GA4: Environmental Committee

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Issue: Managing the impact of natural disasters in Southern Africa

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I. Introduction

Natural disasters are some of the greatest long-standing threats to human security, economic existence, and sustainable development. Natural disasters are not new and it cannot be said that the occurrence of disasters is new, but the frequency and severity of natural disasters have been increasing over the last two to three decades, primarily as a result of climate change, degradation of the environment, and urbanization but no area is resistant to disasters. Southern Africa, as a land of drought, cyclones, floods and outbreaks of diseases, is one of the most disaster-prone places on Earth. Millions in this area depend on rain-fed agriculture in very poor-led economies that do not have the infrastructure to support them when there is an extreme weather disaster.

Presenting the climatic backdrop and geographical position of Southern Africa, the area becomes susceptible to major events of extreme climatology. Idai hit the region in March 2019; in the three affected countries, Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe, the economic loss was put at over USD 2 billion, while more than 400,000 people had been displaced.

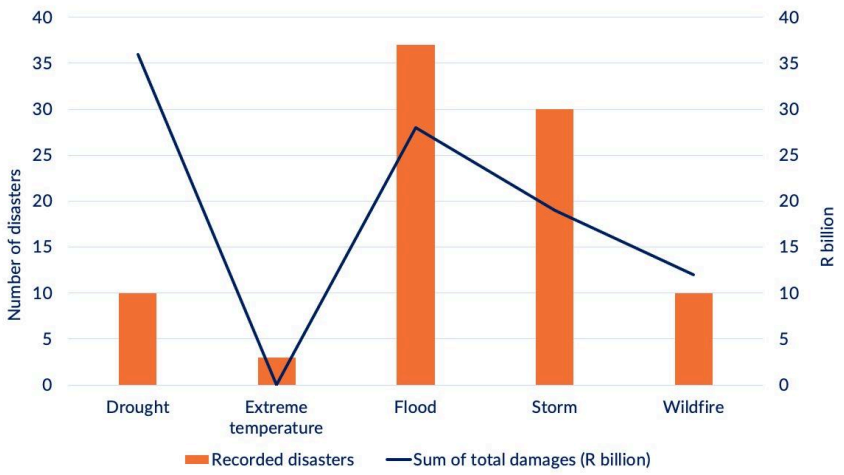

Image 1: Weather-related disasters 1980-2020.

In these four years, in 2023, Cyclone Freddy took the place in being one of the longest-living tropical cyclones in Southern Africa, destroying property and lives in Mozambique and Malawi (World Meteorological Organization). Not only did Cyclone Freddy affect more than 1.3 million people of Southern Africa, but it has also shown that we can no longer treat extreme disaster seasons as isolated events that do not form part of a greater increasing trend in extreme disaster severity and frequency. Meanwhile in Southern Africa, drought with its devastating impacts on food security, continues unabated. During the extreme 2018–2019 dry season, almost 45 million people were impacted at the peak of the lean season (SADC - DRM IMS).

In addition to causing material destruction, these disasters harm public-government trust since responses are insufficient, unevenly distributed, or too late. In Southern Africa, where the majority of states already have unsatisfactory budgets, political instability, and governance issues, this is particularly dangerous. Mutual trust between governments and citizens, and between states, becomes an essential part of disaster readiness in such instances. When they lose trust, speedy relief measures are delayed and long term resilience is undone. Citizens will be less willing to evacuate or prepare if they do not trust authorities.

Understood that collaboration across boundaries is crucial for conducting an efficient disaster management regime in Southern Africa, where droughts, floods, and cyclones undermine all political barriers. However, these regional organizations, like the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), are unaware of their limited use of resources, coordination, and early warning systems. Trust must be built by working transparently together and agreeing on fair methods for distributing aid to solve these barriers.

The instance will continue to go worse as climate change will start giving rise to extreme weather events all across the continent. According to a strengthening voice in the IPCC, cyclones in Southern Africa are expected to become more intense, sustained periods of dry spells will ever increase, and rising sea levels will start devastating coastal communities. The accumulated humanitarian, economic, and political costs in relation to these disasters will continue to build up against the poor and vulnerable communities, unless there is a coherent and trust-based strategy.

II. Key Vocabulary

Cyclone: Cyclones are sizable rotating tropical storms that occur as a result of winds circulating around an area of low atmospheric pressure. Tropical cyclones rotate clockwise in the southern hemisphere, and the term cyclone is used in southern hemisphere countries, while they rotate anticlockwise in the northern hemisphere, and are referred to as hurricanes or typhoons (AIMS). In Southern Africa, Cyclones Idai (2019) and Freddy (2023) caused massive flooding and displacement and are two of the most immediate natural hazards in the region.

