This shifts the country from a one-party dominant state to a multi-party democracy. The ANC has now formed a Government of National Unity (GNU) with ten other political parties, including the centrist Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Inkatha Freedom Party, which has its roots in KwaZulu Natal.



Mozambique held national elections in early October. There was widespread discontent and allegations of election fraud when results were announced, with a new FRELIMO representative, Daniel Chapo, as the new President. This led to violent protests which continued for several months, leaving more than 300 dead, looting and disruption of transport routes from Mozambique's ports to neighbouring countries. Protesters support opposition candidate Venancio Mondlane, who rallied particularly urban and young voters through social media campaigning.[12]



The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) which has been in power in **Botswana** since independence in 1966, conceded that it lost the elections in October and facilitated a peaceful transfer of power to Duma Noko of the Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC), which won an outright majority in Parliament. Voters were unhappy with high levels of unemployment and poor economic growth.[13] It was disappointing that the share of women representatives in both local and national government, already the lowest in SADC, declined even further. Women constitute only 8.7% of elected members of parliament and only 54 of the elected 609 local government councillors were women.[14]



In national elections in late November, 2024, **Namibia** elected its first female President, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah. Younger voters, especially, showed their disaffection with SWAPO which has been in power in Namibia since independence in 1990. SWAPO lost the two thirds majority that it has enjoyed in parliament as well as control of the key cities of Windhoek, Walvis Bay, and Swakopmund.[15]

Shrinking democratic space

In some regions, rights rollbacks, driven by authoritarianism or conservative socio-political agendas, have led to heightened restrictions on freedom of expression, reproductive health, and personal autonomy. Advocacy for women's rights is gaining momentum, but it faces push-back in many contexts, emphasising the urgent need for solidarity and continuous activism.



In Eswatini, civic space continues to be threatened as dissent is routinely restricted. 2023 started with the brutal killing of Thulani Maseko, a prominent human rights lawyer and opposition activist. More than two years after a series of protests, there has been no accountability for the security forces crackdown on pro-democracy protesters. Political parties were banned from participating in general elections held in September 2023. The elections have not offered any political change to the kingdom, as MPs serve in a purely advisory role to the monarch.

[12] Pinto, Teresa. Political crisis in Mozambique shows no signs of abating, January, 2025. https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/mozambique-election-crisis/ Accessed 14 February, 2025.
[13] Muia, W and D Zane, Botswana ruling party rejected after 58 years in power, 1 November 2024. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c238n5zr51yo Accessed 14 February, 2025
[14] Genderlinks, Women's political participation audit, https://genderlinks.org.za/news/botswana-sober-findings-in-gender-and-elections-report/ accessed February 17, 2025
[15] Duffy, M. Reflections on Namibia's elections. Dec 24, 2024. https://www.e-ir.info/2024/12/24/reflections-on-namibias-2024-elections/ Accessed 14 February, 2025.

Climate change

Climate change is one of the most severe crises of our time, and people's sexual and reproductive health rights are negatively affected by climate-driven disasters. Cyclones have pounded SADC countries on the east coast, bringing torrential rains and flooding to the region and causing death and destruction. These storms are becoming more substantial and more devastating. In 2023, Cyclone Freddy, which hit **Madagascar, Mozambique, Malawi** and **Zimbabwe**, was the longest-lasting and highest-ACE (Accumulated cyclone energy) producing tropical cyclone ever recorded worldwide. Over 1200 people died, and 2000 people were injured as a result, and it is estimated that over 1,7 million people were affected, mainly in Mozambique and Malawi. Parts of South Africa have experienced disastrous flooding.

The **2023-2024 El Niño**, which was one of the strongest on record, caused below-average rainfall between October 2023 and February 2024 across much of SADC. This resulted in widespread water shortages and drought, significant livestock losses and reduced agricultural output in many countries, which has led to food insecurity and malnutrition.

Gender equality, SRHR and climate change are inextricably linked. On one hand, the climate crisis is increasing social, economic and gender inequalities. As global temperatures rise, extreme weather events like floods, droughts, and heatwaves threaten the health and rights of girls and women. On the other, gender, sexuality, age, wealth, indigeneity, and race are determining factors in vulnerability to climate change. Crises make reproductive health harder to access and result in higher unmet need for contraception, a rise in unintended pregnancies and maternal deaths due to unsafe abortions. Collapsed infrastructure and the shortage of safe water, sanitation and hygiene services impact women disproportionately as they are typically responsible for collecting and managing household water supplies. The lack of water, soap, and secure changing and washing facilities also make it challenging to manage menstrual health.

Escalating war and conflict



War and conflict globally have profound and multifaceted impacts on women, exacerbating existing gender inequalities and creating new challenges. There is ongoing conflict in **Mozambique**. The country has been facing a violent insurgency in its Cabo Delgado province since 2017, which has led to widespread displacement, loss of lives, and a humanitarian crisis. The conflict has also spread into neighbouring regions, including Nampula and Niassa. There was a recent spike in violence, with over 100,000 people displaced in the southern parts of Cabo Delgado, many of whom had been previously displaced.[16] The conflict in Mozambique remains complex and volatile, with no immediate signs of resolution. Meanwhile the simmering conflict in the DRC has also recently flared up, with the rebel M23 movement, purportedly supported by Rwanda, taking two major cities in the Eastern part of the mineral rich country.

Rape as a weapon of war



The UN Security Council Report to the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence shines a spotlight on this horrific form of violence. Sexual violence continues to be used as a tactic of war, torture and terrorism amid deepening political and security crises, compounded by militarisation and the illicit proliferation of arms. The report highlights the dire situation in the eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, where the ongoing armed conflicts are seriously affecting civilians. In North Kivu, more than half a million people have fled their homes. According to the United Nations, the number of displaced people across the

[16] https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mozambique/overview , accessed 1 October

country has reached nearly 7 million - the highest number of internally displaced people in Africa. Hundreds of cases of conflict-related sexual violence have been documented. Most violations occur in the context of clashes between armed groups and the Armed Forces of the DRC.

