



The 8th Southern Africa Youth Forum Declaration Republic of South Africa (2026)



PREAMBLE

We, the youth delegates, youth-led, youth focused organizations, and stakeholders from across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region and beyond, gathered at the 8th Southern Africa Youth Forum (SAYoF), held from 21-23 July 2026 at the Birchwood Hotel, Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa, under the theme: “Nourishing Futures: Enhancing Food Security and Water Resilience through Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Action for Youth Empowerment”.

- 1.0. Recognizing** the participation of more than 1000 delegates attending in person and joining virtually, reflecting the growing commitment of young people and partners to shaping a resilient, inclusive, and prosperous Southern Africa;
- 1.1. Recognising further** that agriculture and agrifood systems remain an important source of employment for young people in the SADC region, yet many continue to face barriers in accessing land, finance, markets, technology, quality inputs, productive resources, skills, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. That Southern Africa continues to face interconnected challenges, including food insecurity, climate change, water scarcity, unemployment, inequalities in access to opportunities, and barriers to meaningful youth participation in governance and economic development;
- 1.2. Acknowledging** the leadership of the Southern Africa Youth Forum (SAYoF) and the support and contributions of national, regional and international partners, including the African Union Commission (AUC)- Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, AUDA-NEPAD, SADC Secretariat, SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), New Economy Hub, AGRA, AMREF Health Africa, Y-ACT, Equality Now, SADC Business Council, International IDEA, Pan African Youth Union, Afro-Arab Youth Council (AAYC), Action Aid Zambia, Be Relevant Africa, Africa Livestock Academy, Urban Farmer, Dutch Agriculture Youth Association, Afro-Centric Locale, Southern and East African Forum for NGOs (SEFONGOs), Open Space ZW, Institute for Legislative and Policy Studies (ILPS), youth, farmers' organisations, development partners, research institutions, academia, civil society organisations, and the private sector in promoting youth inclusion in agriculture and agrifood systems, and other partner institutions that enriched the dialogue and outcomes of the Forum;
- 1.3. Guided by** the aspirations of continental and regional frameworks that advance youth development, food security, economic transformation, climate resilience, and sustainable livelihoods; among them the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Kampala Declaration, the African Agribusiness Youth Strategy (AAYS), Agenda 2063, the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP 2020–2030), the SADC Regional Agricultural Investment Strategy and Plan (RASIP), the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Africa Youth Charter, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

- 1.4. **Taking note** that climate change, environmental degradation, water scarcity, food insecurity, and limited investment continue to threaten sustainable agricultural production and youth employment opportunities across the region;
- 1.5. **Welcoming** the establishment of the Youth in Agrifood Systems Desk within the SADC Secretariat as an important milestone towards institutionalising youth participation in regional agricultural development;
- 1.6. **Re-accounting** our commitment to regional integration, inclusive economic growth, gender equality, environmental sustainability, innovation, social justice, and meaningful youth participation in policy development, implementation, monitoring, and accountability at national, regional, continental, and global levels;
- 1.7. **Assuring** that young people are not merely beneficiaries of development but are critical partners, innovators, producers, entrepreneurs, leaders, employers, strategic partners, and agents of change whose participation is essential in shaping sustainable solutions for food systems transformation, climate action, democratic governance, trade integration, health promotion, and inclusive economic growth; and further affirming that young people, will move a needle of change through strategic partnerships for an impactful change within the region in the spirit of Ubuntu “I am because you are” and realising the power of negotiation in youth development.
- 1.8. **Recalling** the rich deliberations, high-level presentations, panel discussions, masterclasses, ignite talks, innovation sessions, policy dialogues, and intergenerational exchanges on youth participation and influence, sustainable agriculture, regional trade opportunities under the Tripartite Simplified Trade Regime, green transitions and the green economy, digital rights and technology governance, alternative livelihoods, democratic participation, and regional policy influence; and youth engagements on agribusiness development, climate-smart agriculture, digital agriculture, regional agricultural trade, the Southern Africa Poultry Initiative (SAPI), youth entrepreneurship, agricultural financing, food systems transformation, and regional policy implementation; and further recalling the presence of Her Excellency Boemo Sekgoma the Secretary General of SADC Parliamentary Forum as the Guest of Honour and the support by the SADC Secretariat, African Union Commission, UNECA, AUDA-NEPAD and strategic partners whose participation is essential to achieving food security, economic transformation, climate resilience, regional integration, and sustainable development;
- 1.9. **Affirming** our commitment to regional integration, solidarity, innovation, inclusion, gender equality, social justice, environmental sustainability, and the meaningful and sustainable engagement of youth in decision-making processes at local, national, regional, continental, and global levels;
- 1.10. **Acknowledging** the role of the African Union Gender, Women and Youth Directorate in spearheading youth empowerment, sustainable growth, inclusion, and innovation, and in providing strategic support to the Southern African Youth, we reaffirm our commitment to translate these priorities into action through youth-led agrifood systems transformation. The support

