



GENDER DAY AT THE CSF 2025

#PushForward4Equality

20 August 2025, Antananarivo, Madagascar

Synopsis

This concept note outlines how Gender Links and its partners will participate in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) 2025 Heads of State and Government (HOS) Summit, scheduled to take place in Antananarivo, Madagascar, from August 18 to 22.

2025 is significant for several reasons. It is the 30th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action served as the global blueprint for achieving gender equality, guiding many countries toward more equitable and just societies. It is also just five years to the deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Sustainable Development Goals 2024 Report paints a bleak picture, with the latest data showing that progress has either stopped or regressed across various areas despite renewed commitments.

2025 is also witnessing poly-crises across the globe, escalating war and conflict, rising nationalisms, shrinking democratic space, economic and climate crises, which are rolling back decades of progress for women's rights. The re-election of Donald Trump has already had far-reaching consequences for the Global South. The closure of USAID is being felt particularly for SRHR and HIV/AIDS programmes, which have been defunded almost entirely.

Overall, the intersection of these crises creates a multifaceted landscape where women's and LGBTQI rights work is challenged through both overt and subtle resistance, as well as reduced funding for this essential work. It also presents opportunities for advocacy and mobilisation. Collaboration across sectors and borders is critical to responding effectively to these complex challenges.

Gender Links believes that this moment necessitates a critical reflection by women's and feminist movements on the lessons learned from the last twenty years of organising and lobbying for the implementation of the Gender Protocol. In line with the CSF theme '*Revitalising the SADC We Want*', Gender Links will utilise the HOS to revitalise and galvanise the SADC Gender Protocol Alliance, thereby strengthening regional advocacy and fostering movement-building synergies.

Background and context

The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) is a Regional Economic Community (REC), an intergovernmental organisation that promotes economic development, peace, security, and cooperation among member states in Southern Africa. Every year in August, the Heads of State and Government, SADC's highest decision-making body, meet annually to discuss and decide on key regional issues. The 2025 Summit is the 45th Ordinary Heads of State and Government Summit and will take place in Antananarivo, Madagascar.

In parallel, the **Civil Society Forum (CSF)**, convened annually, under the aegis of the Southern African Regional Apex Alliance, an influential coalition comprising the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa (FOCCISA), the Southern Africa Trade Unions Coordinating Council (SATUCC), and the Southern African Council of Non-Governmental Organizations (SAf-CNGO, formerly the SADC-CNGO), alongside allied sectoral organizations. The CSF is a space for SADC actors to reflect on, engage with, and influence the regional agenda for integration, development, and governance. This year, the forum's theme is *Revitalising the SADC We Want*.

Over the last 25 years, [Gender Links \(GL\)](#) has been at the forefront of advancing gender justice in Southern Africa, pioneering evidence-based advocacy, feminist movement-building, and public accountability. A cornerstone of this work is the [Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance](#), a dynamic coalition of national and regional women's rights networks which GL coordinates across the 16 Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states. The Alliance has been instrumental in shaping regional gender policy, including the adoption in 2008 of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, the only subregional instrument in the world that brings together global and continental commitments to gender equality and sets concrete targets for their achievement. In this project, GL and the Alliance will leverage their comparative advantage in tracking over 100 indicators on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Women's Political Participation (WPP) as well as climate justice in the [Southern Africa Gender Barometer](#).

The 2024 SRHR Barometer, which will be launched at the CSF, reveals that, although progress has been made across the region, many countries are still far from achieving the goals outlined in the SADC Gender Protocol and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also shows that progress is uneven in countries across the region.

The Barometer underscores 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, teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

These findings show that the women's movement in SADC must redouble its efforts to protect the hard-won rights of women and resist regressive forces attempting to restrict their fundamental human rights. Gender Links and Alliance partners will use the opportunity of the SADC HOS to strategise and recommit to vigorous advocacy, monitoring and holding our governments accountable for the commitments they have made.

Partners

SADC Gender Protocol Alliance is a coalition of civil society groups across all 16 SADC states, a regional "network of networks" that has been instrumental in advocating for policy reforms aligned with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. Their efforts have led to tangible legal advancements in gender equality, including the enactment of domestic violence laws and the establishment of quotas for women's political representation in multiple

countries. Since 2009 the Alliance has been actively engaged in policy reform and monitoring progress in achieving the targets through research and advocacy.

