

2025

SADC Lawyers' Association

President's Annual Report



SADC LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION
304 Brooks Street, Menlo Park,
Pretoria,
South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0) 12 366 8800

Fax: +27 (0) 12 362 0969

Email address: info@sadcla.org

Visit: <https://sadcla.org/>

1. Introduction



This report covers the period from 1 30 June 2024 to 20 February 2024. The last SADC Lawyers' Association (SADCLA) President's report to be presented to the Annual General Meeting (AGM) covered the period between 30 June 2023 to 30 July 2024 and was presented at the 23rd AGM of the Association, held in Livingstone, Zambia on 31 July 2024. The current report highlights the major activities and progress made on specific strategic and programmatic areas of operation of the SADC-LA. The organization's constitution and resolutions of the Association's various structures are also highlighted. The report will highlight key areas of strategic overhaul and adaptation made by your leadership to ensure the continued positive trajectory of implementation of the organization.

In 2023 to 2024 the operations of the Association have taken a strategic turn to focus on implementation of the incoming 2025-2029 Strategic Plan. The process of drafting a new strategic plan provided a platform for rejuvenation and adaptation of SADCLA to cope in a rapidly changing geo-political landscape. However, the strategic plan is yet to be Given a paradigm shift in the environmental dynamics of the region, it will be necessary to review the strategic plan and do a mid-term evaluation to adapt as appropriate.

The structure of this report therefore follows the main program areas of the organization as articulated in the strategic plan. These are:

- Democracy and Governance
- Human Rights and Rule of Law
- Organizational Development
- Membership Engagement & Capacity Development
- Advocacy & Communication
- Council & Exco Meeting Attendance

As always, the Association's various structures played an important role in ensuring the implementation of organizational activities during the period under review. These included the Executive Committee, the Council, the Council Committees, institutional and individual members as well as the Secretariat and law societies. We also recognize the role of partners to SADC-LA for development in the region. It is hoped that they will continue to play their role to ensure the success of the Association in the coming year.

2 Identity, Structures and Stakeholders

2.1. SADC LA Identity

The SADC LA, is voluntary association comprising law societies, bar associations, and individual lawyers from the 16-member Southern African region. It is the sole organisation uniting lawyers from the Sub Region. As such, it serves as an authoritative and representative voice of the collective legal profession in Southern Africa.

The SADC Legal Association (SADC LA) was formed in 1999 in Maputo, Mozambique, by SADC regional lawyers. Since then, it has been involved in various activities at both regional and international levels to strengthen, defend, and advance the rule of law in the SADC region and beyond. The SADC LA aims to ensure an independent and competent legal profession in Southern Africa, which is crucial for an independent judiciary.

The SADC LA is the vehicle through which the legal profession from the SADC region collectively promotes justice, defends human rights, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary and generally gives direction and control to the legal profession. The mission of the Association is To Protect and Promote the Rule of Law, Without Fear and Favor

2.2. SADC LA Structures

The Law Societies/Associations, Bar Associations, and other SADC LA

affairs through the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the SADC Lawyers' Association. This meeting exercises general political and strategic control, electing office bearers, making honorary appointments, approving annual accounts, and deciding on the next AGM's time and venue.

The SADC LA Council consists of two members from each institutional member. The Executive Committee, which is the board governing the Association's affairs between AGMs, reports to the AGM.

The Executive Committee comprises the President, Vice President, Treasurer, and two additional members elected by the AGM. It supervises the SADC-LA Secretariat, headed by the Executive Secretary.

The Secretariat implements SADC-LA programs as directed by the Executive Committee. It also establishes committees to address critical issues. For instance, during the year, the Executive Committee appointed a Climate change and sustainability committee to promote the legal profession's role in combating climate change.

The secretariat currently has a staff complement of two, Dr Landilani Banda (acting Executive Secretary) and Mr Shepherd Rantho (Financial Officer).

At the beginning of 2025, SADC-LA had a staff complement of three, namely

Mr Stanley Nyamanhindi (Chief Executive Officer), Shepherd Rantho (Financial Officer) and Bright Gunde (Project Officer). In March 2025, Mr Bright Gunde left the Association to pursue other career goals. In April 2025, Mr Nyamanhindi also left the Association to pursue a career in the private sector. Mr Nyamanhindi, however, is always on hand to provide advice to the secretariat, especially with respect to the application of grants. Following his departure, Exco appointed Dr Landilani Banda from Zambia to act as Executive Secretary of the Association pending the appointment of a substantive CEO. Dr Banda continues to act in this capacity.

institutions such as East African Law Society (EALS), West Africa Bar Association (WABA), Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), American Bar Association (ABA), International Bar Association (IBA), International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), the Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU), the Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC), SADC Parliamentary Forum, Electoral Commissions Forum SADC (ECF-SADC), Arbitration Foundation of Southern African (AFSA), UNAIDS, UNOHCHR and the SADC Council of NGOs (SADC-CNGO).