continues to strengthen partnerships, build capability, and unlock opportunities for young women and men across Southern Africa.

- 1.11. **Encouraged** by the African Union Commission on “**Million Next Level**” and the aspirations of the **African Union Youth Charter**, Southern Africa’s young people commit to advancing the youth agenda in agrifood systems. They will seek to achieve inclusive participation, decent employment, innovation, and shared prosperity. Further encouraged by “Nothing for Youth Without Youth,” the region will translate policy to prosperity through bold investments and accountable institutions.
- 1.12. **Appreciating** the role played by the SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF) in institutionalising past Forum recommendations, particularly its mentorship to the Southern Africa Youth Parliament, the Memorandum of Understanding with SAYoF, the adoption of the Youth Caucus within SADC-PF, and the participation of youth across the region in Standing Committees and with a strengthened voice in the Plenary Assembly, we reaffirm our commitment to deepen youth parliamentary engagement and ensure young people remain active partners in shaping agrifood systems policy and accountability.
- 1.13. **Celebrating** the milestones achieved through the recommendations of past forums and programs designed to include and empower youth in Southern Africa.
- 1.14. **Further celebrating** the inaugural **Southern Africa Youth Awards**, honouring champions in youth development and mentorship.

Hereby adopt this 8th Southern Africa Youth Forum Declaration and commit ourselves to advancing the recommendations and actions contained herein for the benefit of present and future generations;

We therefore on:

2. YOUTH IN AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION:

- 2.0. **Commit** to promoting the meaningful participation of young women and men in agrifood Systems policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and accountability processes at national, regional, and continental levels;
- 2.1. **Call upon** Member States, development partners, financial institutions, and the private sector to increase investment in youth-led agribusinesses through dedicated financing facilities, blended finance mechanisms, guarantee schemes, venture capital, and other innovative financing instruments that improve access to affordable capital;
- 2.2. **Urge** governments and relevant stakeholders to improve equitable access for young people to land, water, irrigation, mechanisation, quality seed, inputs, digital technologies, extension services, and other productive resources necessary for competitive and sustainable agribusinesses; including **establishing and operationalising** Youth in Agrifood Systems Desks within Ministries responsible for Agriculture in all SADC Member States to strengthen youth coordination, policy engagement, and programme implementation;