All parties to the violence in the DRC have been implicated in the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. The conflict and violence also limit women and girls' access to SRHR and GBV services, resulting in unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions and further trauma.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in SADC

Voice + Choice
Action and results for SRHR in SADC

In 2016, SADC member states updated the Protocol on Gender and Development to align with the SDGs. Each year since 2009, the SADC Gender Protocol Alliance has produced a Barometer to measure progress against the SADC Gender Protocol and related regional, continental, and global commitments. From 2019 the Barometer has focused on SRHR commitments.

Ministers of Health and Ministers responsible for HIV and AIDS endorsed the Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the SADC Region 2019-2030 in 2018. It is a policy and programming framework for the SADC Member States to accelerate the attainment of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all people in the region.

Southern African Development Community (SADC) Ministers of Health developed a **SADC Scorecard on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)**, a high-level strategic tool that tracks progress in achieving the 20 targets of the SADC SRHR strategy and the SDGs. SADC launched its 2nd Milestone Scorecard on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) on the margins of the joint meeting of Ministers of Health and Ministers responsible for HIV and AIDS on the 28th of November 2023 in Luanda, Republic of Angola.

The Scorecard provides an opportunity to highlight progress made and also the barriers, challenges, priorities, and strategies on SRHR in the region and to advocate for increased action in protecting, sustaining, and advancing SRHR gains.

UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Director Lydia Zigomo, speaking on behalf of the UN Agencies supporting the Together4SRHR programme, highlighted that support must be directed at SRHR programmes if the SADC region is to make progress towards ensuring that all people enjoy a healthy sexual and reproductive life and have sustainable access to quality SRHR services. She highlighted five critical areas of action required:

- Ensuring that SRHR is incorporated into the national essential package of services and medicines lists and as part of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) benefit packages while ensuring that the provision of quality integrated services is part of the Primary Health Care system.
- Promoting open and frank conversations on the impact that legal and policy barriers pose to SRHR, leading to high unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortion, gender-based violence, and ultimately, new HIV infections and continuing high maternal mortality.
- Building the resilience of our health systems to withstand future pandemics, the impact of climate change, conflicts, and other humanitarian shocks by ensuring that SRHR is included in national disaster preparedness strategies and plans and disaster preparedness is incorporated into the next generation of SRHR strategies and frameworks.
- The Global AIDS Report for 2023, under the theme "Let Communities Lead," urges us to advance SRHR by fully and reliably funding communities, making them central to all SRH policies and programmes so that they can lead efforts to advance and protect SRHR.
- The need to adopt a digital mind-set where we leverage advances in digital technologies to enhance the quality of care through client-responsive data systems.

Barometer Methodology

Measuring progress against government commitments

The Barometer measures progress against government commitments as expressed in vital normative frameworks, including the following:

- SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (SGP).
- Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the SADC Region 2019-2030.
- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol).
- United Nations Conference on the Status of Women Resolution 60/2 on Women, the Girl Child and HIV.
- Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
- Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA).
- International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Quantitative data - using indicators

Each chapter begins with a table of key indicators for which there is reliable data across the 16 SADC countries. The primary sources of these indicators are from UN Agencies such as UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNESCO, the WHO and World Bank and the SADC SRHR Scorecard.

Table 1.1: Classification of indicators

Thematic area	SADC Barometer indicators	SADC SRHR Score card indicators	Measured by both the Barometer and score card
Menstrual Health, Family Planning and Maternal Health	18	7	4
Adolescent SRHR	5	4	4
Safe abortion	8	2	1
HIV and AIDS	24	2	2
Gender-based violence	12	2	1
Harmful practices	8	0	0
Sexual Diversity	22	0	0
Budgets and services	3	3	1
TOTAL	**100**	**20**	**13**

Table 1.1 shows the indicators in this Barometer and the SADC SRHR Scorecard by theme area. The table shows that the Barometer (100 indicators) goes well beyond what governments (20 indicators) goes well beyond what governments (20 indicators) report to SADC but that they are committed to through the instruments listed. The table shows that the Barometer and SADC SRHR scorecard have 13 indicators in common. The seven indicators not measured by the Barometer are ones in which there is insufficient data across all countries, an observation borne out by the scorecard reports submitted by governments in which there are several gaps.

Qualitative data

- ***Desktop research:*** Researchers conducted extensive desktop research on the latest trends and developments across all the SRHR themes. Sources include journals, articles, academic and activist research and UN and NGO reports on the themes.

- ***Case studies:*** Alliance members gathered case studies of their #VoiceandChoice policy and advocacy work, in particular showcasing the work of V&CSA Fund partners.

The Barometer triangulates quantitative findings with relevant information, best practices, and case studies from SADC countries to provide an in-depth and nuanced account of the countries' successes, challenges and next steps.

Limitations

Data is not always available for every country, nor is it necessarily collected annually or bi-annually. Thus, in some cases, data may not have changed since the last Barometer.

The Barometer has a dedicated team of professionals who continue to produce it on an ever-shrinking budget, even as the need for evidence-based advocacy grows. We trust, however, that the data and analysis will continue to guide Alliance campaigns and provide baselines for the new grantees of the Voice and Choice Fund.