- **Cooperating Partners:** Donors or

2.3. SADC LA Stakeholders

As with previous years the following stakeholders continue to be critical to the mandate of SADC LA:

- **Institutional members:** stated in the constitution as any national law society or bar association in existence in any country within the region. Institutional membership in practice however also includes any eligible law based organisation, association or law firm.
- **Individual members:** are members of national lawyers or bar associations within SADC and are eligible to practice law (admitted to practice or called to the bar) within the SADC region.
- **Strategic Partners:** generally seen as like-minded domestic, regional and international institutions whose mandate is to promote and protect the rule of law, human rights and the administration of justice. These would include

In the year under review the Association sought to consolidate its relationship with various civil society organisations and sub regional law societies. As such in November 2025, SADC-LA collaborated with the East African Law Society and the International Commission of Jurists through submitting a joint funding proposal aimed at enhancing the defence of human rights in East and Southern Africa.

fundors of programs.

- Judicial and Quasi-Judicial Institutions/Organs in the SADC and African Union (AU). These include domestic courts and sub-regional and regional courts and tribunals
- Relevant governmental and intergovernmental bodies concerned with human rights, the administration of justice and the rule of law.

3. Mandate, Values and Principles

3.1. Mandate

The core business of SADC-LA is ensuring that governments in the SADC region protect the rights of their citizens and respect the rule of law and independence of the judiciary in all situations, including situations where judgments are given against them. The SADC-LA is mandated by its members as a professional body of lawyers to protect and promote the rule of law throughout the SADC region and promote human rights, including the rights of people with disabilities, women, children, accused persons, prisoners and/ or other detainees, and the rights of people living in communities in which there are some extractive industries.

- Promoting the respect for human rights, especially the rights of women, people with disabilities and children.
- Development of respective legal systems to ensure the proper administration of justice and generally to work towards the harmonization of SADC countries' respective legal systems and to advance the interests of the members.

3.2. Values & Principles

In executing its duties, SADC-LA is guided by the following values and principles articulated in its founding preamble, as follows:

- Mutual interaction with the Bar Associations, Law Societies and their respective members within the Region.
- Upholding and maintaining respect for the Rule of Law and fundamental liberties.

4 . Aims and Objectives

SADCLA is constitutionally mandated to fulfil the following objectives:

- Maintain and promote the Rule of Law throughout the SADC Region and to promote human rights, including the rights of people with disabilities, women and children;
- Work with, support and complement the work of the Pan African Lawyers Union, The Commonwealth Lawyers' Association, the International Bar Association and other international organizations with similar objectives;
- Ensure that the people of the Region are served by an independent and efficient legal profession;
- Ensure that a common bond of co-operation within the Region is preserved and fostered by strengthening of professional links between members of the legal profession and to enhance their interests;
- Promote the honor, integrity of the profession and uniformity in standards of professional ethics;
- Encourage the improvement of standards of legal education and the promotion of exchange of legal expertise and institute exchange programs for lawyers and students;
- Encourage the harmonization of the legal system of the Region;
- Facilitate and increase the flow of professional information between Law Societies and Bar Associations of the Region on developments relevant to the organization and servicing of the practicing legal profession.
- Hold regular Regional Law Conferences, open to all branches of the legal profession throughout the Region, and promote as wide an attendance thereat as is practicable;
- Respond as appropriate to ad hoc requests for information and assistance received from Law Societies and Bar Associations within the Region;
- Provide support for Law Societies, Bar Associations and other appropriate organizations and legal professional associations concerned with matters of common interest;
- Generally, to do all that is necessary to further the interests of the legal profession and civic society advancing human rights and rule of law throughout the Region with a view to improving the legal services available to and provided for the public, and that there is equal access to justice for all;
- To facilitate conflict resolution amongst countries, organizations and individuals within the Region by way of arbitration and alternative dispute resolution.