- 2.3. **Commit** to strengthening entrepreneurship, technical and vocational education, digital literacy, research, innovation, mentorship, incubation, and climate-smart agriculture to prepare young people for the future of agrifood systems;
- 2.4. **Encourage** Member States and regional institutions to promote youth participation across strategic regional value chains, including poultry, livestock, horticulture, fisheries, aquaculture, seed systems, agro-processing, agricultural logistics, and agricultural services, as drivers of employment creation and industrialisation;
- 2.5. **Support** the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices that promote climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, renewable energy, water security, and environmentally sustainable food systems; and **accelerate investment** in digital agriculture, climate-smart technologies, artificial intelligence, precision agriculture, and youth-led agritech enterprises to improve productivity and resilience;
- 2.6. **Call upon** Member States to strengthen youth participation in regional and continental agricultural trade by reducing trade barriers, improving market access, harmonising standards, and expanding opportunities under the SADC Trade Protocol, the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA);
- 2.7. **Recommend** the integration of youth-responsive indicators into the implementation and monitoring of the CAADP Kampala Declaration, National Agrifood Systems Investment Plans (NASIPs), and the CAADP Biennial Review process to strengthen accountability and evidence-based decision-making;
- 2.8. **Promote** stronger partnerships among governments, youth organisations, research institutions, universities, farmers' organisations, development partners, financial institutions, and the private sector to accelerate youth-led agrifood systems transformation and increase **public and private investment** in youth-led agribusinesses through dedicated financing windows, concessional lending facilities, blended finance, guarantee schemes, and youth-focused investment funds;
- 2.9. **Support** the establishment of a SADC Regional Youth in Agrifood Systems Platform, a Regional Youth Agrifood Innovation Hub, a Regional Youth Agribusiness Digital Portal, a Regional Youth Agribusiness Investment Platform, and a SADC Youth Agrifood Systems Scorecard to strengthen coordination, innovation, investment, knowledge sharing, and accountability;
- 2.10. We commit to working in partnership with governments, regional institutions, parliaments, development partners, the private sector, academia, farmers' organisations, and communities to build resilient, inclusive, competitive, and sustainable agrifood systems that create decent jobs, strengthen food and nutrition security, advance climate resilience, and promote shared prosperity across Southern Africa and commit ourselves to becoming innovators, entrepreneurs, employers, and responsible custodians of Southern Africa's agrifood systems, contributing to food security, decent employment, regional economic integration, and shared prosperity.

3. Tripartite Simplified Trade Regime (TSTR)

- 3.0. Call upon** Member States, Regional Economic Communities, parliaments, development partners, youth organizations, and trade support institutions to undertake sustained capacity building, sensitization, and awareness-raising initiatives on the Tripartite Simplified Trade Regime (TSTR), particularly targeting youth, women, informal cross-border traders, and border communities to enhance understanding and utilization of the opportunities available under the regime;
- 3.1. Further call upon** governments, Regional Economic Communities, the Tripartite Task Force (TTF), and development partners to support the establishment, operationalization, and sustainability of Trade Information Desk Officers (TIDOs) through adequate financial, technical, institutional, and logistical support to improve access to trade information and facilitate compliance with trade procedures;
- 3.2. Urge** Member States and relevant stakeholders to facilitate the establishment, strengthening, and capacity building of Cross-Border Trader Associations (CBTAs), ensuring the meaningful participation and leadership of youth and women;
- 3.3. Welcome and adopt** the Draft TSTR Youth Engagement Mechanism developed during the Policy Dialogue Forum for Women and Youth in Trade held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 20-21 May 2026, as a framework for structured, inclusive, and sustainable youth participation in the implementation, monitoring, and governance of the Tripartite Simplified Trade Regime, and calls upon the Tripartite Secretariat, COMESA, EAC, SADC, and Member States to support its operationalization;
- 3.4. Commend** youth-led innovation in advancing regional integration and cross-border trade, including the development of electronic platforms, which seek to bring together stakeholders across African markets through digital solutions that facilitate trade, market access, and business linkages;
- 3.5. Commit** to continue embracing, promoting, and utilizing opportunities presented by the Tripartite Simplified Trade Regime through entrepreneurship, innovation, digital trade solutions, participation in regional value chains, and youth-led initiatives that contribute to inclusive trade, sustainable livelihoods, and regional economic integration.

4. Fertilizer Sovereignty and Food Security.

- 4.0. Urge** Member States to prioritize fertilizer sovereignty by reducing dependence on gas-based global input chains (e.g., urea/ammonia) to protect African farmers from price shocks and availability disruptions linked to geopolitics (such as Gulf supply volatility).
- 4.1. Call upon** SADC Member States to shift national and regional agricultural policy from a fertilizer-centered approach to a soil-health-led strategy, and domesticate the Africa Fertilizer and Soil Health Action Plan to align funding,

extension services, and procurement with soil fertility resilience rather than input volatility.