The SADC scorecard

Since the #VoiceandChoice Barometer launched, focusing specifically on SRHR, the Barometer has used 13 of the 20 indicators that governments track for which reliable data can be sourced across the 16 SADC countries to rank countries and assess which areas are performing better than others. This year, the Barometer analyses 20 indicators from the governments' reported data in the 2023 Milestone scorecard. SADC rates countries using a 2019 baseline score from each country's latest data source. Where there is no 2019 baseline figure, the scorecard uses the available 2021 or 2023 figure as the baseline. The following tables show the progress for each country on the 20 indicators that the Barometer and the SADC Scorecard both measure.

This Barometer continues to evaluate government progress using the six colour-coded table to indicate performance levels, as illustrated below:

SDG target achieved
2023 milestones achieved
Targets not achieved but within -1% to -14.9%, sustain & expand efforts to achieve target
Targets not achieved and within -15% to -29.9% make considerable effort
Targets not achieved and 30% or more off target, make significant effort
Not applicable
No data or no milestone set

The SADC SRHR Scorecards for 2023 provides a detailed assessment of the progress made by SADC member states in achieving the targets set out in the SADC SRHR strategy 2019-2030. The scorecard applies this colour coding across 17 SRHR indicators for which data could be obtained. Gender Links colour-coded the following three indicators, which are not coded in the 2023 scorecards: the Existence of laws and policies that allow adolescents to access SRH services without third-party authorisation; the minimum legal age of consent to marriage, 18 years for all irrespective; and the legal status of abortion.

Please see Tables 1.2 and 1.3 SADC SRHR Scorecards for 2021 and 2023 below.

Table 1.2: Overview of SRHR Indicators by country 2021

SADC SRHR scorecard	Angola	Botswana	Comoros	DRC	Eswatini	Lesotho	Madagascar	Malawi	Mauritius	Mozambique	Namibia	Seychelles	South Africa	Tanzania	Zambia	Zimbabwe
Minimum legal age of consent to marriage, 18 years for all irrespective	18	21 with exceptions	18	18	18	18	18	18	Below 18	18	18	18	18	18	21 with exceptions	18
Adolescent birth rate, 10-19 years of age	104	43,7	32	109	87	55	103	4	24	153,8	82	56	46,2	123	29	69
Percentage of primary schools that provided life skills-based HIV and sexuality education in the previous academic year	82	93,3	100	No data	100	100	100	No data	100	95,5	100	100	80,6	65,1	100	100
Mother to child transmission of HIV	19,2	1,75	0	23,4	3,7	5,98	39,8	2,3	13,7	12,36	3,8	1	2,7	6,61	No data	8,7
Obstetric and gynaecological admissions due to treatment of abortion	N/A	61,3	12	No data	31	No data	No data	23	No data	34,1	9,38	10	No data	31	5,3	10
Density and distribution health workers per 10,000 population	19,3	35,5	19,4	2,3	26,48	6,5	11	2,5	33,8	4,4	62,1	170,9	35,2	7,7	17,72	11,5
Proportion of services within the essential package of SRHR services covered by the PHC facility	No data	45,8	No data	No data	100	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	100	No data	No data	100	No data
STI incidence rate	7,2	6,3	0,3	2	3,6	3,1	No data	0,02	No data	No data	4,48	0,4	4,55	No data	6,8	1,3
Maternal mortality	288	166	172	693	452	618	335	349	61	452	385	65	121	556	252	462
Neonatal mortality	24	17,9	24	27	20	34	20	20	10,2	28,5	20	9,1	21	25	27	31
Existence of laws and policies that allow adolescents to access SRH services without third party authorisation	No	No	No	Yes	Yes for 12+	Yes	Yes	Yes	14+	N/A	Yes	15+	Yes for 12+	Yes	No	No
Unmet need for family planning	35,7	17,3	32	27,7	15,2	18,4	16,1	19	9,6	22	12	No data	19	22	19,7	10
Percentage reduction in new HIV infections, females15-24	26	39,1	30	50	64	58,75	-159	63,6	24	33	48	2,6	45	35	6	66
Proportion of females who have received the recommended number of doses of HPV vaccine prior to age 15	N/A	52,8	No data	No data	N/A	N/A	No data	88,5	No data	No data	N/A	97	61,2	59	60	No data
Percentage of condom use with last high-risk sex among adolescent girls and young women 15-24 year of age	32,9	No data	70	24,3	71,4	77,1	3	64,5	No data	No data	52	51,3	47	33,5	41,4	56,4
Legal status of abortion (2 = Abortion on demand; 1 = Restricted abortion; 0 = Abortion not available)	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
Proportion of ever-partnered girls and women (ages 15 and above) subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner, in the last 12 months	21,7	28	12	4,6	4,6	0,8	38	24,3	No data	36	33	No data	8,7	41,7	43	39,6
Percentage of annual budgets allocated to health sector (Abuja Declaration recommends 15%)	5,6	12,5	12	11,4	9,4	9,5	8	9,3	5,5	8,7	13,6	11,7	8,1	6,7	4,5	10
Percentage of maternal deaths due to abortion	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
Proportion of facilities providing integrated SRH services	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
Proportion of women who have experienced sexual violence in last 12 months	4,5	2,9	10,1	25,4	0,2	No data	No data	14	No data	N/A	7	No data	No data	10,1	No data	7

Source: SRHR indicators table adapted from the 2nd SADC Milestone Scorecard 2021.[17]

[17] SADC SRHR SCORECARD 2021_EN_FR_PO Available at: https://public.tableau.com/views/SADCSRHRSCORECARD2021_EN_FR_PO_16360021643560/2021English?:embed=y&:showVizHome=no&:host_url=https%3A%2F%2Fpublic.tableau.com%2F&:embed_code_version=3&:tabs=no&:toolbar=yes&:animate_transition=yes&:display_static_image=no&:display_spinner=no&:display_overlay=yes&:display_count=yes&:language=en-US&:loadOrderID=0 (Accessed: 10 January 2025