5. Activity Report

5.1 Grant/project funding applications

With the organisations finances being in a critical state, one of the major activities undertaken by the organisation was to apply for funding through project grants. As such in the period under review, SADC-LA applied for three project grants as follows.

5.1.1. GIZ project on enhancing access to justice in South Africa

The application process was started by Mr Nyamahindi before he left the Association, and was continued by Dr Banda in his acting capacity. This project seeks to enhance access to justice in Southern Africa through the establishment of a regional pro bono and public interest law network, technical support to the reconstitution of the SADC Tribunal, and strengthening of judicial independence. SADC-LA, leveraging its institutional membership of all bar associations across the SADC region, will implement a multi-faceted intervention combining legal empowerment, regional advocacy, and institutional reform. The initiative will run for 12-18 months with a total budget of USD 212,000. The application was successful. On Thursday, 16 October 2025,

Secretariat, together with the Treasurer of the Associations, Tania Canguia, attended the online orientation meeting for the project. The disbursement for the project was expected in the first week of December, and it is anticipated that it will be made before the close of 2024.

5.1.2. NORAD grant on supporting human rights defenders

In November 2025, SADC-LA, in collaboration with the African Judges and Jurists Forum (AJJF), East African Law Society (EALS), and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), applied for the project grant on supporting human rights defenders in East and Southern Africa. The grant is for a period of four years (2026-2029). The partnership applied for NOK 30,000,000 to implement a comprehensive regional programme spanning at least nine African countries: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Eswatini, Zambia, Ghana, and Nigeria, with continental engagement at the African Commission and the United Nations human rights mechanisms. The outcome is yet to be announced.

5.1.3. African Collaborative Team grant application

On 18 September, the Southern African Development Community - Legal Assistance (SADC-LA) submitted an application for funding amounting to R2,000,000. This application was

made in response to the African Collaborative Team Grants call, which is designed to support African-led organisations. The African Collaborative is a funding initiative that focuses on empowering organisations that are led by Africans, providing them with the necessary financial resources to accomplish their goals and objectives. As of now, the decision regarding the outcome of SADC-LA's application has not been announced, leaving the organisation awaiting the results to determine whether they will receive the funding to further their mission.

5.2. Collaborations

5.2.1. SADC Parliamentary forum

During the period under review, the Secretariat actively engaged in a series of meetings to strengthen and maintain its collaboration with other regional organisations. In October, the Secretariat convened a meeting with the SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF). The primary objective of this meeting was to explore opportunities for collaboration in preparation for the establishment of the SADC Parliament. During the discussions, it was resolved that in 2026, both SADC-LA and SADC-PF will jointly host a comprehensive series of webinars. These webinars are intended to raise awareness and educate law societies across the region about the SADC PF model laws and the process involved in establishing the SADC Parliament. The initiative aims to ensure that law societies are well-informed and prepared for the upcoming changes, thereby facilitating a smoother

transition and integration into the new parliamentary framework.

5.2.2. ProBono.Org

Between June and December 2025, the Secretariat held a series of meetings with *ProBono.org* towards the actualisation of the MoU signed by the two organisations. The meetings explored opportunities for joint project funding and the preparation of the PILnet Global Forum for pro bono services.

The PILnet Global Forum brings together lawyers, in-house counsel, and bar associations with representatives of civil society and academia from around the world to engage in discussions about how to best use pro bono and public interest lawyering to support civil society and protect access to justice. Through interactive sessions, engaging social events, and structured networking opportunities, attendees have an opportunity to forge alliances to help deliver justice.

The last meeting was held on 12 December 2025, where it was agreed that SADC-LA, PILnet, together with ProBono.Org, will co-host the global pro bono forum in Cape in November 2026. SADC-LA will be the steering committee co-chairholder. There are no financial obligations on the Association as the Forum is externally funded through ProBono.org partners.

5.2.3. United Nations Women

On 17 November 2025, the Secretariat held a meeting with UN Women to

explore the possible collaboration in a project being conceptualised by Women on the role of lawyers in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The proposed collaboration falls within the theme of UN-Women to 'Ensure and strengthen access to justice for all women and girls by addressing discriminatory laws, structural barriers, financing gaps, and the need for inclusive, equitable systems'.

In the coming months it is anticipated that a series of meetings will be held to follow on the discussion held in the period under review as UN Women finalizes the projects conceptualisation and implementation plan.

