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## (CHAIRPERSON'S NOTE



**THE NAMIBIAN GOVERNMENT IS PULLING ALL STRINGS IN PREPARATIONS FOR THE 38TH SADC HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT SUMMIT WHICH IS SCHEDULED FOR AUGUST THIS YEAR. WE HAVE BEEN INFORMED THAT THE TOTAL EXPENDITURE OF THE SUMMIT WILL COST NAMIBIANS CLOSE TO N\$50 MILLION.**

Of interest is the summit theme:

“Promoting Infrastructure Development and Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development”. This is a relevant theme as SADC boasts with a vibrant youth dividend and it goes without saying that infrastructure development is important for the socio-economic growth of SADC member states. During the last three years, the themes were: “Accelerating Industrialisation of SADC Economies (Botswana Summit)”, “Transformation of Natural Endowment and Improved Human Capital” (eSwatini Summit), and “Partnering with the Private Sector in Developing Industry and Regional Value Chains” (South Africa). All three themes focused on industrialisation. It can be noted that SADC is building a momentum towards industrialisation as this year’s theme is in line with that of previous years.

I browsed through the Labour Force Survey of a few SADC member states and paid attention to the labour force participation by sex and age. I also skimmed at employment by industry. I found the labour force participation of women and youth still lags behind significantly. In almost all the member states men continue to dominate in the labour force. If one looks at employment by industry, career selection in all SADC states is unequally distributed between men and women. Demonstrative is that men still predominantly work in mining and quarrying, manufacturing, and transportation while women are mostly employed in education, health and social work as well as the hotel and retail industries. These sectors are also characterised by a wage gap. The sectors that recruit men tend to offer better wages compared to sectors that recruit females. The only employment sector where the number of men and women is almost equal is the agriculture sector.

As SADC states are forging ahead towards industrialisation, caution needs to be taken not to perpetuate gender inequality. SADC issued two protocols, namely the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and the SADC Protocol on Employment and Labour, compelling member states to be cognisant of gender issues in their development agendas. The integration of gender should be seen as a systematic progress that must be engaged on from the onset of any developmental agenda and should not be treated as an add-on. Hence, our appeal to SADC heads of state and government ministers is to ensure that the promotion of gender equality is central to every SADC developmental agenda.

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