Table 1.3: Overview of SRHR Indicators by country 2023

SADC SRHR scorecard	Angola	Botswana	Comoros	DRC	Eswatini	Lesotho	Madagascar	Malawi	Mauritius	Mozambique	Namibia	Seychelles	South Africa	Tanzania	Zambia	Zimbabwe	SADC Median
Minimum legal age of consent to marriage, 18 years for all irrespective	18	21 with exceptions	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	21	18	18	18	21	18	N/A
Percentage of primary schools that provided life skills-based HIV and sexuality education in the previous academic year	No data	91,0	100,0	No data	100,0	99,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	95,5	100,0	100,0	88,1	100,0	100,0	100,0
Adolescent Birth Rate per 1,000 females	57,6	43,7	32,0	109,0	87,0	206,2	111,0	10,1	19,5	180,0	82,0	46,5	38,6	112,0	24,0	108,0	69,8
Proprotion of facilities providing integrated SRH services	98,0	46.1	66,0	No data	100,0	100,0	No data	100,0	100,0	96,6	No data	No data	100,0	N/A	100,0	99,0	100,0
Mother to child transmission of HIV	15,0	1,8	0,0	27,5	1,4	6,0	17,2	1,6	0,0	12,4	4,1	10,0	0,4	2,6	10,0	8,1	5,1
4a. Obstetric and gynaecological admissions due to treatment of abortion	No data	32,6	2,7	No data	28,0	61,0	2,9	3,7	No data	16,0	7,6	77,1	N/A	4,1	14,1	No data	14,1
Density and distribution health workers per 10,000 population	19,3	35,5	4,2	21,3	26,4	No data	1,1	21,9	116,5	1,9	62,1	110,9	35,2	11,0	17,7	11,5	21,3
Neonatal mortality (reduce new born deaths to 12 per 1,000 births in every country by 2030)	24,0	17,5	10,0	27,0	20,0	34,0	26,0	27,0	8,4	30,0	20,0	8,3	10,0	24,0	27,0	32,0	24,0
Proportion of services within the essential package of SRHR services covered by the PHC facility	77,8	45,8	No data	No data	100,0	100,0	No data	63,6	88,9	87,5	No data	44,4	100,0	No data	100,0	No data	88,2
Proportion of females who have received the recommended number of doses of HPV vaccine prior to age 15	N/A	0,5	N/A	No data	No data	72,4	No data	52,3	N/A	94,0	No data	82,7	92,0	64,0	38,0	95,0	72,4
Maternal Mortality Rate per 100,000 deliveries (population)	239,0	243,4	186,4	547,0	452,0	618,0	408,0	439,0	32.8	452,0	385,0	0,0	86,0	556,0	252,0	462,0	396,5
Unmet need for family planning (%)	38,0	No data	0,3	28,7	15,0	18,4	14,7	15,1	12,7	23,0	12,0	No data	11,8	21,0	20,0	8,4	15,1
Percentage of annual budgets allocated to health sector (Abuja Declaration receommends 15%) (based on 2019 baseline)	7,2	18,7	12,0	8,7	11,0	11,4	8,2	10,0	3,2	No data	11,8	5,1	8,1	7,3	8,0	11,0	8,7
Percentage reduction in new HIV infections (from 2010) for 15-24 male and female	45,0	66,0	30,0	58,0	72,0	74,0	-151,0	72,0	42,0	41,0	48,0	-118,0	57,0	68,0	53,0	78,0	55,0
Percentage of condom use with last high-risk sex among people aged 15-24	32,9	74,8	70,0	24,3	71,4	84,4	7,5	64,5	N/A	48,4	74,7	51,3	67,0	No data	42,0	84,1	64,5
Proportion of ever-partnered girls and women (ages 15 and above) subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner, in the last 12 months (based on 2019 baseline)	21,7	26,2	12,0	5,0	4,6	No data	15,5	24,3	1,1	18,8	33,0	0,4	10,3	No data	47,0	39,6	15,5
Existence of laws and policies that allow adolescents to access SRH services without third party authorisation	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	N/A
Legal status of abortion (2 = Abortion on demand; 1 = Restricted abortion; 0 = Abortion illegal)	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	N/A
4b. Percentage of maternal deaths due to abortion	6,9	0,0	6,9	No data	8,0	58,0	0,7	5,3	0,0	14,3	9,6	0,0	6,5	0,7	26,0	3,6	6,5
STI incidence rate - last 12 months	7,2	3,8	0,3	0,0	3,6	3,1	0,8	1,9	0,0	3,7	3,9	0,3	4,6	No data	0,3	1,9	1,9
Proportion of women who have experienced sexual violence in last 12 months	4,5	2,3	10,1	23,0	0,2	No data	12,2	14,0	0,2	6,0	7,0	No data	2,9	10,1	14,0	18,0	8,6

Source: SRHR indicators table adapted from the 2nd SADC Milestone Scorecard 2023.[18]

[18] SADC SRHR SCORECARD 2023 Tableau Public. Available at: https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/sadc.srhr.scorecard2239/viz/SADCSRHRSCORECARD2023/2023English (Accessed: 6 October 2024).

Table 1.3 shows that the scorecard highlights improvements in several key indicators, particularly those with dark green scores by 2023. The scorecard highlights progress and ongoing challenges, emphasising the need for continued monitoring and adaptive approaches to ensure sustained improvements across all indicators. Only a few SADC member states have met some important commitments, such as those in the AU's Abuja and Malabo Declarations[19], through which countries committed to increasing their health budgets to a target of 15% of overall budget. The 2023 SADC Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Strategy Scorecard Report[20] indicates a median of 8.7% of national budgets allocated to the health sector, a drop from 9.5% in 2021.