- 4.2. **Build** Resilient Intra-African Fertilizer Markets via AfCFTA: Use AfCFTA to accelerate localized, intra-African fertilizer procurement and distribution systems, strengthening regional affordability and insulating internal markets from external volatility.
- 4.3. **Recommend** Member States to scale soil-health interventions, measures and best agricultural practices to reduce dependency on inorganic fertilisers and vulnerability. **Further** recommend Member States to promote nature-based, lower-carbon fertiliser production models (including locally suitable blends and nutrient-recovery approaches) to expand access and improve long-term sustainability.
- 4.4. **Deploy** Heat-Ready Farming Systems for Southern Africa: Implement region-specific heat-stress adaptation programs using localized projections and seasonal guidance, enabling farmers to adjust crop management before losses occur.
- 4.5. **Strengthen** Water Resilience in Heat Impacts: Increase investment in water security for agriculture (water harvesting, efficiency, drought-resistant practices) to reduce the combined stress of extreme heat and reduced water availability on yields.
- 4.6. **Protect** Agricultural Labour Through Heat-Safety Protocols: Adopt labour protections for agricultural workers: revised work schedules, protective clothing, health protocols, and enforcement mechanisms, especially for women and youth farm labourers and small-scale subsistence farmers.
- 4.7. **Integrate** Smart Technologies and Early Warning Systems: Scale smart agricultural technologies and early warning systems to anticipate heat stress and manage risk for both crops and labour, improving timely decision-making.
- 4.8. **Transition** from Fossil Fuels: Prioritize a rapid transition from fossil fuels (“move out from petro”) to renewable energy systems to enable rural enterprise, safeguard food and water systems, and strengthen ecological resilience, because no energy means no economy, and no ecology means no economy.

5. Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment (TIFI).

5.0 Acknowledging the milestone by Member Parliaments to institutionalise youth participation by ensuring that at least one youth representative addresses every Plenary Assembly on issues affecting young people in the SADC region.

5.1 SADC PF and Member Parliaments should continue to promote youth-responsive economic policies that address barriers to finance for youth-led SMEs, including blended finance mechanisms and de-risking instruments tailored to young entrepreneurs.

5.2 SADC institutions and Member States should harmonise trade and investment standards to build resilient regional value chains that support

both food security and responsible mineral development, ensuring that corridors serve food and agricultural inputs as much as mineral exports.

5.3 Member States should adopt legal frameworks that protect farmland and water resources to ensure meaningful consultation of mining-affected communities and integrate tools for community-driven accountability such as environmental and social grievance platforms.

5.4 Parliaments should prioritise domestication and implementation of SADC and AfCFTA trade, industry, finance and movement protocols, ensuring that laws and regulations explicitly include youth and women's participation pathways.

5.5 Committees should apply a practical test for domestication: whether it reduces barriers to business registration, improves market access, and expands procurement opportunities for young people and SMEs.

6. Digital Rights, TFGBV, and Feminist AI Governance

6.0. Digital technologies are reshaping every dimension of youth life in the SADC region: education, livelihoods, civic participation, and climate action. Yet an unregulated digital ecosystem continues to expose young people, particularly young women and girls, to technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), discriminatory AI systems, and exclusion from the institutions that govern digital life. Guided by AUDRI's Digital Principles, the Gender Principles of the Global Digital Compact, the SADC Model Law on Gender-Based Violence, the Maputo Protocol, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 8th SAYoF Youth Declaration calls on Member States and relevant stakeholders to commit to the following actions:

6.1. End Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: Domesticate and fully implement the SADC Model Law on Gender-Based Violence, with explicit, enforceable provisions covering online sexual harassment, non-consensual image sharing, deepfake abuse, and technology-facilitated trafficking. Resource specialised, survivor-centred reporting, protection, and redress pathways, including cross-border cooperation to address TFGBV cases.