Drought: A drought is a prolonged dry period and can happen almost anywhere in the world. Water shortage is a slow-onset disaster characterized by an absence of precipitation. The environment, energy, economies, agriculture, and health can all be significantly impacted by drought (WHO). Southern Africa's

rain-fed agriculture dependence renders drought doubly devastating and in terms of causing food shortages to millions. Drought stimulates cross-border cooperation on water management and food supply.

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR): "Disaster risk reduction is aimed at preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk and managing residual risk, all of which contribute to strengthening resilience and therefore to the achievement of sustainable development" (UNDRR). DRR in Southern Africa involves investment in early warning, regional disaster funds, and climate-resilient infrastructure.

El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO): The El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is a very vast, ever-changing, and naturally occurring climatic phenomenon, involving changes in the zenith atmosphere and oscillating ocean temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific (WHO). ENSO severely impacts the climate of southern Africa, where El Niño years generally bring great droughts and La Niña brings floods and cyclones.

Climate Adaptation: Climate adaptation is the process of anticipating, being in a state of preparation for, and making adjustments to the projected and actual impacts of climate change. Planetary changes are causing extreme weather conditions such as heat waves, droughts, and floods to be more acute (Global Center on Adaptation). Adaptation to climate change in southern Africa includes cyclone-proofing structures, developing drought-tolerant crops, and strengthening regional early warning systems.

Humanitarian Corridor: In an area or path designated stewardly, a humanitarian corridor is an effectively demilitarized corridor for a fixed time to allow safe passage of aid, supplies, people, and humanitarian personnel. Despite their assumed safety, humanitarian corridors are frequently very dangerous. Parties can theoretically agree to the conditions but disregard them in practice (USD). Humanitarian corridors are mostly required in Southern Africa after cyclones and floods cut off remote areas, especially in Mozambique and Madagascar.

III. Involved Countries and Organizations

Mozambique

Tropical storms from the Indian Ocean proceed directly over Mozambique, so it stands among the most disaster-prone countries in Southern Africa. The cases of Cyclones Idai (2019) and Freddy (2023) portray Mozambique as a climate-vulnerable country, with millions displaced and thousands dead. Appreciating the need for resilience, the government began climate adaptation under the National Disaster Management Institute (INGC) and worked with the World Bank Disaster Risk Management and Resilience

Program for Mozambique (2021). Emphasis is laid on international solidarity, with President Filipe Nyusi of Mozambique stating, after Idai, that "This is a humanitarian disaster of great proportion. We appeal for support from the international community" (BBC). Despite being a disaster-prone country, Mozambique feels that it strongly requires regional and international collaboration, as its resources, technically as well as financially, are inadequate.

Malawi

Being a landlocked country, dependent to a great extent on rain-fed agriculture, Malawi is highly susceptible to drought and flood events. Cyclone Freddy induced massive flooding in March 2023, whereby 1,200 people were killed and half a million were displaced. The Malawi 2063 Vision, given by the government calls for building resilience and sustainable agriculture practices; however, its applications are limited because of weak infrastructure and financing problems. At COP27, President Lazarus Chakwera said: "We are paying the price for emissions we did not cause. The international community must support Africa in building resilience"(UN Malawi). Thus, Malawi is altogether in favor of more aid, the establishment of early warning systems, and affirmative climate finance.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe experiences frequent droughts, particularly in the El Niño years, seasonally devastating maize crops, and increasingly undermining food insecurity. There are cyclones; however, drought persists as the more long-term hazard. Political instability and the poor state of disaster management reduce Zimbabwe's capacity to adequately respond. As stated in the National Climate Policy (2017), the government has recognized the issue and has committed to strengthening disaster preparedness and integrating climate resilience into development plans. The dilemma, however, is that the country often firmly states its position on sovereignty and South–South cooperation in wary of external interference. Meanwhile, Zimbabwe continues to work within the SADC framework and accepts regional support during a major crisis. Delegates representing Zimbabwe will, therefore, need to seek a fine balance between strengthening resilience and securing national sovereignty in the policy responses.