Table 1.4: Performance of SADC SRHR indicators 2023 by colour code

Indicators	Dark green	Light green	Yellow	Amber	Red	No target set	N/A	No data	% Dark green (2021)	% Dark green (2023)
Minimum legal age of consent to marriage, 18 years for all	15	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	81%	94%
Percentage of primary schools that provided life skills-based HIV and sexuality education in the previous academic year	12	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	71%	75%
Adolescent birth rate, 10-19 years of age	10	3	1	0	2	0	0	0	63%	63%
Proportion of facilities providing integrated SRH services	9	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	0%	56%
Mother-to-child transmission of HIV	8	3	3	0	2	0	0	0	0%	50%
Obstetric& gynaecological admissions due to treatment of abortion	6	2	1	0	0	0	1	6	33%	38%
Density and distribution Health workers per 10000 population	5	4	0	2	4	0	0	1	25%	31%
Neonatal mortality	4	1	1	9	1	0	0	0	13%	25%
Proportion of services within the essential package of SRHR services covered by the PHC facility	4	0	0	1	1	0	0	10	20%	25%
Proportion of females who have received the recommended number of doses of HPV vaccine before age 15	3	1	0	1	3	0	3	5	7%	19%
Maternal mortality	2	2	1	2	9	0	0	0	0%	13%
Unmet need for family planning (contraception)	2	6	1	4	1	0	0	2	0%	13%
Percentage of annual budgets allocated to the health sector	1	2	3	6	3	0	0	1	0%	6%
Percentage reduction in new HIV infections, females 15 - 24	0	12	0	2	2	0	0	0	0%	0%
Percentage of condom use with last high-risk sex among adolescent girls and young women aged 15-24 years of age	0	3	4	3	3	0	1	2	0%	0%
Proportion of ever-partnered girls and women (ages 15 and above) subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner, in the last 12 months	0	4	0	2	6	0	0	4	13%	0%
Existence of laws and policies that allow adolescents to access SRH services without third-party authorisation	0	10	0	0	6	0	0	0	0%	0%
Legal status of abortion	0	1	14	0	1	0	0	0	0%	0%
Percentage of maternal deaths due to abortion	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	1	0%	0%
STI Incidence rate - number of new cases of reported STIs (Syndronic or etiological reporting) over the last 12 months	0	3	0	3	5	0	0	5	0%	0%
Proportion of women who have experienced sexual violence in the last 12 months	0	0	0	1	7	0	0	8	7%	0%

SRHR indicators table computed from the 2nd SADC Milestone Scorecard 2023.[21]

[19] Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods (2014); Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases (2001).
[20] SADC Secretariat (2023). 2023 Milestone Scorecard. Fast-tracking the Strategy for SRHR in the SADC Region. https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/sadc.srhr.scorecard2239/viz/SADCSRHRSCORECARD2023/2023English
[21] SADC SRHR SCORECARD 2023 Tableau Public. Available at: https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/sadc.srhr.scorecard2239/viz/SADCSRHRSCORECARD2023/2023English (Accessed: 6 October 2024).

Table 1.4 provides a detailed analysis of various indicators measured by the SADC 2023 Milestone Scorecard. There has been significant improvement in achievement of several targets over the period from 2021 to 2023. Notably, the dark green scores indicating achievement of the target for the minimum legal age of consent to marriage for all individuals has increased from 81% to 94%, reflecting a 13% improvement.

Another area of substantial improvement is the proportion of facilities providing integrated sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, which has risen from 0% in 2021 to 56% dark green scores in 2023. This increase indicates significant progress towards provision of comprehensive SRH services. Similarly, the number of countries where the rate of mother-to-child transmission of HIV has improved increased from 0% to 50%, highlighting significant strides in reducing HIV transmission rates.

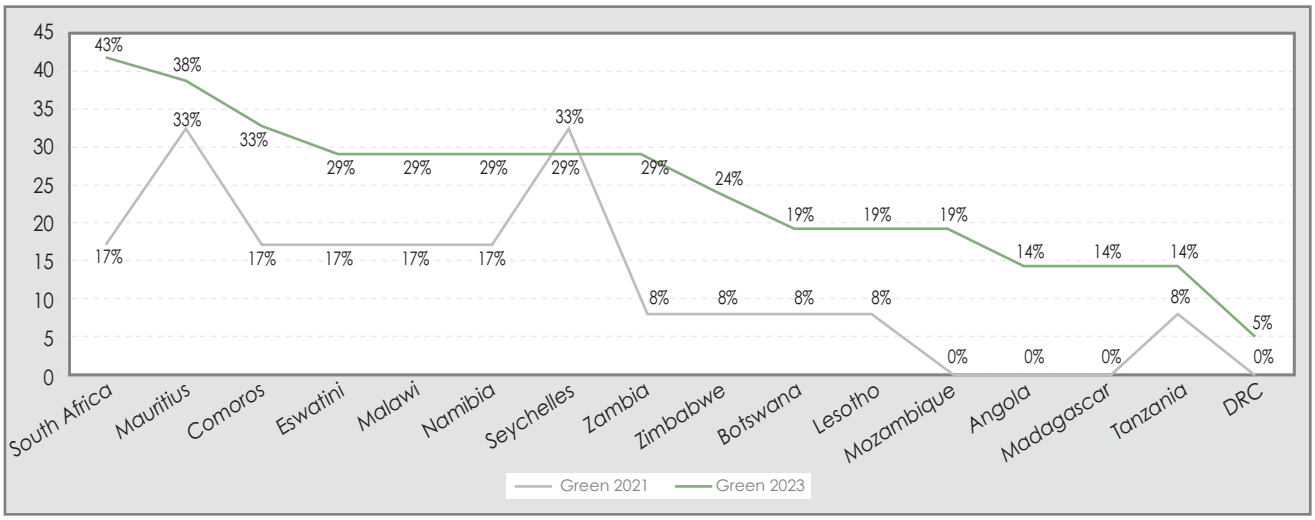
There has also been an increase in dark green scores for Neonatal mortality rates, increasing from 13% to 25% of countries. Additionally, the number of countries which have achieved the target for the recommended number of HPV vaccine doses before age 15 has increased from 7% to 19%, contributing to the prevention of cervical cancer.