Women of the South Speak Out is a five-year project funded by the **Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)**. Through fellowships, WOSSO's backbone of nearly 200 fellows, aged 18 to 35, from diverse countries, regions, and backgrounds, offers unique world views and amplifies the voices of women and girls from the Global South. Through the **#PushForward4Equality**, WOSSO Fellows will raise awareness and document the experiences and stories of resistance strategies and collaboration that drive progressive change.

African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) is funding GL to enhance its advocacy initiatives across Southern Africa through the **#PushForward4Equality** campaign, which aligns with the global movement for gender equality. This project is designed to strengthen regional advocacy, enhance digital and foster movement-building synergies.

The **Marang Fund** (Marang means "rays of light" in Setswana) is a new **EU-funded** initiative to strengthen LBTIQ organisations and their work in Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Namibia, with advocacy initiatives stretching across Southern Africa. Through **small grants, capacity building, and storytelling**, the Fund supports bold advocacy, safe spaces, and legal reforms that advance equality and justice.

The United Nations' electoral assistance project, implemented by the **UNDP** through the Renforcement des processus électoral et démocratique à Madagascar (RPEDEM), supports efforts to strengthen Madagascar's electoral ecosystem by working with national institutions, civil society, and local actors involved in the country's democratic processes. Guided by a commitment to national ownership and localisation, RPEDEM applies a multidimensional and adaptive approach that spans the entire electoral cycle. The project aims to foster trust among stakeholders, expand the inclusive participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities, and strengthen democratic governance. It contributes to the advancement of key Sustainable Development Goals, including gender equality (SDG 5), partnerships for the goals (SDG 17), and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).

Ipas Francophone Africa works globally to advance reproductive justice by expanding access to legal abortion and contraception. In collaboration with national, international and community-based partners, Ipas's Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa regional program is working with eight Francophone nations—Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo—to overcome political and cultural barriers and significantly expand programs providing safe abortion. Ipas also works with diverse partners to train and educate legal professionals, youth activists and leaders in sexual and reproductive health and rights to build a network of committed champions for safe, legal abortion.

Southern African Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (SAf-CNGO), formerly the Southern African Development Community of Non-Governmental Organisations (SADC-CNGO), is a regional umbrella body of national associations of NGOs operating in all the 16 Member States of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). Under the aegis of the Southern African Regional Apex Alliance, an influential coalition comprising the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa (FOCCISA), the Southern Africa Trade Unions Coordinating Council (SATUCC), and the Southern African Council of Non-Governmental Organizations SAf-CNGO, alongside allied sectoral organizations, the Civil Society Forum (CSF) is organised annually to promote discourse, solutions, and capacity building for civil society in the SADC region.

Objectives

1. Create a platform for open dialogue between women's rights organisations, civil society, state actors, and other stakeholders to share perspectives, challenges, and solutions related to gender equality and women's empowerment.
2. Strengthen partnerships and build relationships to support the implementation of regional and national gender strategies, in particular the RISDP.
3. Review and assess progress toward implementing the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
4. Identify current and emerging challenges that hinder the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment in the region.
5. Identify key gender gaps and priority intervention areas for regional action, ensuring alignment with existing frameworks and strategies.

Participation

- Alliance members
- WOSSO Fellows
- Marang Fund grantees
- National and regional WROs
- National and regional CSOs
- Faith-based and community-based organisations
- Development partners and donor agencies
- Media organisations
- SADC institutions and political leadership

Outputs

1. At least five policy and campaign priorities identified.
2. A platform for storytelling, knowledge-sharing, joint strategising, and collective action.
3. Strategy for the Alliances' engagement on the RISDP.

Intended Outcomes

1. A **stronger, more unified feminist movement** across the region. Alliance membership expands the participation of youth, LGBTQI individuals, rural women, informal workers, and sex workers, ensuring the Alliance reflects the diversity of the movement.
2. Marginalised voices are amplified through the **#PushForward4Equality** campaign, which tackles barriers to equality and challenges gendered disinformation through targeted advocacy and movement-building, spotlighting survivor stories and countering backlash and online harassment through partnerships with feminist influencers and media.
3. **Enhanced policy reform** through demanding stronger implementation of the SADC Gender Protocol at high-level forums, to push for concrete commitments on women's political quotas, GBV laws, and economic rights. Grassroots mobilisation will pressure governments to adopt policies like paid parental leave and access to credit for women entrepreneurs.
4. A **permanent platform for storytelling and knowledge-sharing**, joint strategising, and collective action, significantly enhancing the effectiveness of women's rights organisations in holding governments accountable.