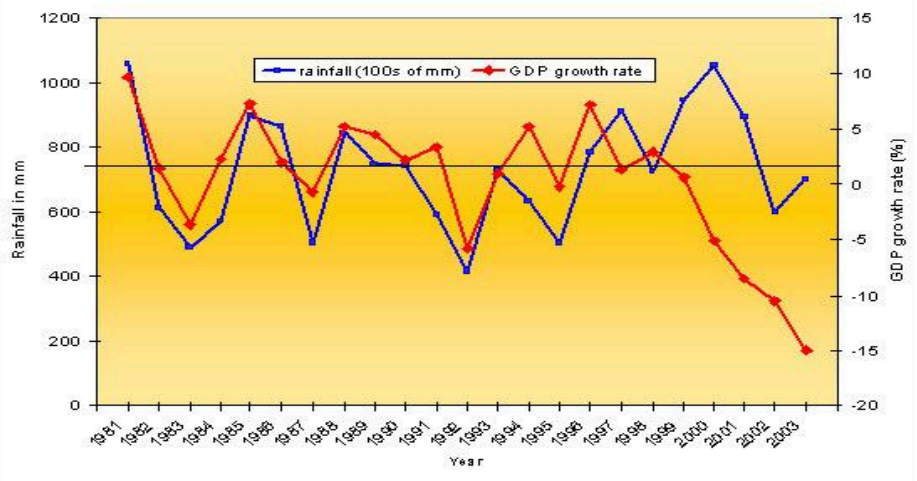

Image 2: Rainfall vs. GDP in Zimbabwe: 1981-2003

South Africa

Being less directly exposed to cyclones, South Africa undergoes droughts and water crises (the recent one being the 2018 Cape Town "Day Zero"). Being the stronger economy in the region, South Africa is a leader in ensuring aid and coordination during crises in the Southern African crises. Disaster coordination in South Africa is handled by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), and it also supports the African Risk Capacity (ARC) insurance scheme. President Cyril Ramaphosa remarked back in 2021: "Like many developing economy countries, South Africa is extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change. As these countries, we carry the least responsibility historically for the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming"(South African Government). South Africa is an integral part of the debate, as it suffers disasters and provides its neighbors with financing, logistics, and humanitarian assistance.

Madagascar

Madagascar ranks as one of the most cyclone-prone countries in the entire world, experiencing tropical storms almost every year and having its coastal cities laid utterly waste. In 2022 alone, floods and the destruction of crops were brought about in that island by six tropical storms and cyclones. President Andry Rajoelina has expressed the need for international solidarity and stated in 2022, "Madagascar is paying the biggest price for climate change, even if our footprint on earth is minimal" (RTL).

Botswana

Although we cannot say Botswana is a cyclone-prone area, it ranks among the countries most often challenged by drought and desertification—especially in the Kalahari. Historically, Botswana has dealt with droughts well because of good governance and policy measures such as its Drought Management

Strategy; however, climate change is now making it less and less predictable as rainfall patterns are getting disrupted.

Southern African Development Community (SADC)

SADC holds a paramount regional role in disaster management. Its Disaster Preparedness and Response Strategy (2016–2030) tries to strengthen early warning systems, encourage resource sharing, and promote cooperation across borders. When SADC was fighting with the demolition Cyclone Idai brought in 2019 and the droughts, they facilitated regional humanitarian responses. Yet, there remain financial shortages and too much dependence on external donors. Regional solidarity is an issue that SADC raises continuously.

African Union (AU)

The continental framework for disaster risk reduction is provided by the AU mostly through the Africa Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction (2004, revised in 2015). The AU acts through the African Risk Capacity, which provides insurance and early response financing for Member States afflicted by natural disasters. As the AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat has said, "In Africa, the consequences of the climate crisis are substantial, serving as an economic hindrance that hinders growth. Research indicates that many African countries face GDP losses of up to 5% because of the impacts of climate change"(African Union).

IV. Focused Overview of the Issue

1. Geographic and Climatic Vulnerability

Southern Africa's physical setting explains a lot about why natural disasters are so common and so damaging. The region covers very diverse landscapes in a small space. Countries like Mozambique and Madagascar are in the path of tropical systems that form over the oceans and head westward. When these systems reach land, they unleash massive amounts of rain within a short time, thereby causing flash floods, landslides, and the destruction of roads. In contrast, landlocked countries like Botswana and Namibia are far away from the sea and get less rain, so they are concerned about droughts and water shortages.

Another thing contributing to vulnerability is the seasonal variability. In most of Southern Africa, the rainy season is distinguishable from the dry season. When rains arrive late or go away early, crops fail, and dams don't get filled. When it rains all at once or floods hit in the form of a cyclone, rivers and floodplains

get overwhelmed and submerged. Most people in these countries earn their living from farming, so even a slight change in rainfall affects food and income.