However, achievement of some targets has declined. Dark green scores for the proportion of ever-partnered girls and women subjected to physical and/or sexual violence has decreased from 13% to 0%, and the countries which have achieved the target for the proportion of women who have experienced sexual violence in the last 12 months has dropped from 7% to 0%.

There has been no change in the number of countries with dark green scores for several indicators These include: the adolescent birth rate (10-19 years), which remains at 63%, and reduction in new HIV infections among females aged 15-24, which remains at 0% of countries to achieve this target. These stagnations suggest a need for enhanced efforts in adolescent reproductive health education and services to meet the SADC SRHR strategy's goals.

The analysis highlights significant improvements in key indicators, particularly in legal frameworks, service provision, and health outcomes. However, some areas, especially those related to violence and adolescent health, require continued focus and intervention. These findings underscore the importance of sustained efforts and targeted strategies to meet the commitments outlined in the SADC SRHR strategy 2019-2030. Continued monitoring and adaptive strategies will ensure progress across all indicators.

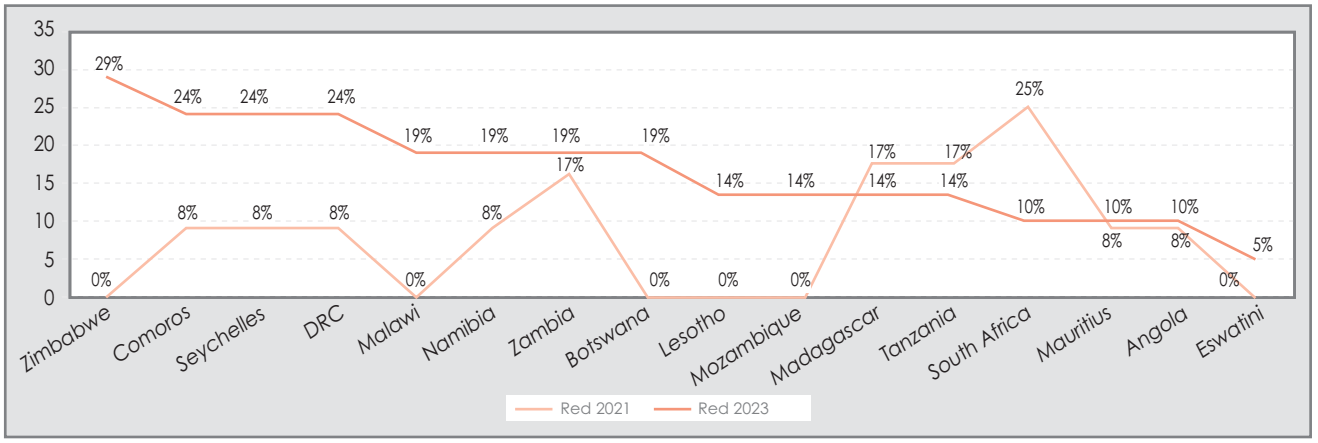
Figure 1.3: Dark green scores by country 2021 and 2023



Source: Gender Links: Computed from the SADC 2021 and 2nd Milestone Scorecard 2023

Figure 1.3 provides a detailed comparison of the Dark Green scores for specific indicators between the SADC 2021 and the 2nd Milestone 2023 Scorecard. It reveals that South Africa experienced the greatest change in the number of dark green scores (indicators for which the SDG target has already been achieved), rising from 17% in 2021 to 43% in 2023. This indicates significant progress. South Africa also had the highest number of dark green scores in 2023. This improvement is likely due to targeted interventions, increased funding, and strong government commitment to SRHR. Mauritius and Comoros have also made significant strides, increasing the number of dark green scores from 33% to 38% and 17% to 33%, respectively. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) had the lowest number of dark green scores in 2023 at 5%, highlighting potential challenges in their SRHR initiatives. Notably, Seychelles was the only country to experience a decrease in numbers of dark green scores, dropping from 33% in 2022 to 29% in 2023. This decline could suggest challenges in maintaining their SRHR programmes, possibly due to policy changes, funding issues, or other socio-political factors. Such a decrease might necessitate a review and reinforcement of their SRHR strategies to ensure continued progress.

Figure 1.4: Red scores by country 2021 and 2023 comparison



Source: Gender Links: Computed from the SADC 2021 and 2nd Milestone Scorecard 2023

The comparative analysis of the 2021 and 2023 Red scores (indicating that even the 2023 target was not achieved by 30% or more) by country shown in Figure 1,4 reveals significant changes in the state of achievement of SRHR targets. Zimbabwe saw the greatest increase in red scores, rising from 0 in 2021 to 29% in 2023. Other countries with notable increases include Comoros, Seychelles, and DRC, each growing from approximately 8 in 2021 to 24% in 2023. Malawi, Namibia, Zambia, Botswana, Lesotho, and Mozambique also experienced increases in red scores, indicating a regression in achievement of SRHR targets. Increases in red scores suggest that these countries face significant challenges in maintaining or improving their SRHR indicators. This could be due to factors such as policy changes, funding cuts, socio-political instability, or other barriers hindering progress. The rise in red scores is a concerning sign and highlights the need for targeted interventions and support to address these challenges and ensure that SRHR efforts are sustained and advanced.

For a more detailed analysis of the country scores, please Table 1.5 below.