5.2.4. Arbitration Foundation of South Africa

Following the launch of the AFSA SADC LA alliance in 2024, I am happy to inform that SADC LA has continued to strengthen the partnership with planning of the joint hosting of the Johannesburg arbitration week underway. The event will take place between 5th to 7th May 2025 in Sandton. The AFSA ALLIANCE is a Southern Africa based network of like-minded institutions committed to the development of a shared arbitration framework and advancement of the practice of international arbitration in SADC. Its members are active national, regional and international organizations and individuals, which work together on the transformation of the way in which dispute resolution is

administered. It stems from an agreement signed between the SADC-LA and AFSA in 2019 followed by a resolution of the network of SADC Bar Associations and AFSA under the AFSA.

SADC Division in 2021 to establish a Southern African Alliance with a roadmap for the establishment and operationalisation of a regional seat for international commercial arbitration in SADC. The President of the LPC also took the occasion to host a high level luncheon for visiting dignitaries, government leaders and Bar Leaders from the SADC Region. She emphasised the need for close collaboration in the SADC region and for the legal profession to unite in providing leadership to the SADC region in the fight for market share in the Africa Continental Free Trade Area.

The objectives of this ALLIANCE are to facilitate collaboration by the Parties as follows:

- To become a leading network of institutions committed to excellence in providing fair and reliable systems to resolve disputes privately, to build panels of mediators, conciliators, and arbitrators and to train and develop arbitrators and mediators in Southern Africa and beyond.
- To become a regional and international leader in provision of fast, transparent, and affordable services in international arbitration.
- To transform the way in which the domestic, regional, and

international business sector handles and processes disputes in Southern Africa.

- To foster domestication and ratification of international standards in arbitration by Southern African countries so that they will meet the stringent criteria which justify their status as recognized seats or venues for the resolution of disputes.
- To promote review and reform of domestic arbitration law for, harmonization, alignment, and consistency with international standards
- Co-hosting of seminars, conferences, and events to promote international commercial arbitration and alternative dispute resolution as well as dissemination of related information to mutual partners.
- Compilation of an easily accessible database of arbitration laws, institutions, and resources in Southern Africa.
- Collaboration in promoting the participation of young lawyers and female lawyers in professional arbitration.

The ambition of the partners is encapsulated in the vision of the Alliance, namely to create a standardized and harmonized framework for administered arbitration to be available and operative throughout the SADC region, and thus constitute Southern Africa as a destination of choice for parties seeking services in international commercial arbitration.

As part of its mission, the Alliance seeks to promote and facilitate cooperation in the field of international commercial arbitration in furtherance of the Alliance vision; In particular

- At an international level by providing a welcoming seat or venue and thereby promoting international trade, business, and investment through dealing quickly and fairly with commercial disputes;
- At a regional level by providing a shared dispute resolution mechanism for intra-regional trade and commerce;
- at a local level by providing an expedited and cost-effective means for the settlement of business disputes and thereby facilitating access to justice, and thus create a firm foundation for each SADC Member State and Alliance member to develop and expand its own identity as an arbitral seat internationally, regionally, and domestically.

The international arbitration community present gave some very positive feedback and has challenged SADC not to drop the ball against such an auspicious launch and immense progress. While there is still a long way to realize the goal, the critical steps have been taken, the partnerships at hand have what it takes to deliver. I therefore call upon all our Bar Leaders to unite and work hand in glove towards the realization of the first ever regional seat for international commercial arbitration. This will no doubt benefit our economies and grow the business

potential and skills of individual
lawyers and law firms.



S A D C
LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION

304 Brooks Street, Menlo Park, Pretoria, South Africa, Telephone: +27 (0) 12 366 8800 Fax: +27 (0) 12 362 0969
Email address: infor@sadcla.org

The Executive Director
The Arbitration Foundation of Southern Africa
First Floor, Grindrod Tower, 8A Protea Place, Sand
P O Box 653007

Dear Sir,

Partnership with the Arbitration Foundation of Southern Africa

This letter serves to confirm that the Southern African Development Cooperation Lawyers Association (SADC-LA) is in partnership with the Arbitration Foundation of Southern Africa (AFSA) with the principled mission to establish a shared regional framework for international commercial arbitration in the SADC. Pursuant to this mission, SADC-LA is partnering with AFSA towards hosting the Johannesburg Arbitration week from 5 to 7 May 2026 at the Sandton Convention Center (SCC) in South Africa, Johannesburg.