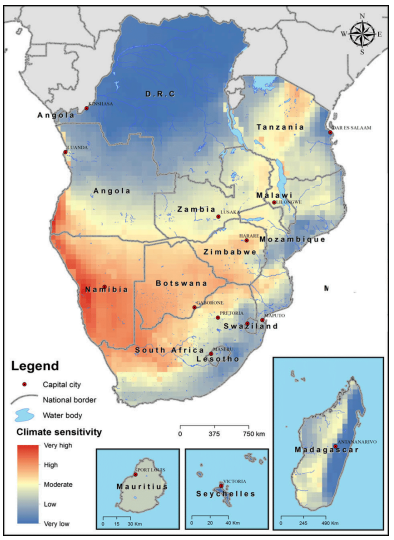

Image 3: Meteorological Drought Risk

Climate variability makes the whole issue more complicated. Weather phenomena like ENSO can tilt the entire season towards drought Picture 3: Meteorological drought risk or towards heavy rain. Generally, in an El Niño year, Southern Africa sometimes receives less rain than it normally does, hence damaging crops and pastures. Some La Niña years bring intense rainfall in some areas, resulting in floods. These swings don't respect the borders. A drought may hit several countries at the same time, or a cyclone may wash away a part of the coastline, only to demolish inland shortly after. Thus, this very natural layout almost "invites" cross-border emergencies where two or more neighboring countries are struck by basically the same disaster.

Lastly, climate change is a hammer sitting on everything else. Warmer oceans give more energy to tropical storms. On the other hand, warm air can hold more moisture, leading to heavy rains. On land, high temperatures quickly dry the soil, thus increasing drought when it does not rain. The same types of disasters Southern Africa is already dealing with are getting harder to cope with because their background conditions are changing.

2. Cyclones, Floods, and River Systems

The cyclone is one of the grave catastrophes that can affect the region. When a very powerful system transits the Indian Ocean, winds rip off roofs, storms flood coastal towns, and rains overwhelm everything in its path. A coastal town like Beira or Toamasina is especially vulnerable because of its low elevation relative to sea level and dependence on ports and roads that lie by the water. If these towns are flooded, it tends to disrupt local communities but also slows the trade for the entire region since many inland countries are dependent on these ports for imports and exports.

Once landfalling cyclones demolish bridges in various Indonesian provinces, they often turn into a big rain event, dumping water into the river basins. Rivers like the Zambezi, Limpopo, Save, and numerous smaller ones provide the basis of irrigation and energy generation in various countries. But these rivers flood when it rains too hard. Floods have several effects: they destroy bridges, isolate rural areas, and contaminate wells. Schools and clinics may also get damaged or be used as shelters, interrupting education and health service delivery. This eventually leads to outbreaks of various water-borne diseases, especially

where there are inadequacies within sanitation facilities. In essence, the cyclone sets a chain reaction that leads to several months of problems.

Aside from cyclones, there are those "ordinary" floods produced by seasonal storms. If a river fills with water during heavy rainfalls and people live on its floodplain, destruction is inescapable. Flood plains are supportive of agriculture; hence, families choose to farm there with the view that in normal years they make a good harvest. It's a risk-reward tradeoff: similarly, the land is productive but risky. Reinforcing land-use planning and implementing codes for safe residential construction could reduce life loss, but those initiatives require money, training, and political will.

3. Drought, Water Scarcity, and the Food System

While the occurrence of cyclones and floods dominates the headlines, drought remains a silent crisis, equally cataclysmic. Most of the world in Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and parts of South Africa corresponds to the existence of rain-fed agriculture. If the rains fail for one season, a family may lose a year's income. If rains fail for two seasons, they will sell livestock or pull children from school to hire help at home or migrate for work. Drought doesn't topple buildings, but gently erodes the ability of people to cope.

Water scarcity goes much beyond farming. Water supply must be present for towns and cities, for homes, hospitals, or even businesses. Governments can face criticism when they have to ration water because of low dams, saying that this adversely affects the manufacturers and small businesses who depend upon water for their production. Power supply can be a bit inconsistent under these conditions since most of these countries depend upon hydropower. Once the reservoirs get too low, the generating capacity is cut back. Clinics can't preserve food and can't communicate in emergencies.

Food stock security is closely tied to drought. When crops perish in many countries at once, prices go up in local markets. Poor households tend to spend more of their relatively limited incomes on basic food and thus, conversely, may go for cheaper and less nutritious alternatives. Malnutrition among children may increase, while humanitarian agencies will be called on to provide food assistance. Regional trade can come to the rescue if borders are kept open and if uninterrupted transport routes exist. If a country attempts to protect its own supplies by restricting exports, this act will amplify shortages for other countries.

4. Economic Damage and the Cost of Recovery

Disasters in Southern Africa, being humanitarian emergencies, create economic shocks largely felt in the economy. When a cyclone damages roads, bridges, and power lines, the government incurs a lot of expenses in building basic services. With drought causing crop failures, tax revenues drop since farmers

and businesses earn less. Meanwhile, the state is supposed to provide relief to distressed communities. This results in some budget tension: less cash is flowing in and more is flowing out.