Table 1.5: Overview of country SRHR scores by colour code 2021 and 2023

Country	Dark green 2021	Dark Green 2023	Light Green 2021	Light Green 2023	Yellow 2021	Yellow 2023	Amber 2021	Amber 2023	Red 2021	Red 2023	No target set for 2021	No target set for 2023	Not Applicable 2021	Not Applicable 2023	No data 2021	No data 2023
South Africa	17%	43%	0%	19%	0%	5%	0%	10%	25%	10%	25%	5%	0%	5%	0%	5%
Mauritius	33%	38%	8%	10%	8%	5%	8%	0%	8%	10%	25%	5%	0%	10%	8%	24%
Comoros	17%	33%	25%	10%	25%	10%	0%	5%	8%	24%	25%	5%	0%	5%	0%	10%
Eswatini	17%	29%	17%	19%	25%	19%	8%	14%	0%	5%	25%	5%	0%	0%	8%	10%
Malawi	17%	29%	33%	19%	33%	14%	0%	5%	0%	19%	25%	5%	0%	0%	0%	10%
Namibia	17%	29%	17%	10%	17%	10%	17%	14%	8%	19%	25%	5%	0%	0%	0%	14%
Seychelles	33%	29%	0%	5%	8%	5%	8%	10%	8%	24%	25%	5%	0%	0%	17%	24%
Zambia	8%	29%	0%	14%	25%	10%	17%	19%	17%	19%	25%	5%	0%	0%	8%	5%
Zimbabwe	8%	24%	25%	10%	25%	24%	17%	0%	0%	29%	17%	5%	0%	0%	8%	10%
Botswana	8%	19%	17%	19%	8%	14%	25%	10%	0%	19%	25%	5%	0%	0%	17%	14%
Lesotho	8%	19%	17%	19%	33%	5%	17%	14%	0%	14%	25%	5%	0%	0%	0%	24%
Mozambique	0%	19%	17%	19%	33%	10%	17%	14%	0%	14%	17%	5%	8%	0%	8%	19%
Angola	0%	14%	58%	24%	0%	10%	8%	19%	8%	10%	25%	5%	0%	5%	0%	14%
Madagascar	0%	14%	42%	29%	8%	0%	8%	14%	17%	14%	25%	5%	0%	0%	0%	24%
Tanzania	8%	14%	8%	24%	25%	5%	17%	14%	17%	14%	25%	5%	0%	5%	0%	19%
DRC	0%	5%	33%	29%	25%	5%	8%	10%	8%	24%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	29%

SRHR indicators table computed from the 2nd SADC Milestone Scorecard 2023

Table 1.5 provides a detailed analysis of the comparative performance of SADC countries based on the provided indicators. Mauritius and Seychelles are among the best-performing countries. Mauritius has consistently performed well, with an increase in dark green scores from 33% in 2021 to 38% in 2023 and a slight increase in light green scores from 8% to 10%. The country's strong healthcare system, effective policy implementation, and high government commitment to SRHR issues contribute to its success. Despite a slight decrease in dark green scores from 33% to 29%, Seychelles remains one of the best-performing countries due to its sound public health services, which provide free health care for all citizens and, in particular, comprehensive SRHR services, including pregnancy testing, contraception, and antenatal care.[22] On the other hand, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Angola are among the poorer-performing countries. DRC has shown a slight increase in dark green scores from 0% in 2021 to 5% in 2023, a decrease in light green scores from 33% to 29%, and an increase in red scores from 8% to 24%. The country faces significant challenges, including political instability, limited healthcare infrastructure, and high levels of poverty, which hinder progress in achieving SRHR targets. Angola's performance is similarly lower, with an increase in dark green scores from 0% to 14%, a decrease in light green scores from 58% to 24%, and an increase in red scores from 8% to 10%.

South Africa and Comoros have shown the most improvement. South Africa has made remarkable progress, with an increase in dark green scores from 17% in 2021 to 43% in 2023, an increase in light green scores from 0% to 19%, and a decrease in red scores from 25% to 10%. This improvement is likely due to targeted interventions, increased funding, and strong govern-

[22] https://www.heard.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Seychelles-country-fact-sheet.pdf

ment commitment to SRHR issues. Comoros has also made significant strides, increasing dark green scores from 17% to 33%. However, the increased red scores for Comoros from 8% to 24% indicate areas requiring attention and improvement.

During the launch of the SADC 2nd Milestone Scorecard, the SADC Deputy Executive Secretary for Regional Integration, Angele Makombo N'tumba, applauded Member States for their commitment to devising strategies and approaches to address maternal and neonatal mortality and promote a multi-sectoral approach to addressing the scourge of gender-based violence. She emphasised the need to ensure that every woman and every adolescent girl and young woman has access to contraceptives so that they can reach their full potential.[23]

She said "the strategy and scorecard are driven by the SADC Vision 2030, which aims for a region in which all people can have a healthy sexual and reproductive life, have sustainable access, coverage and quality SRHR services, information and education, and are fully able to realise and exercise their SRH rights, as an integral component of sustainable human development in the SADC Region."[24]

Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020 to 2030

The RISDP is SADC's key strategic framework that outlines the body's objectives and priorities for promoting regional development and integration. It is a comprehensive 10-year development agenda for addressing social, economic, political, and governance issues in the region with 24 strategic objectives and 48 key outcomes.



Its three core pillars are:

- Industrial Development and Market Integration.
- Infrastructure Development in Support of Regional Integration.
- Social and Human Capital Development, anchored in a firm Peace, Security, and Good Governance foundation.

Gender is cross-cutting, and Strategic Objective 1 in this section is enhanced gender equality, women's empowerment and development, and elimination of gender-based violence.