6.2. Advance AI and Algorithmic Accountability: Adopt binding standards, not voluntary codes, requiring gender-responsive impact assessments and transparency of training data and algorithms before AI systems are deployed. Establish enforceable redress mechanisms for algorithmic bias and discrimination, with particular attention to women, girls, and other marginalised groups in the Global Majority.

6.3. Guarantee Youth Participation in Digital Governance: Secure institutionalised meaningful, resourced participation of young people and youth-led feminist organisations in national, SADC, AU, and UN digital governance and AI policy processes. Recognise youth knowledge, leadership and partnership in shaping the laws and institutions that govern digital life, rather than merely as users or beneficiaries of digital technology.

6.4. Uphold Fundamental Digital Rights: Protect freedom of expression, privacy, peaceful assembly, data protection, and informed consent online, applying an equality-by-design approach across all phases of digital technology development. Close the digital divide through affordable, accessible, and safe

internet access for all youth, with particular attention to rural communities and persons with disabilities.

- 6.5.** As youth delegates, we commit to carrying this Declaration across national, SADC, AU, and UN advocacy spaces, while holding our countries and institutions accountable for translating these commitments into meaningful, lasting protection for all.

7. Rural Entrepreneurship, Agriculture, Food Value System, Youth Leadership, and Innovation for Development of Marginalised Youth.

- 7.0.** Drawing inspiration from Terry Maphosa of Kwa Terry and the “The Big Two,” among others; the ethos of practical entrepreneurship plus locally rooted innovation, these recommendations aim to develop marginalised youth through rural entrepreneurship, agriculture, food value systems, and innovation. The focus is on turning rural livelihoods into scalable business pathways, not short-term projects.
- 7.1. Launch** “Youth-to-Value” Rural Enterprise Incubators
Create rural incubators that train youth to start businesses across the food value chain (input supply, aggregation, processing, transport, retail, catering). Require market-based milestones and business mentoring, not only workshops.
- 7.2. Guarantee** First-Mover Starter Packs for Entrepreneurial Agriculture
Provide targeted starter assets (seed/fertiliser budgets, simple equipment, irrigation options, storage materials, weighing/measuring tools) tied to performance and sales outcomes, with transparent community targeting.
- 7.3. Support** Youth-Led Aggregation and Market Access
Fund youth aggregation models so young entrepreneurs can sell higher volumes and negotiate better prices.
- 7.4. Build** Practical Skills for Food Safety and Compliance
Offer certification pathways and on-the-job coaching in food safety, grading, standardization, packaging, labelling basics, and basic quality assurance, so youth can access formal buyers and avoid rejection of produce.
- 7.5. Create** Rural Innovation Challenges with Real Customer Contracts
Run innovation sprints where youth teams solve specific value-chain problems (post-harvest loss reduction, low-cost packaging, affordable irrigation, pest monitoring, feed formulation).
- 7.6. Develop** Local Agri-Processing Micro-Enterprises
Promote small-scale processing opportunities suited to rural contexts: drying, milling, sorting, grading services, and value additions.
- 7.7. Establish** or strengthen Youth-Focused Finance and Risk-Sharing Mechanisms. Partner with MFIs, banks, and cooperatives to provide youth-friendly credit with low collateral alternatives, crop and business risk-sharing tools, repayment schedules aligned to harvest cycles, transparent credit histories, and coaching.
- 7.8. Strengthen** Digital Market Platforms for Marginalised Youth
Enable youth traders and producers to access prices, buyers, and logistics via offline, low-data tools and community kiosks. Provide training in using platforms for orders, payments, and delivery tracking.
- 7.9. Strengthen** youth-led representation in agricultural decision-making and support representative, youth-led agricultural structures that enable young farmers to jointly formulate their priorities and participate structurally in policy

discussions at national and regional levels. (i.e. Young Farmers Labs, Clubs, Hubs, Networks and Councils), thus investing in the organisational and leadership capacity of Agri-youth structures.

- 7.10. **Provide** young agricultural leaders and organisations with practical support in governance, leadership, advocacy, membership development and financial sustainability.
- 7.11. **Build** on existing organisations through practical partnerships: map and connect existing youth, farmer, education and private-sector structures, and test cooperation through regional pilots, mentorship and joint activities before creating new structures.

8. Financing Youth Agribusiness

- 8.0. **Create** youth-friendly agricultural financing mechanisms, including seasonal repayment structures and collateral-light lending products that align with farm cash flows. Also develop regional poultry lending and insurance mechanisms to manage risks related to feed, disease outbreaks, mortality, and input price volatility, so youth can invest with greater confidence and stability.
- 8.1. **Mentorship** and producer-led talent development: Incentivize commercial producers to mentor young farmers through structured out-grower or co-production models. Support mentorship with clear responsibilities and performance indicators (such as survival rates, production quality, and market linkages) so knowledge transfer translates into measurable enterprise outcomes.
- 8.2. **Digital** compliance tools for youth market access: Support the development and scaling of AFRI Trade Exchange and similar compliance apps to reduce barriers that youth face when entering markets. Prioritize simplified guidance for documentation, standards, grading, and packaging, using low-data or offline-friendly options where necessary.
- 8.3. **Alternative** livelihoods beyond tobacco: Invest in non-tobacco enterprises for youth with guaranteed markets and input support. Pair financing with reliable offtake arrangements (contracts or procurement commitments) and starter inputs (seed, feed, equipment, and extension), so youth can shift into profitable and resilient livelihoods.
- 8.4. **Youth** participation across the policy cycle: Institutionalize youth participation throughout the full policy cycle- design, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation- so youth voices are reflected in decisions that affect agriculture, trade, and employment outcomes.
- 8.5. **Stronger** data to guide youth-inclusive agriculture: Strengthen data collection on youth involvement in trade and agriculture by improving youth-disaggregated indicators and monitoring systems. This should capture barriers to entry, enterprise performance, market access, and employment results to guide better targeting and policy improvements.
- 8.6. **International exchange** and learning for Agri youth: Promote international exchange through initiatives such as “Agri Youth Without Borders,” enabling youth entrepreneurs and innovators to learn from regional and global best practices. Use structured exchange models that include mentorship pairing, exposure to market systems, and return-to-home implementation plans to scale what works.

- 8.7. **Institutionalise** meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes at all levels, ensuring youth have real influence in agenda-setting, policy design, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring.
- 8.8. **Increase** financing and investment for youth-led organisations, enterprises, and innovations through youth-specific funding windows, concessional credit, grants, and blended finance mechanisms that reduce risk for first-time entrepreneurs.
- 8.9. **Protect** civic space and create enabling environments for youth engagement by safeguarding participation rights, reducing barriers to organising, and improving access to information, platforms, and local decision forums.
- 8.10. **Invest** in climate-resilient agriculture, agroecology, and food sovereignty, supporting youth to access climate-smart inputs, soil health solutions, water-efficient systems, and locally controlled value chains.
- 8.11. **Ensure** extractive industries operate responsibly through meaningful community consultation, strong environmental accountability, and equitable benefit-sharing that translates resource wealth into long-term community development.
- 8.12. **Support** youth-led research and evidence generation by funding youth research fellowships, community data initiatives, and pilot projects that produce actionable evidence for inclusive and responsive policymaking.

9. Green Economies

- 9.0. **Southern African Youth** should be empowered to unlock opportunities from green transitions to address youth unemployment and enable the region to harness its demographic dividend.
- 9.1. **Governments** should promote access of Southern African youth to green technology and innovation, green finance and green markets to promote participation of Southern African Youth in the transition towards green economies.
- 9.2. **Southern African Youth entrepreneurs** should be provided with incentives and targeted support to promote their participation in and contribution to green economies, with special attention to constraints faced by young women, young persons with disabilities, and rural-based youth.