

# SADC PF MPs in Germany for lessons sharing

By Moses Magadza



A child that never leaves its mother's kitchen is in grave danger of growing up thinking that its mother is the best cook in the world, so goes an African saying. SADC Parliamentary Forum Members of Parliament were in Germany this week to participate in a fact-finding tour on parliamentary democracy as part of the Guest Programme of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Visitor Programme enables people from different walks of life to visit Germany to share lessons and experiences with their German counterparts on various issues. It seeks to promote international cooperation and strengthen relations between Germany and other countries.

SADC PF Secretary General Ms. Boemo Sekgoma led the SADC PF delegation which included chairpersons of five Standing Committees of the Forum on the visit, which began on the 10th of March 2024 and ended on the 15th of March 2024.

In an interview, Ms. Sekgoma said a courtesy call she made to the German Ambassador to Botswana in 2022 inspired the visit. She recalled that after discussing various issues related to the work of the Forum and its aspirations that include transforming into a SADC Parliament and improving women's representation, the Ambassador told her

about the Guest Programme and she applied. The SG said a lot of thought went into justifying the visit to Germany and in selecting MPs that would add value after the visit. *“The idea was to profile SADC PF and how we think when we transform into a SADC Parliament, we can contribute to the regional integration agenda of SADC. Secondly, I wanted MPs to clearly locate themselves as leaders of our Standing Committees and to be able to take advantage of the lessons from this trip to advance the visions of their Committees,”* Ms. Sekgoma reasoned.

While in Germany, the MPs met cabinet ministers and discussed various issues including cooperation, political and development trends in the SADC region, the Peace Project or the EU Parliament and how European states came together to deal with the aftermath of the Second World War through integration, self-reliance and interconnectivity. Expectations are that having appreciated the values that inspired European integration – issues of democracy and good governance, peace, stability, security, regional solidarity, human rights including gender equity – the SADC PF MPs can better support regional integration in SADC.

There were discussions during the visit around agriculture and industrialisation as well as the EU Parliament architecture to enable MPs to consider approaches that are appropriate for their environment. The SG stressed that there was no attempt to copy and paste from the EU but to appreciate how the EU got to where it is. She said: *“At SADC PF we learn through sharing experiences and knowledge. Issues that we deal with that include gender representation and parliamentary democracy are not peculiar to Africa. They affect other parts of the world.”*

SADC PF works on several themes and projects, including those that seek to consolidate democracy in the SADC region, promote human rights and the empowerment of women. Ms. Sekgoma said with this in mind, it was felt that if chairpersons of the Forum’s Standing Committees participated in the Guest Programme, they would appreciate what was obtaining elsewhere and use those insights in the work of their committees. *“The idea was to glean areas of common interest from the European Parliament that could be discussed with MPs in Germany,”* she reasoned. She said this engagement enabled the SADC PF to share its strategy in developing model laws and compare it with the law-making process in Germany.

In recent years the SADC PF has developed and adopted regional soft laws that some SADC member states have used when developing or reforming their laws. They include the Model Law on HIV and AIDS; the Model Law on Ending Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage; Model Law on Gender Based Violence; and

Model Law on Public Finance Management. *“Our MPs were able to talk about these pioneering instruments and to talk about how they had consolidated the accountability mechanisms at national level where they leverage on the principle of separation of powers and apply checks and balances,”* she said.

Additionally, according to the SG, the MPs were able to appreciate the work of the European Parliaments vis-à-vis the projects being implemented by SADC PF and issues that their Standing Committees deal with. *“This was a learning process aimed at helping us to improve on our own processes for oversight and accountability as well as how MPs can advance democracy and human rights while deepening and broadening participatory democracy which puts citizens and their active involvement at the center,”* Ms. Sekgoma stated.

A letter written prior to the visit to Ms. Sekgoma by Ms. Katja Keul, Minister of State and a Member of the German Bundestag, perhaps best captures the excitement and expectations on the German side. *“With your transnational work, you and the SADC Parliamentary Forum are sparking ideas for cooperation between and democratisation of the countries in your region. In the course of your trip, you will have the opportunity to discuss the advantages of regional integration, also using the example of the European Union as an illustration,”* Ms. Keul wrote.

While in Germany, the SADC PF MPs had discussions at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Bundesrat and with representatives of foundations, associations and think tanks, thus forging important contacts. They met, also, with members of the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union and the Parliamentary Friendship Group for Relations with the Southern African States at the Bundestag. They interacted with parliamentary representatives, representatives of the Land government and various non-governmental organisations in Germany.

The MPs and their hosts exchanged views on many other issues including Parliamentary democracy. In this connection the importance of the active participation of MPs and the citizens in forging a common identity that prevents, inter alia, the economic exclusion of women was stressed.

In addition to Ms. Sekgoma, the SADC PF delegation included: Mr. Sheuneni Kurasha, Programme Manager of the SADC Parliamentary Forum; Honourable Dithapelo Lefoko Keorapetse, MP and Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment, from Botswana; Honourable Ishmael Ndaila Onani, MP and Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources,

from Malawi; Honourable Regina Lucia Esparon, MP and Chairperson of the Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus, from Seychelles. The others were, Honourable Huguette Kelly Samynadin, MP and Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Human and Social Development, from Seychelles; Honourable Tendai Nyabani, MP and Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Democratisation, Governance and Human Rights, from Zimbabwe; and Honourable Shally Josepha Raymond, MP and Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Gender Equality, Women Advancement and Youth Development, from United Republic of Tanzania.

The SADC PF is working towards transforming into a SADC Parliament while southern Africa is seeking regional integration. Expectations are that this visit will enable the participating MPs to support these processes more perceptively.