The SADC RISDP 2020-2030 goals reflect those of international and regional commitments, particularly the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063.[25]

SADC is approaching the halfway mark of its 10-year regional strategy, the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020 to 2030. This presents an opportunity for SADC and its member states to evaluate the strategy's implementation to determine if it is progressing towards its objectives.

The **Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance** is a "network of networks" that campaigned for adopting the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which was updated in 2016 to align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Attesting to the vital role of civil society in campaigning for gender justice in the region,

[23] SADC Launches 2nd Milestone Scorecard on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights to accelerate the attainment of sexual and reproductive health and rights for the people of the SADC Region | SADC (no date). Available at: https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/sadc-launches-2nd-milestone-scorecard-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights (Accessed: 13 October 2024).
[24] Ibid
[25] Southern African Development Community (SADC) Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-2030, Gaborone, Botswana, 2020.

the SADC Gender Protocol is the only one of the 26 SADC Protocols that has been updated. It is the only Protocol with a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Results Framework.

The Alliance launched the 2024 Africa Women's Political Participation Barometer in the wings of the 44th SADC Heads of State Summit in August in Harare, Zimbabwe. The Alliance members engaged with SADC and member states on various issues, including mechanisms for non-state actors (NSA) to engage with member states.

A Regional Dialogue for Non-State Actors (NSAs)

The Gender Protocol Alliance, represented by Gender Links in the group of regional civil society organisations comprising the Partnership for Social Accountability (PSA) Alliance, has co-convened regional dialogues to track and discuss the RISDP 2020-2030 implementation. The first virtual event in June 2021 raised awareness about the RISDP 2020-2030 and allowed NSAs to exchange ideas and formulate recommendations. In 2022 and 2023, a growing number of co-conveners held hybrid (in-person and virtual) events to highlight the importance of socially accountable public resource generation and management in SADC's development, contributing to increased NSA consultation by SADC structures in participating countries, the approval of the SADC Regional NSA Engagement Mechanism, and development of a SADC PF Scorecard to assess alignment of legislation with the PFM Model Law.

In 2024, the PSA Alliance convened the RISDP NSA Dialogue from 14 to 15 August, just ahead of the SADC Heads of State and Government Summit (17-18 August) in Harare, Zimbabwe. The event interrogated the RISDP 2020-2030 performance four years into its implementation. It provided insights and recommendations on how and where SADC and its member states can increase investment in human and social development and generate and ensure the sound use of financial resources. Additionally, the co-conveners took stock of the achievements of the RISDP NSA Dialogues, reflected on current efforts to engage civil society in SADC processes, and developed action plans to guide future national and regional activities.

> Accountable public resource management is critical to ensuring consistent support for research and development in all industries, including the social sectors

The dialogue brought together over 200 participants from 10 of SADC's 16 Member States, both in person and virtually, including diverse representation from civil society organisations, smallholder farmers' associations, trade unions, youth organisations, faith-based organisations, media outlets, SADC Secretariat representatives, SADC Parliamentary Forum members, and government officials. The theme of the Dialogue mirrored that of the 44th SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government, *Promoting innovation to unlock opportunities for sustained economic growth and development towards an industrialised SADC*, highlighting the need to generate and nurture innovative approaches to advance sustainable growth in the region. Accountable public resource management is critical to ensuring consistent support for research and development in all industries, including the social sectors. Accessible, inclusive, and high-quality education, healthcare, and agricultural services support the creation and growth of livelihoods and entrepreneurial activities among the people of the SADC region, reducing poverty and uplifting communities and nations.

Gender Links, coordinator of the Gender Protocol Alliance, represented the Alliance at the dialogue, highlighting the importance of accountability and reporting for impact, focusing on feminist principles of monitoring, evaluation and accountability.

Accountability and reporting for impact, with a focus on feminist principles

i. Emphasis is placed on transparency, including raising awareness of instruments and budget tracking with a gender-based analysis.
ii. Participants called for inclusivity in monitoring and evaluation processes involving communities and women's rights organisations.
iii. There was a recommendation for empowerment through campaigning and capacity building on the roles of elected leaders.
iv. A proposal was made for intersectional reporting approaches to collect better decision-making data.
v. There was an emphasis on responsiveness to the specific needs of women in different country contexts.
vi. A call was made for communities' legal empowerment and training law enforcement agencies to be gender-sensitive.

SADC has developed several frameworks, including the SRHR scorecard, which measures progress toward achieving the targets laid out in them. However, accountability and reporting for impact needs to move beyond numbers. These feminist principles apply to SRHR in particular because of the 'controversial' nature of these rights, where measuring change is illustrated in changing power dynamics, agency and control of women's bodies. Reporting for impact must be grounded in women's lived experience, demonstrating how women and LGBTQI+ people's lives have changed.

Safe Abortion Alliance of Southern Africa (SAASA)

Safe Abortion Alliance of Southern Africa
SAASA
#VoiceandChoice
an affiliate of the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance

Lack of access to safe abortion continues to be one of the driving factors of maternal mortality in the SADC region. The region is guided by the Maputo Protocol (Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa) adopted by the African Union in 2003. It is the first treaty anywhere in the world to recognise abortion, under certain conditions, as a reproductive right of women.

Laws on abortion in SADC range from being legal on demand, as in South Africa and Mozambique, to complete criminalisation in Madagascar. Advocating for access to legal and safe abortion is, therefore, a priority in the SADC region.

Voice and Choice Fund members initiated the Safe Abortion Alliance of Southern Africa (SAASA)[26] at the Learning and Sharing Summit in November 2023. They met again in Harare in August 2024, where they drafted an action plan for the coming year and agreed to broaden their membership to all 16 countries in SADC and in Johannesburg in November 2024 where they developed a strategy for the alliance.

[26] https://vcsafund.org/saasa/

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16 Days march in Eswatini. Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini