



South African Reserve Bank, Pretoria, South Africa

2026 Forum Report

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List of Acronyms

AFI	Alliance for Financial Inclusion	ICT	Information and Communications Tec...
AI	Artificial intelligence	KYC	Know your customer
AML	Anti-Money Laundering	MAP	Making Access Possible
AML/CFT	Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-...	MSME	Micro, small and medium enterprise
API	Application Programming Interface	MTO	Money Transfer Operator
CCBG	Committee of Central Bank Governors	NPU	National Payment Utility
CGAP	Consultative Group to Assist the P...	PEM	Payments Ecosystem Modernisation
CISNA	Committee of Insurance, Securities...	PKCE	Proof Key for Code Exchange
CKYC	Central know your customer	PKI	Public Key Infrastructure
CMA	Common Monetary Area	POS	Point of sale
CoSSE	Committee of SADC Stock Exchanges	P2P	Person-to-person
CyD/SeyID	Seychelles National Digital Identi...	RISDP	Regional Indicative Strategic Deve...
DFS	Digital Financial Services	RTGS	Real-Time Gross Settlement
DFI	Development Finance Institution	SACCO	Savings and Credit Cooperative Org...
DFRC	Digital Finance Research Centre	SACRRA	Southern African Credit and Risk R...
DPI	Digital Public Infrastructure	SADC	Southern African Development Commu...
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	SAMOS	South African Multiple Option Sett...
eKYC	Electronic know your customer	SARB	South African Reserve Bank
EFT	Electronic funds transfer	SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
ENIF	Estrategia Nacional de Inclusao Fi...	TCIB	Transactions Cleared on an Immedia...
FATF	Financial Action Task Force	TLS	Transport Layer Security
FIC	Finance, Investment and Customs	USD	United States Dollar
FSCA	Financial Sector Conduct Authority		



Introduction



The 2026 SADC Financial Inclusion Forum was held from 5-6 May 2026 at the South African Reserve Bank in Pretoria, South Africa. Marking the Forum's 10th anniversary, the convening brought together regulators, policymakers, development partners, financial sector stakeholders and technical specialists from across the SADC region to reflect on progress, share implementation experiences and strengthen regional cooperation on financial inclusion and access to finance.

Maxine Hlaba, Master of Ceremonies for Day 1, welcomed delegates who participated both in person and virtually. Interpretation was provided in English, French and Portuguese to support inclusive regional engagement. Representatives attended from across the region, including Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Discussions at the two-day Forum focused on strengthening the implementation of the SADC Strategy on Financial Inclusion and SME Access to Finance (2023–2028), expanding inclusive digital financial systems, improving regional payment integration and ensuring that financial inclusion contributes more directly to livelihoods, economic participation and resilience.

A recurring theme throughout the Forum was the need to move beyond measuring access alone towards strengthening meaningful usage, financial resilience and consumer outcomes.

Official welcome and opening address

Dr Yolanda De Figueiredo Sabino

SADC Director of Finance, Investment and Customs (FIC)



Dr Yolanda De Figueiredo Sabino formally opened the Forum by welcoming member states, regional structures, development partners and financial sector stakeholders. She expressed appreciation to the Government of South Africa for hosting the event and acknowledged the sustained contribution of policymakers, regulators and technical partners who have supported the regional financial inclusion agenda over the past decade.

Providing historical context, Dr Sabino noted that the SADC financial inclusion agenda emerged from priorities identified under the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), particularly those linked to industrialisation, regional integration and market development. She recalled that the first consultative discussions on a regional financial inclusion strategy took place in Johannesburg in 2015, followed by a directive from Ministers of Finance and Investment to establish a dedicated regional platform for dialogue, coordination and peer learning.

Dr Sabino reiterated that the Forum was established to:

- Align national financial inclusion initiatives with regional priorities
- Monitor progress on regional financial integration
- Promote peer learning and exchange of implementation experience
- Strengthen policy coordination across member states.

The address highlighted the ongoing implementation of the SADC Strategy on Financial Inclusion and SME Access to Finance (2023–2028), supported by several regional frameworks and guidelines, including:

- The SADC Financial Consumer Protection Guidelines
- The Revised Mobile Money Guidelines
- The Guidelines for Financial Inclusion Data Systems for Policymakers and Practitioners were adopted in December 2025.

Dr Sabino noted that adult financial inclusion across SADC had increased from approximately 50% in 2016 to 75% by 2025. Despite this progress, important disparities remain across member states, with stronger inclusion outcomes recorded in countries such as South Africa, Seychelles, Botswana, Lesotho and Mauritius, while lower levels persist in Madagascar, Malawi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Comoros.