The private sector faces damage. Floods wipe small shops out of their inventories. Hotels and restaurants shut down when tourists cancel their trips post-disaster. Farmers may lose credit access next season if they do not repay their loans this season. Insurance coverage rates are very low, so many losses have never been compensated. A delay of merely a few weeks for ports and industrial zones can create a big ripple effect in those countries next door that rely on those facilities for trade.

The long-term costs are even greater than the short-term repairs or reconstruction. A child who misses months of school may eventually drop out. Roads not reconstructed swiftly isolate rural areas, limiting trade and fostering economic stagnation and local development. Health adversities arising out of disasters like injuries, water-borne diseases, or malnutrition may continue to exist long after the event. Such effects, when accumulated over time, hamper countries from achieving their development targets.

Financing the recovery is a recurring challenge. Some countries embark upon new debt to rebuild, which presents a risk if another disaster strikes before the economy is able to stand on its two feet. Then there is international aid, from some points of view helpful but, again, hardly ever dependable or prompt in its delivery. New mechanisms such as regional insurance pools and contingency funds promise speedy delivery of finances post-shocks. But they call for robust preparation and meticulous rules so that all members can trust the system and continue in it.

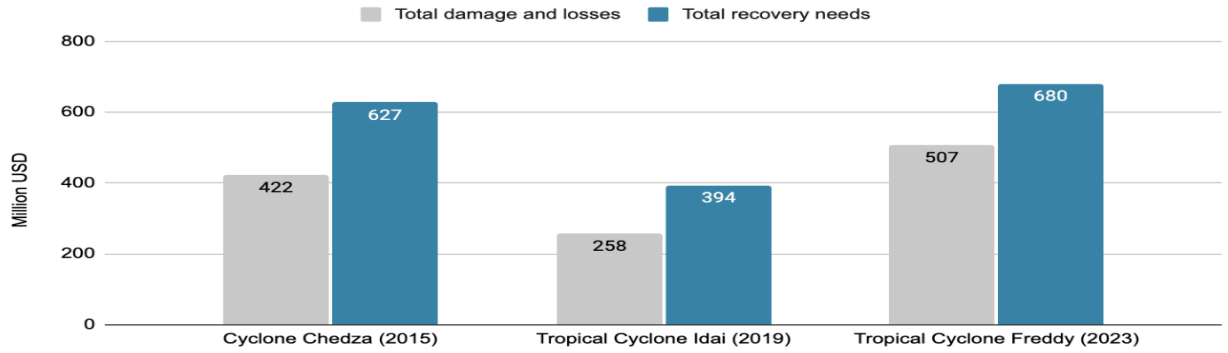

Image 4: Costs of recent extreme weather events in Malawi

5. Infrastructure, Governance, and Early Warning Gaps

The impact of a disaster is associated not only with the magnitude of the hurricane, flood, or the duration of drought but also with the extent to which the systems in preparation and response can withstand those forces. In many areas of Southern Africa, power lines remain exposed, drainage assertions remain clogged, and informal settlements are put up on flood-prone lands. Hence, when heavy rains

descend upon them, unnecessary damage occurs. By improving infrastructure, such as by erecting stronger schools and clinics, elevating roads in flood zones, or bettering stormwater management, some losses can be diminished. Nevertheless, these projects are costly and may remain in competition with other urgent needs, such as health and education.

Governance matters just as much. There should be a clear description of roles between agencies set up to handle disasters with enough funding and personnel who have been trained for their tasks. Emergency plans must remain updated and practiced through drills at regular intervals. Aid can arrive at the least opportune time due to confusion or uncoordinated mechanisms or even miss those for whom this was meant most. Such scenarios hinder the level of public acceptance. In some instances, political considerations and even disputes over resources hold back a speedy and fair response.

Early warning systems are indeed one of the most prudent investments. If the village knows that a flood is about to occur two days earlier, then people could move to safety, pack their belongings, and give shelter to their cattle. Having a reliable seasonal forecast could similarly help farmers choose their crop and planting dates. Yet from one place to another, early warning systems coverages vary: from weather satellites to community radio systems are available, but in some areas, there is a lack of last-mile communication. Their messages must be available in the local language, and they also must reach the common people without smartphones. Even simple equipment, such as sirens and assistance from community volunteers, can go a long way.

Cross-border cooperation is needed as well. Rivers, storms, and trade routes link countries. If one country decides to release water from its dam because of a flood, it has to alert the others downstream. If a cyclone is expected to hit a coastal region, the inland parts of another country should be prepared for heavy rainfall. Building such systems for sharing data fast and openly needs a lot of trust. Countries must know for sure that their neighbors are going to act in good faith and keep communication channels preserved even during tense moments.

6. Social and Humanitarian Impacts on People

Each number signifies a person and a story behind it. Disasters make families face hard choices. Once flooded, the parents and children could be forced to move into temporary accommodations with tiny rooms and limited basic services. The lifting of water, maintenance of water, and sanitization becomes difficult in such situations, posing an increased risk of cholera or other outbreaks. With damaged clinics or roads set off, health workers could find it harder to reach patients. This only makes matters worse for children, pregnant women, and the elderly.

Also, education takes a heavy blow when a disaster strikes. Schools might get damaged or occupied as temporary shelters, hence obstructing the educational process. At times when schools do open their doors again, students are not quick to return as help is still required in their homes, or because uniforms and books were lost in the disaster. The frequent interruptions set students back and can lead to dropout rates. If the young generation is denied education, the entire community will lose future skills and opportunities.

Livelihoods get affected in many ways. Farmers lose their crops and tools. Fishers cannot take boats to the sea once the harbors get damaged. If there are market vendors, they have to rebuild their stock from scratch. And when relief arrives too late, or is unfairly distributed, tensions can rise within communities. In a few places, disasters raise the risk of gender-based violence due to stresses such as displacement and the unavailability of safe shelters. Supporting targeted interventions for women and youth, such as cash assistance, training, and safe shelters, ensures faster recovery of families and curtailed harm.

Migration is one social impact that demands more attention. Sanitation services and infrastructure for water supply in urban areas are very low, insufficient, and subject to environmental degradation when these communities do not have clear land tenure. Due to the incoming migrants from flood disasters, new exposure emerges in the informal settlements in the cities. If communities could be helped to build back safer homes in their original place, forced migration to some degree would be prevented. But this requires ongoing commitment and input from the local people in the planning process.

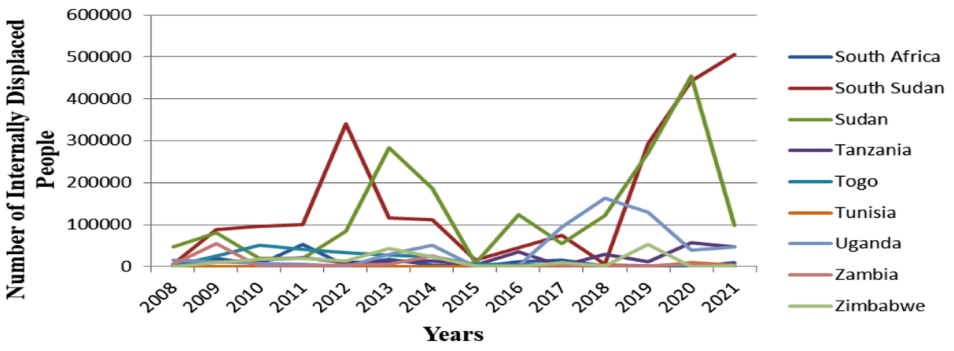

Image 5: Internally Displaced People: 2008–2022

7. Future Risks and Why Cooperation Matters

Development is challenged more by increasingly complicated disasters. Populations along the coasts are expanding, thereby putting more residents and assets in the path of cyclones and rising seas. Cities are developing even into floodplains because the land is cheaper there. Temperatures are rising while rainfall patterns grow less certain, which is a perfect cocktail of drought and flood risk, varying from area to area and time to time.

Given that these risks cross borders, solutions must too. Sharing data about weather, river flow, and other matters allows countries to prepare better. Joint training and exercises of disaster agencies build trust well before the onset of a crisis. A regional stock must be ready with relief items because any delay could cost valuable days in responding to a crisis. Insurance schemes paying fast after a drought or a cyclone will prevent the government from falling into holes of debt. However, for all to work out, trust is necessary: countries must, as a matter of trust, believe that their neighbors will follow through on what they have promised and that such help will be given fairly and transparently.

Community participation is also a dimension of cooperation. Local authorities, traditional chiefs, youth groups, and networks of women generally know which areas are flooded first, which roads become impassable, and which are the most endangered households. This builds trust when people see that their information counts, and help goes to where it is demanded. It is not just where it is handed out with ease.

Ultimately, investing in resilience is cheaper than paying the costs of repeated emergencies. Schools and clinics may serve double duty as shelters. With finer drainage, a storm will not be too much trouble. Diversified farming and water storage are the way through the dry season for communities. When countries come together to share knowledge, funding, and the burden, safety is enhanced throughout the region and progress is less likely to be wiped out by the next calamity.

V. Important Events & Chronology

Date (Day/Month/Year)	Event
11–17/02/2000	Mozambique floods kill over 700 people and displace more than half a million people. It showed early gaps in disaster response.
2015–2016	A severe El Niño drought leaves 40+ million people food insecure across Southern Africa.
03/2015	Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction adopted; Southern African states commit to better preparedness.
17–24/03/2019	Cyclone Idai devastates Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe; 1,300+ deaths and USD 2 billion in damages.
24–30/04/2019	Cyclone Kenneth strikes Mozambique, the first time two strong cyclones hit the country in one season.
07/2016	SADC Regional Humanitarian Appeal launched, requesting USD 2.4 billion for drought relief; only 50% funded.

2017	African Risk Capacity (ARC) makes its first insurance payout in Malawi, aiding 1 million drought-affected people
20/01/2021	Cyclone Eloise hits Mozambique, displacing 20,000 people and flooding key infrastructure.
23/01– 14/03/2023	Cyclone Freddy becomes the longest-lasting tropical cyclone ever; 1,400 deaths and 500,000 displaced in Malawi alone.
2021	SADC Disaster Preparedness and Response Strategy (2021–2030) adopted to coordinate early warnings and humanitarian corridors.
08-21/04/2022	Around Durban in KwaZulu-Natal Province, the floods washed away infrastructure, land, houses and livelihoods. 435 people lost their lives and 80 were reported missing.
11/2022	At COP27, Southern African nations secured support under the Loss and Damage Fund for climate disaster recovery.
04/2023	World Bank launches Southern Africa Resilience Fund with USD 1 billion for infrastructure and early warning systems.
Ongoing (2024–2025)	Expansion of community-based disaster committees improves local preparedness and response capacity. Even though the effort and funds invested, catastrophic disasters still lead to casualties, such as the Eastern Cape Floods and the Botswana South Africa Floods.

VI. Past Resolutions and Treaties

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (A/RES/69/283)

Being adopted in March 2015 under UNDRR, the Sendai Framework is the most comprehensive global framework for disaster risk reduction and resilience enhancement. However, implementation has been inconsistent. To this end, the provisions and potentials of the Sendai Framework have not been fully realized in the region. The other limitation to its implementation is its non-binding nature, it can encourage those who are willing but cannot obligate those states to undertake efforts to achieve its goals.

Paris Agreement (FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1)

The Paris Agreement was adopted in December 2015 by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The agreement requires the global temperature increase to be below 2°C

above pre-industrial levels. The agreement also requires all participating parties to submit their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) so they can reflect their plans for mitigation and adaptation. However, many Southern African states don't have enough financial or technological resources necessary to carry out their NDCs..

SADC Disaster Preparedness and Response Strategy (2021–2030)

In 2021, the Southern African Development Community adopted a regional ten-year strategy that seeks to empower its 16 member states in disaster risk management. It is a very important step toward regional cooperation. Nevertheless, financial constraints combined with differing political interests among members of the SADC have tended to slow down the operationalization processes with respect to the major initiatives.

Kampala Convention on Internally Displaced Persons (2009)

The Kampala Convention advocates for the protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs). It was adopted by the African Union in 2009. It forces African states to prevent displacing these people when its possible. For this issue, the Kampala Convention is very relevant because there are frequent displacements in Mozambique, Malawi, and Madagascar caused by cyclones. However, in 2025, 30 out of 55 of AU member states have ratified it. Implementation is also inconsistent due to financial limitations and governance problems.

African Risk Capacity (ARC) Treaty (2012)

Established in 2012 under the African Union, the African Risk Capacity (ARC) is an organality that provides a risk pooling and insurance mechanism aimed at providing rapid financial support to African States when faced with disasters. ARC has been providing crucial help to Southern African states with insurance payouts following massive droughts and cyclones in Malawi and Madagascar. Its successes notwithstanding, ARC remains underutilized, with only 11 out of the 35 eligible AU states ratifying the treaty.

VII. Failed Solution Attempts

Various approaches were used in Southern Africa for disaster risk management; however, most of these approaches have failed because of a lack of sufficient funding, governance, and cooperation at the regional level. These failures could themselves stand as examples of what exists and what could be applied in the future.

1. Weak Early Warning Systems

The governments of Southern Africa, through SADC, have attempted to set early warning systems to warn people of those natural hazards beforehand. For example, warnings were issued in 2019 for Cyclone Idai; however, thousands of Mozambicans and Malawians were caught completely unaware because warnings were not translated into local languages and also not properly disseminated. The tragic loss of life could have been prevented.

2. Insufficient Regional Cooperation under SADC

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has developed various mechanisms to coordinate cross-border disaster response, including the SADC Disaster Preparedness and Response Strategy. While it looks good on paper, it has suffered from very poor implementation.

3. Limited Funding for Disaster Relief

World Bank, African Risk Capacity and other institutions promised Southern Africa with large amounts of money for disaster relief. Instead, most came late or never came. Malawi, for example, in 2023, when Cyclone Freddy struck, received far below the amount it needed. Hundreds of thousands remained without shelter and medical support after the disaster. Most Southern African states completely depend on external aid, which makes this situation even worse.

4. Poor Infrastructure Resilience

The continuous attack and rendering of infrastructure have resulted in a very vulnerable design. For example, after Cyclone Idai, thousands of homes, schools, and hospitals were built without cyclone-resistant materials. As a result, Cyclone Kenneth easily destroyed them.

5. Ineffective Management of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Natural disasters that take place in Southern Africa almost always cause large-scale displacements. Even though the Kampala Convention was enacted in 2009 for addressing IDP needs, the convention has scattered implementation.

After Cyclone Idai, thousands of IDPs were in camps with insufficient food, water, and healthcare. Lack of coordination between humanitarian agencies and governments further delayed the response, which substantially escalated disease outbreaks at the shelter camps.

6. Political Instability and Corruption

Many countries of southern Africa have been buffeted by political instability and corruption in neutralizing their disaster management efforts, thus to some extent turning donor funds into questionable

channels. Therefore, this has contributed toward undermining public confidence and discouraging their further voluntary support from abroad.

VIII. Possible Solutions

The disaster response measures in Southern Africa attempt to save lives, stabilize the economy, and support development. Referring to this, governments, NGOs, and local communities are supposed to work with one another in providing viable solutions.

1. Improving Early Warning Systems

Early warning systems need fine-tuning; this will go a long way in reducing disaster losses. Governments should collaborate with organizations to share real-time data and enhance prediction models. Warnings should also be disseminated through the radio and cellular SMS to rural communities and through community leaders. However, still, early warning systems are not enough on their own and need action plans under the circumstances

2. Setting Up Regional Emergency Stockpiles

The creation of joint stockpiles of food, water, medicines, and shelters throughout Southern Africa would facilitate faster responses to disasters. SADC should administer these stockpiles to ensure equitable access to all the member states, reducing dependency on delayed resources coming from international aid.

3. Climate Resilient Infrastructure Development

Building strong climate-resilient infrastructure would reduce the degree of damage that cyclones and floods present. To this effect, governments should attempt to update building codes and provide incentives for the use of sustainable building materials.

4. Promoting Regional and International Cooperation

Disasters can spill over to surrounding countries from time to time. Thus, regional cooperation is essential. Establishing the Southern Africa Disaster Response Network under SADC would help coordinate the deployment of resources and rescues. Such coordination, being in close cooperation with other international bodies, would mean effective disaster management.

5. Setting Up a Regional Disaster Relief Fund

This could be an establishment to set up a disaster fund to provide emergency financial assistance to nations affected by natural disasters. The fund would be raised on contributions from member states and

donors from both the African Union and abroad. Transparency and accountability in fund allocation processes would restore public confidence in response times.

6. Community-Based Disaster Preparedness Promotion

Local communities are the first responders. Their preparation is, therefore, very important. The government must organize trainings for community leaders and volunteers on basic first aid, evacuation planning, and emergency coordination. Moreover, awareness creation campaigns will foster proper responses from residents.

7. Climate Adaptation in Agriculture

Due to the dependence of the area on agriculture, climate-smart agriculture needs to be implemented much more. Some of the forefronts are drought-resistant varieties, drip irrigation systems, and land-use methods that reduce the impact of droughts and floods. Together with local NGOs and foreign bodies, these will be done to ensure better dissemination.

8. Investment in Technology and Innovation

Technology can become a tool in disaster management if appropriately harnessed. Some of these tools can assess damage on disaster sites, assess needs, give emergency supplies, and keep watch on hazardous locations. The governments can establish mobile apps alerting the community about emergency occurrences and in addition advertising evacuation routes and regular updates during disasters.

To that end, disaster management should be considered in Southern Africa from the viewpoint of long-term planning, regional coordination, and active community participation. Resilience will require building trust and solidarity, distributing responsibilities throughout and beyond the region.

IX. Useful Links

- Natural disasters in African countries: what can we learn about them?:

  https://td-sa.net/index.php/td/article/download/266/243

- The charts provide an overview of the most frequent natural disasters in a given country and help understand the impacts of those disasters on human populations:

  https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/south-africa/vulnerability

- The impact of disasters on economic growth in selected Southern Africa development community countries:

  https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8603153/

- Disasters and Disaster Risk Management in South Africa:

  https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-94974-1_32

- Weather-related disasters in South Africa from 1980 to 2023:

  https://www.nrf.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Weather-related-disasters-in-South-Africa-from-1980-to-2023.pdf

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