In order to fulfil the objectives of our cooperation, the AFSA SADC Alliance has been established and is the platform upon which the arbitration week will rotate amongst SADC member states. Through this partnership, the signatories to the AFSA SADC Charter seek to standardize the conduct of administered arbitration in Southern Africa, and facilitate the convergence of various stakeholders in the private and public sector in Southern Africa as a region and the African continent. Training, law reform, capacity building at institutional level and administration of competent panels remain mission critical objectives.

We look forward to engaging on the key details of the partnership in regard to JAW and defining the role of members of the AFSA SAC Alliance through the agency of SADC's Bar leaders as apex constituents of SADCLA.

Yours Sincerely

Dr Landilani Banda
Chief Executive Officer



6. CONSOLIDATING THE LEGAL PROFESSIONS STRATEGY TO PROMOTE LIBERALISATION OF TRADE IN LEGAL SERVICES

As stated in my previous report of 2024, SADC LA at its AGM in 2019, the SADC-LA interrogated the case for liberalization of trade in legal services across the region. This is in line with the stated objectives of the SADC-LA in its constitution which among other key objectives include;

- Encourage the harmonization of the legal systems of the Region and lawyer mobility within the region;
- Facilitate and increase the flow of professional information between Law Societies and Bar Associations of the Region on developments relevant to the organisation and servicing of the legal profession.
- Provide support for members, Law Societies, Bar Associations, individual lawyers and other appropriate organisations and legal professional associations concerned with matters of common interest: and,
- Generally, to do all that is necessary to further the interests of the legal profession throughout the Region with a view to improving access to aordable

legal services available to and provided for the public;

The resolution was also in response to the prioritization of regional economic integration by the SADC Summit of Heads of States and Government.

In my previous report, I indicated that the drafting of the standard MRA was underway and that SADC LA will be required to take a leading role once the drafts are complete.

I am happy to report that SADC committee on Liberalisation of Trade and Regional Integration, finalised a draft Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) in 2025 in English, French and Portuguese. Article 4 of the draft MRA states the following as its objectives:

(a) facilitate the mobility of Lawyers and their services to support the implementation of

commitments made by State Parties for the liberalisation of legal services under the Protocol;

(b) establish the conditions for mutual recognition of Lawyer's qualifications, and promote

continuous legal education for Lawyers in State Parties;

(c) facilitate the exchange of information amongst Competent authorities with a view to

promoting adoption of best practices in legal education, qualifications, practice and

ethics amongst State Parties;

(d) encourage harmonisation of the regulatory framework and standardisation of legal

services provision in State Parties;

(e) encourage law students and law graduates to move from one State Party to another for

mentorship, capacity building, and exchange programme internship; and

(f) facilitate the exchange of information, technologies and ideas to promote the adoption

SADC has recently requested our secretariat to circulate the draft to member Associations for input. In the weeks to come secretariate will organise a webinar for all member organisations to discuss the draft. I call upon all members to provide input to the draft is circulated.

7. SADCLA Meetings

I confirm that your Executive Committee met bi-monthly to review the implementation of the Associations strategic plan by Secretariat and provide guidance in all the activities, operations and projects

reported herein. The meeting were successful and led to the resolution of several challenges of the organisation. In order to plan the years activities your executive adopted the following meeting calendar for 2026:

2026 Exco and Council meeting calendar

Date	Nature of Meeting
20 February 2026	AGM
26 March 2026	Ordinary Exco meeting
30 April 2026	Ordinary Exco meeting
28 May 2026	Ordinary Exco meeting
25 June 2026	Full Council meeting
30 July 2026	Ordinary Exco meeting
27 August 2026	Ordinary Exco meeting
24 September 2026	Full Council meeting
29 October 2026	Ordinary Exco meeting
26 November 2026	Ordinary Exco meeting
10 December 2026	Full Council meeting
17 December 2026	Ordinary Exco meeting

8 Conclusion

I express my gratitude to all bar associations for their unwavering dedication to the Association's mission.

The leaders of bars are increasingly becoming integral to the Association's operations and programming. This collaboration has bridged the gap between us, resulting in unified efforts with greater clarity and impact. Let's continue on this positive trajectory.

The legal profession, encompassing private practice, the judiciary, prosecution and more, is called upon to demonstrate leadership professionalism and independence. In times of injustice, the legal profession's conduct can help resolve intractable conflicts. Therefore, let's remain committed to upholding the rule of law and promoting and protecting human rights without fear or favour.