She further emphasised that expanding access alone is insufficient when financial services remain unaffordable, underutilised, or poorly aligned with consumer needs. The high cost of remittances was highlighted as a continuing regional challenge, particularly in major migration corridors where transfer costs remain above Sustainable Development Goal targets.

Looking ahead, Dr Sabino identified several regional priorities, including:

- Strengthening implementation of regional regulatory frameworks
- Accelerating delivery of regional payment and financial infrastructure projects
- Expanding technical support to member states

- Deepening collaboration between governments, regulators and private sector stakeholders
- Leveraging digital innovation to improve efficiency, inclusion and market access.

She also called on regional structures established under the Protocol on Finance and Investment – including the Committee of Central Bank Governors (CCBG), CISNA, CoSSE, the DFI Network and the AML/CFT Committee – to align their programmes more closely with the objectives of the regional financial inclusion strategy.

In closing, Dr Sabino encouraged delegates to use the Forum to strengthen regional cooperation and identify practical implementation priorities capable of advancing inclusive growth, economic participation and regional integration.

Keynote address: Deepening financial inclusion to accelerate regional integration and industrialisation in SADC

Dr Arif Ismail

Head of the National Payment System Department, South African Reserve Bank



Delivering the keynote address on behalf of South African Reserve Bank Governor Lesetja Kganyago, Dr Arif Ismail positioned financial inclusion as a strategic enabler of regional integration, economic resilience and industrialisation.

The address highlighted that approximately 113 million adults across the SADC region remain financially excluded, underscoring the scale of the inclusion challenge despite significant progress over the past decade.

Dr Ismail reflected on the gains achieved across the region, including the entry of approximately 48 million adults into the formal financial system, 22 million of whom were women. He also highlighted growth in mobile money adoption and reductions in remittance costs across several regional corridors.

At the same time, he cautioned that gains in financial inclusion remain vulnerable where households and small businesses lack resilience mechanisms. Referring to lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, he argued that the regional agenda must increasingly focus on resilience, active usage and financial capability rather than access indicators alone.

The keynote further highlighted the region's investment in evidence generation through FinScope surveys, MSME studies and Making Access Possible (MAP) diagnostics. Dr Ismail noted that the challenge now lies less in generating evidence and more in translating findings into effective policy responses and implementation measures.

Country examples illustrated both progress and remaining gaps:

- Eswatini has recorded strong improvements in formal financial inclusion, although MSME access to credit and insurance remains constrained
- Malawi has expanded access to formal financial products, while financial capability challenges persist
- Gender gaps in access have narrowed across much of the region, though disparities remain in credit access, insurance uptake and business ownership.

The address stressed that financial inclusion should not be viewed solely as a financial-sector objective but rather as a broader development issue linked to industrialisation, climate resilience and gender equality.

Dr Ismail highlighted the importance of financially empowered MSMEs in supporting regional value chains and inclusive economic growth. He further emphasised that savings, insurance and emergency financing mechanisms are increasingly important in helping households and enterprises withstand economic and climate-related shocks.

On gender inclusion, the keynote underscored the need for financial products that better respond to women's economic realities, including flexible savings products, accessible credit and insurance mechanisms suited to caregiving responsibilities and informal income patterns.

The keynote concluded with a forward-looking vision of a financially resilient and economically active SADC citizen by 2035, in which meaningful financial inclusion supports sustainable livelihoods, resilience and participation in regional economic development.

113M

Adults financially excluded

48M

Entered formal system

22M

Women newly included

75%

SADC inclusion 2025

Review of financial inclusion in SADC gaps and opportunities

Damola Owolade

Head: SADC Financial Inclusion Programme, FinMark Trust



Damola presented a regional review of progress under the SADC Strategy on Financial Inclusion and SME Access to Finance (2023–2028), focusing on selected demand-side indicators drawn from FinScope surveys and central bank administrative data.

The presentation assessed progress against the strategy's core priorities, namely regulatory harmonisation, regional financial infrastructure and country-level implementation support, underpinned by stronger data systems and regional coordination.

A central concern raised during the session was the limited availability of current demand-side data across member states. Only three countries presently have FinScope surveys within the required three-year reporting cycle, constraining regional comparability and evidence-based monitoring.

Despite these limitations, the review reflected continued expansion in financial inclusion across the region, driven largely by:

- Growth in mobile money and agent banking networks
- Increased mobile phone penetration
- Expansion of non-bank financial service providers
- Social protection systems supporting account ownership.

Delegates noted that women and rural populations have benefited from many of these gains. However, the session stressed the growing distinction between account ownership and meaningful usage. Low and irregular incomes, affordability constraints and the cost of formal financial services continue to contribute to high levels of account inactivity in several markets.

Mobile money was identified as one of the region's strongest drivers of financial inclusion. Merchant payments are increasingly overtaking airtime purchases and remittances as a primary use case, while transaction volumes in some jurisdictions now exceed traditional card-based point-of-sale activity.

The presentation also examined regulatory and infrastructure priorities required to support deeper regional integration, including:

- Cross-border mobile money participation
- Regional instant payment systems, including TCIB
- Interoperable e-KYC frameworks
- Greater alignment of licensing and supervisory arrangements.

Delegates observed that restrictive licensing frameworks continue to limit the role of mobile money in regional payments integration and cross-border trade.

The session further highlighted progress in digital identity systems and simplified KYC processes, which are reducing customer due diligence costs and improving access to formal financial services.

MSME finance remained a persistent challenge across the region. While access to transactional financial services has improved, formal credit uptake remains constrained by informality, weak credit histories, limited credit information-sharing systems and risk aversion among both lenders and borrowers.

The importance of responsible financial inclusion was emphasised throughout the discussion. Delegates highlighted the need to strengthen consumer protection, market conduct oversight and financial capability initiatives, particularly as digital financial services continue to expand.

Key recommendations emerging from the session included:

- Prioritising regular FinScope surveys across member states
- Strengthening regional e-KYC and data-sharing systems
- Accelerating implementation of regional payment infrastructure
- Reviewing regulations governing cross-border mobile money participation
- Expanding financial capability and consumer protection initiatives.

The session concluded that the region has made substantial progress in expanding access to financial services, particularly through digital channels and regulatory reform. However, sustained effort will be required to address account inactivity, strengthen MSME finance, improve interoperability and ensure that financial inclusion contributes more directly to economic participation and regional integration.

Governance and coordination of the SADC Financial Inclusion and SME Access Strategy (2023-2028)

Moderator: Rado Razafindrakoto, Programme Officer, SADC Secretariat

Panellists:

Bafokeng Martin Noosi (Central Bank of Lesotho)

Liz Julienne (Central Bank of Seychelles)

Chiluba Mercy Munoni

(Ministry of Finance and National Planning, Zambia)



The panel discussion focused on governance, coordination and implementation arrangements that support the SADC Financial Inclusion and SME Access Strategy (2023-2028).

Panellists reflected positively on the role of the Financial Inclusion Subcommittee (FIS) in coordinating regional structures and supporting peer learning, policy alignment and technical cooperation.

Discussion highlighted the contribution of regional collaboration to strengthening national financial inclusion strategies, data systems development and implementation capacity across member states.

Delegates also raised concerns regarding declining donor funding and increasing pressure on regional technical assistance programmes. Greater emphasis was placed on domestic resource mobilisation, institutional coordination and long-term sustainability.

Recommendations emerging from the discussion included:

- Developing practical tools to support the domestication of regional frameworks
- Strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems

- Institutionalising peer review mechanisms
- Improving coordination across SADC structures
- Ensuring dedicated domestic funding for financial inclusion initiatives.

Participants further identified cybersecurity, digital consumer protection, financial resilience and responsible use of artificial intelligence as emerging priorities requiring increased regional attention.

The session concluded with a call for stronger collaboration among governments, regulators, private-sector actors and development partners to sustain momentum on the regional financial inclusion agenda.

South Africa payments ecosystem modernisation – implications for non-banks

James Thomas

Technical Director for PEM, South African Reserve Bank



James presented an overview of South Africa's Payments Ecosystem Modernisation (PEM) programme and its implications for financial inclusion, digital public infrastructure and non-bank participation.

The session traced the programme's origins to the South African Reserve Bank's Vision 2025 strategy. It highlighted ongoing efforts to improve the efficiency, accessibility and interoperability of the national payment system.

A central theme of the presentation was that account ownership alone does not equate to meaningful financial inclusion. Many consumers continue to use formal accounts primarily for cash withdrawals while remaining dependent on cash-based transactions for day-to-day economic activity.

The PEM programme, therefore, seeks to support a transition towards a 'cash-smart' society by expanding affordable, trusted and efficient digital payment alternatives while preserving consumer choice.

Key programme components include:

- Digital financial identity solutions
- Expansion of fast payment systems
- Open API and QR interoperability frameworks
- Shared fraud management systems

- Renewal of settlement infrastructure
- Consumer education and awareness initiatives.

The session also highlighted the establishment of the National Payment Utility (NPU), which will support shared digital public infrastructure in the public interest.

James noted that the PEM programme is intended to broaden participation beyond traditional banking institutions to include fintechs, retailers, mobile network operators and other non-bank participants under proportionate supervisory arrangements.

Trust in digital payment systems was identified as a critical determinant of adoption, alongside affordability, reliability and effective consumer protection.

The presentation further highlighted the use of regulatory sandboxes to test emerging technologies, including distributed ledger technologies and digital currencies, while maintaining AML, KYC and financial stability safeguards.

The session concluded with several key messages:

- Financial inclusion measurement should evolve beyond access towards active usage and resilience
- Digital public infrastructure is foundational to inclusive payment ecosystems
- Payment systems should support proportionate participation by non-bank actors
- Regional payment integration should remain a strategic priority.

Member State updates on progress on financial inclusion

The plenary session provided member states and regional structures with an opportunity to share implementation updates, policy developments and emerging priorities relating to financial inclusion across the SADC region.

Insurance, capital markets and regulatory harmonisation

Deeya Hazareesing-Meetarbhan and Sarojini Sumputh Veeramah

CISNA



CISNA presentations focused on the role of regulatory harmonisation, capital markets development and innovation in strengthening regional financial inclusion.

The insurance-focused presentation highlighted uneven insurance penetration across the region, with concentration remaining highest in South Africa. Delegates discussed the importance of regional collaboration, technical cooperation and enabling regulatory frameworks to support more inclusive insurance markets.

Innovations such as insurtech platforms and digital insurance aggregators were presented as examples of how digitalisation can improve consumer choice, transparency and accessibility.

The discussion also highlighted persistent challenges related to pensions and informal-sector coverage, noting that pension systems remain largely oriented towards formally employed populations.

The capital markets presentation positioned financial inclusion as an enabler of broader economic participation and regional integration. Particular emphasis was placed on integrating MSMEs and underserved populations into formal financial systems and capital markets.

CISNA further highlighted work underway on model laws covering:

- Microfinance
- SACCOs
- Insurance
- Medical aid schemes
- MSME capital market participation.

Key constraints identified included informality, low trust in formal institutions, infrastructure gaps and uneven implementation of regional frameworks.

Malawi

Thabeth Angela Kunje

Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralisation Malawi



Malawi presented progress under the National Strategy for Financial Inclusion III (2024-2028), highlighting continued growth in digital financial services, mobile money usage and electronic payments.

Government initiatives supporting MSMEs, financial literacy and consumer protection were also outlined, including financial education programmes and digital fee comparison tools aimed at improving transparency for consumers.

Challenges identified included infrastructure limitations, cybercrime, fraud risks, climate-related disruptions and continued dependence on cash.

Mozambique

Elda Monteiro

Central Bank of Mozambique



Mozambique presented reforms aimed at expanding digital financial infrastructure and improving access to inclusive financial services.

Key initiatives included:

- Basic bank accounts with simplified onboarding requirements
- Expansion of rural agent banking
- Regulatory sandboxes supporting innovation
- Real-time payment reforms
- Consumer protection and cybersecurity measures.

The presentation also highlighted the integration of financial literacy into school curricula and ongoing efforts to strengthen women's financial inclusion.

Zambia

Daniel Chimfwembe

Zambia Financial Intelligence Centre



Zambia's presentation focused on balancing financial inclusion objectives with AML/CFT requirements.

Key risks highlighted included:

- Mobile money fraud and scams
- Misuse of digital wallets
- Weak oversight of agent networks
- Informal remittance channels.

The session underscored the importance of tiered KYC and e-KYC approaches in supporting both inclusion and regulatory compliance.

Angola

Silvio Canga Velhinho

Central Bank of Angola



Angola presented its National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2025–2027), which prioritises women, youth and agricultural households.

The strategy focuses on:

- Digital identity
- Multi-stakeholder coordination
- Digitalisation
- Regulatory reform.

Progress includes the expansion of digital financial services, interoperability initiatives and the integration of financial inclusion into broader poverty reduction programmes.

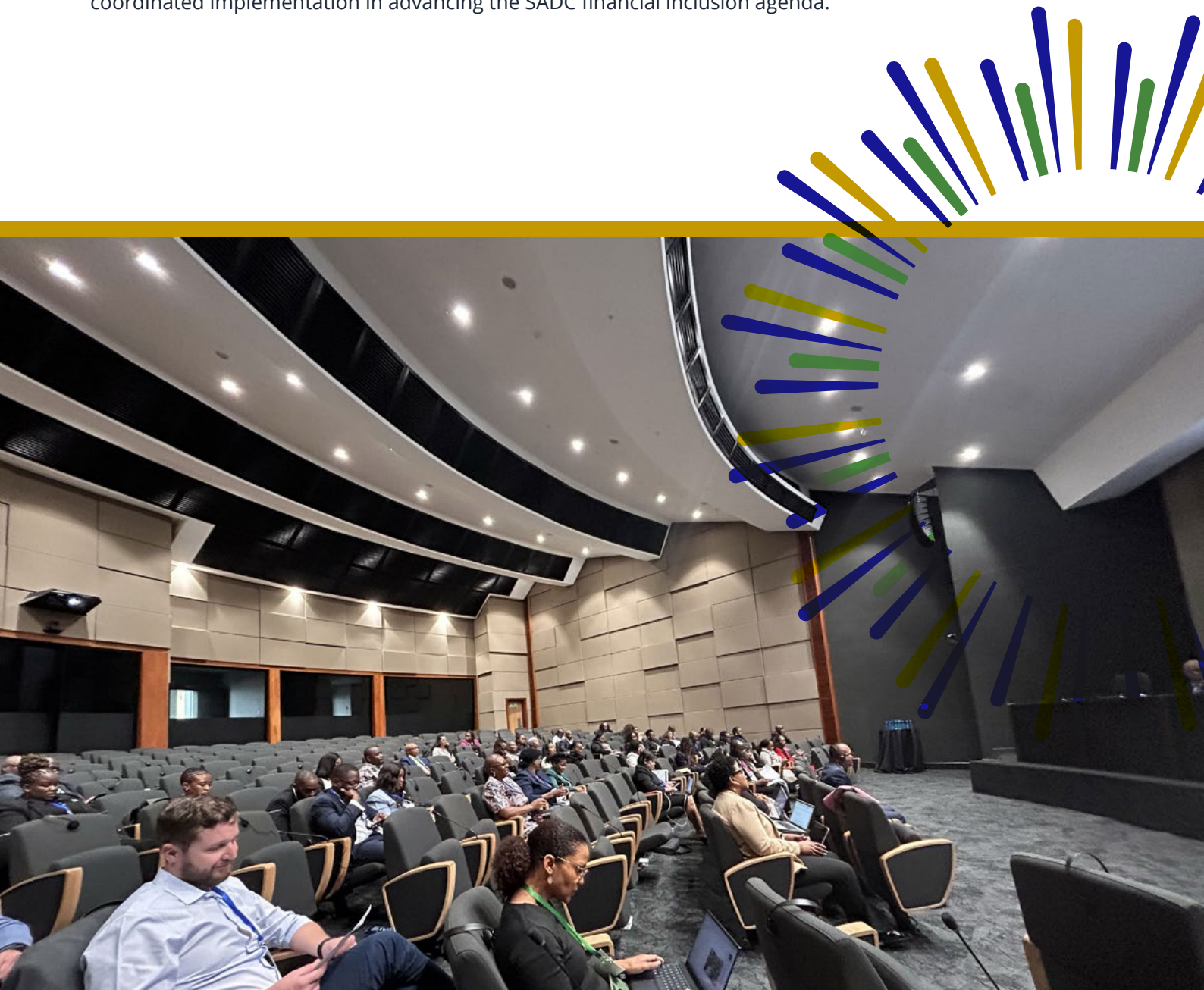
Challenges remain regarding infrastructure, financial literacy, consumer trust and implementation coordination.

Discussion and cross-cutting themes

Discussions throughout the Forum highlighted several recurring regional priorities:

- Strengthening harmonised regional data systems and indicators
- Balancing financial inclusion objectives with AML/CFT requirements
- Expanding digital public infrastructure and interoperability
- Strengthening financial capability, consumer trust and consumer protection
- Improving implementation, monitoring and accountability
- Leveraging non-bank and digital channels to reach underserved populations.

Delegates further emphasised the value of continued peer learning, regional cooperation and coordinated implementation in advancing the SADC financial inclusion agenda.





Introduction

Master of Ceremonies: Brendan Pearce, CEO of FinMark Trust

Opening Day 2 proceedings, Brendan reflected on the significance of the Forum's 10th anniversary and the progress achieved since its establishment.

He noted that when the Forum was first convened, financial inclusion was not yet firmly embedded within the regional policy agenda and relatively few member states had formal financial inclusion strategies. Over the past decade, however, financial inclusion has become a core component of regional and national development planning, supported by SADC structures, Ministers of Finance and a range of collaborative implementation initiatives.

While acknowledging the substantial gains made across the region, Brendan also noted that new risks and implementation challenges continue to emerge as financial systems evolve and digital financial services expand.

Updates on the SADC Transactions Cleared on Immediate Basis (TCIB) scheme

Tshepo Rakhibane

Head: Stakeholder Engagements Rest of Africa, PayInc

The session provided an update on the SADC Transactions Cleared on Immediate Basis (TCIB) scheme, positioning it as a key regional instant cross-border retail payment platform supporting payment system integration and financial inclusion.

PayInc outlined the ongoing repositioning of TCIB from a predominantly middle-mile payment service to a broader platform capable of supporting first-mile-to-last-mile payment flows.

Central to this transition is the planned hub-and-spoke model, which will connect domestic payment infrastructures into TCIB and expand accessibility, particularly in markets where local systems already support non-bank participation.

Current participation levels remain below the scheme's intended scale. TCIB currently has 47 members, of which seven are actively transacting. Active participants include CMA-linked banks as well as institutions in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana.



The presentation noted that adoption is expected to accelerate between 2026 and 2027 as regulatory engagement strengthens and implementation of the CMA directive progresses.

The hub-and-spoke rollout is expected to support operational readiness across approximately eight SADC member states by 2027. Zambia and Zimbabwe spokes are already connected, while engagement with Angola is underway.

The session also highlighted the importance of stronger regulator-led market mobilisation. Earlier onboarding constraints were attributed in part to implementation efforts driven primarily by the scheme itself rather than by broader regulatory engagement.

TCIB currently supports electronic payment use cases, including store-of-value transfers and account-to-account payments. However, merchant and person-to-business functionality remains under development and has been identified as a priority to increase transaction volumes and commercial relevance.

PayInc further noted that long-term sustainability will depend on broader participation, expanded use cases and migration from existing payment streams.

Several implementation challenges were highlighted, including:

- Differing national regulatory frameworks
- Balance of payments reporting requirements
- Licensing constraints affecting non-bank participation
- Technical onboarding complexity
- Settlement risk management.

To address these challenges, PayInc is developing technical onboarding playbooks for non-banks and money transfer operators, while also exploring omnibus settlement arrangements to reduce dependence on sponsor banks.

The roadmap for TCIB includes:

- Further rollout of the hub-and-spoke model
- Expanded payment functionality
- Enhanced AML and fraud management capabilities
- Strengthened governance arrangements
- Revised pricing structures to encourage broader adoption.

During the discussion, participants raised questions regarding governance arrangements and the balance between regional utility objectives and private-sector participation. PayInc clarified that TCIB is owned by SADC, with PayInc serving as scheme manager and regional clearing system operator.

In closing remarks, the SADC Secretariat reaffirmed that TCIB remains a strategic regional initiative supporting the implementation of the SADC Protocol on Finance and Investment, particularly Annex 6 on payment system integration.

Key follow-up actions identified during the session included:

- Strengthening regulatory engagement to support onboarding and corridor activation
- Expanding supported payment use cases
- Advancing settlement and interoperability enhancements
- Supporting non-bank participation frameworks
- Continuing to strengthen AML, sanctions screening and fraud management capabilities.

Panel discussion: Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and ecosystems – enhancing innovation and financial inclusion

Moderator: Desire Kachenje, Co-Develop

Panellists:

Arnaud Bazerque Bacha (Bank of Mauritius)

Nafissatou Diallo (Department of ICT, Seychelles)



The panel explored the role of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in advancing financial inclusion through interoperable, citizen-centred digital systems. Drawing on implementation experiences from Mauritius and Seychelles, the discussion focused on central KYC systems, national digital identity platforms and the broader implications of interoperable digital ecosystems for financial inclusion and regional integration within SADC.

The session noted a growing global shift away from isolated digitisation initiatives towards integrated digital ecosystems capable of delivering services at scale. DPI was described as the foundational digital systems that enable participation in the digital economy and support the delivery of public and private services across society.

Three core layers of DPI were highlighted:

- Payment systems
- Identity systems
- Data exchange platforms

International examples referenced included India's Aadhaar, Brazil's Pix and Estonia's X-Road platform, while acknowledging that African countries are increasingly emerging as leaders in applying DPI to development and inclusion priorities.

The Co-Develop Fund highlighted its collaboration with FinMark Trust on the SADC eKYC initiative, which aims to reduce onboarding barriers, strengthen cross-border trust and improve access to financial services for underserved populations. Similar interoperability initiatives are also underway in other African regions, including ECOWAS.

Mauritius central KYC platform

The Bank of Mauritius presented the rationale and implementation approach underpinning its Central KYC (CKYC) platform. The initiative was developed in response to both market demand for streamlined customer due diligence processes and regulatory requirements associated with FATF compliance obligations.

Mauritius adopted a federated, switch-based architecture rather than a centralised data repository model. Under this approach, the Bank of Mauritius functions as a secure connector that routes queries in real time to authoritative data sources, including the Central Population Database, police systems, utility providers and, in future phases, the Global Business Companies database.

The session noted that this architecture reduces risks associated with outdated records, preserves institutional ownership of source data and improves data integrity across participating institutions.

Strong emphasis was placed on governance and consent management. Customer consent is mandatory before any query is executed, with consent records centrally stored and subject to audit oversight. Access governance is jointly administered by the Bank of Mauritius and the Financial Services Commission, depending on the type of regulated entity accessing the platform.

The platform currently operates on a closed private network rather than the public internet, reducing cyber exposure risks. Approximately 50 institutions are already connected, including banks, non-bank deposit-taking institutions and payment service providers.

Operational benefits observed to date include:

- Streamlined digital onboarding
- Automated KYC refresh processes
- Faster account opening for customers with existing population records.

Future development plans include extending coverage to foreign nationals and integrating global screening tools such as LexisNexis and World-Check to strengthen AML compliance processes.

Seychelles national digital identity platform

The Seychelles Department of ICT presented the country's national digital identity platform, CyD/SeyID, launched in 2022 under the Digital Economy Steering Agenda.

The platform is built on the national Civil Status system and provides a government-backed digital identity linked to authoritative records.

Foundational components supporting DPI-enabled financial inclusion in Seychelles include:

- Nationwide digital connectivity infrastructure
- A national digital identity layer
- A developing national payments layer
- Interoperable data exchange infrastructure
- A data protection framework established under the Seychelles Data Protection Act (2023)
- Digital literacy and public awareness initiatives
- Emerging dispute resolution and fraud management mechanisms.

While no financial institution has yet achieved full system-to-system integration with CyD, substantial progress has been recorded. In 2025, the Central Bank of Seychelles formally recognised the CyD virtual identity card as a valid KYC credential for regulated financial institutions. Banks are now being encouraged to integrate CyD into onboarding processes on a voluntary but strongly supported basis.

The presentation also highlighted the platform's layered security architecture, including:

- Liveness verification during registration
- Multi-factor authentication
- PKCE protection
- TLS encryption
- PKI infrastructure
- Real-time consent notifications for third-party access requests.

Regional implementation considerations

Across both country experiences, several shared implementation challenges were identified:

- Legislative and regulatory misalignment across jurisdictions
- Complexities associated with consent management at scale
- Fragmented government registries and inconsistent data standards
- Digital literacy gaps, particularly among vulnerable populations
- Increasing fraud and identity theft risks, including AI-enabled fraud
- Public resistance and low trust in digital systems
- Smartphone dependency excluding lower-income populations

- Conservative adoption approaches within the banking sector
- Inconsistent source data formats complicate interoperability.

Participants agreed that legal and regulatory harmonisation remains one of the most significant barriers to regional eKYC implementation and cross-border interoperability within SADC.

Key lessons and emerging priorities

Several lessons emerged from the discussion:

- Strong political and institutional commitment is critical for successful DPI implementation
- Building public trust and institutional coordination is often more complex than technical deployment
- Digital literacy must form part of core implementation planning
- Consent management and audit functionality should be incorporated into the system design from inception
- Federated or switch-based architectures may offer stronger governance and security outcomes than centralised data storage models
- DPI initiatives should begin with a focused implementation scope and scale incrementally
- Fraud prevention requires both technical safeguards and behavioural awareness interventions.

Audience discussion focused strongly on fraud, identity theft and public confidence in digital systems. Participants raised concerns regarding social engineering scams and impersonation risks associated with digital onboarding.

Panellists emphasised the importance of combining digital literacy initiatives with technical controls such as biometric verification, liveness detection, source-based verification and consent-driven access management. The moderator concluded that responding to AI-enabled fraud will require both technological safeguards and stronger public awareness.

The session further noted that lessons emerging from Mauritius and Seychelles are directly informing the wider SADC eKYC initiative currently being implemented through the Committee of Central Bank Governors with support from the Co-Develop Fund. Country-level consultations are already underway to support the development of a regional eKYC framework.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Secure high-level political commitment prior to implementation of DPI initiatives
- Adopt federated or switch-based architectures for central KYC systems
- Integrate consent management and audit capabilities into system design from inception
- Implement DPI initiatives incrementally, beginning with a minimum viable scope
- Strengthen digital literacy and awareness programmes alongside technical deployment
- Provide clear regulatory recognition of digital identity credentials for KYC purposes
- Embed biometric verification and liveness detection into onboarding processes
- Prioritise regional harmonisation of data protection, consent and cross-border data-sharing frameworks
- Ensure multilingual accessibility of DPI-related communication and documentation across the SADC region.

Beyond access – what does financial health mean for our region?

Bobby Berkowitz

Senior Data and Analytics Specialist, FinMark Trust



The working session examined the concept of financial health within the context of the SADC Financial Inclusion and SME Access to Finance Strategy (2023–2028) and explored how the region can move beyond measuring financial access alone towards assessing broader developmental outcomes.

The session formed part of wider reflections on progress in regional financial inclusion over the past decade. Participants considered a central challenge emerging from this work. While access to financial services has expanded significantly across the SADC region, these gains have not consistently translated into improved financial resilience, economic security or sustainable livelihood outcomes.

The facilitator noted that existing financial inclusion metrics successfully track indicators such as account ownership, mobile money adoption, service availability and regulatory reform. However, these measures provide limited insight into whether households and businesses are financially secure, resilient to shocks or able to build assets and plan for the future.

Financial health was presented as the next phase in the evolution of financial inclusion – shifting focus from measuring access to assessing whether financial systems are improving people's lived economic outcomes.

The discussion distinguished between several related concepts:

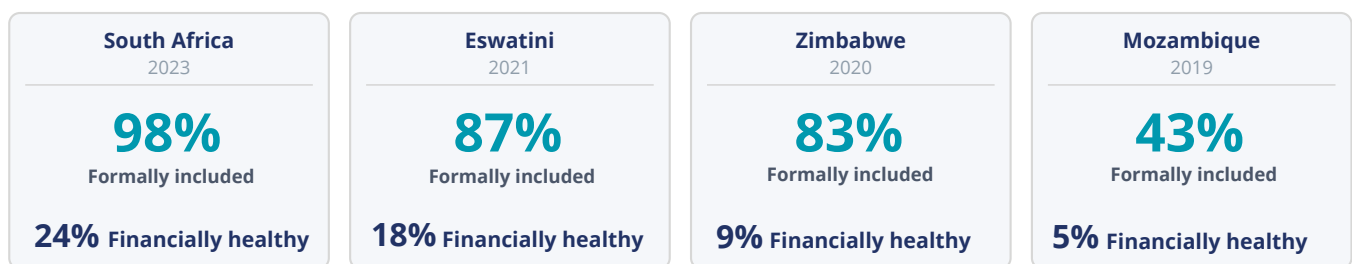
- Financial literacy: what people know
- Financial capability: how people apply financial knowledge
- Financial health: the ability to manage financial affairs effectively
- Financial well-being: perceptions and confidence regarding financial circumstances
- Financial resilience: the ability to absorb and recover from shocks.

The framework used during the session focused on four dimensions of financial health:

- Day-to-day financial management
- Capacity to withstand shocks
- Progress towards long-term goals
- Financial confidence and agency.

The session further emphasised that financial services alone do not determine financial health outcomes. Income levels, employment stability, geography, climate vulnerability and social support systems all influence financial well-being.

Recent FinScope findings were used to illustrate the gap between financial inclusion and financial health outcomes across the region. Examples shared included:



The session noted that financial inclusion can, in some instances, worsen vulnerability where products such as credit increase indebtedness without strengthening resilience.

Group discussions

Participants were divided into breakout groups focusing on consumer and MSME financial health.

Consumer-focused discussions explored:

- Debt sustainability
- Ability to absorb unexpected financial shocks
- Economic participation
- Reliance on harmful coping mechanisms during crises.

Climate-related shocks, including floods and cyclones, featured prominently in discussions.

Participants highlighted limitations in existing insurance and savings mechanisms, particularly where informal support systems collapse during widespread community-level crises.

MSME-focused groups examined:

- Cash flow management
- Business resilience
- Capacity for growth
- The relationship between household and business finances.

Participants noted that household and enterprise finances are often deeply interconnected in SADC contexts, complicating both measurement approaches and policy responses.

Recurring barriers identified across discussions included:

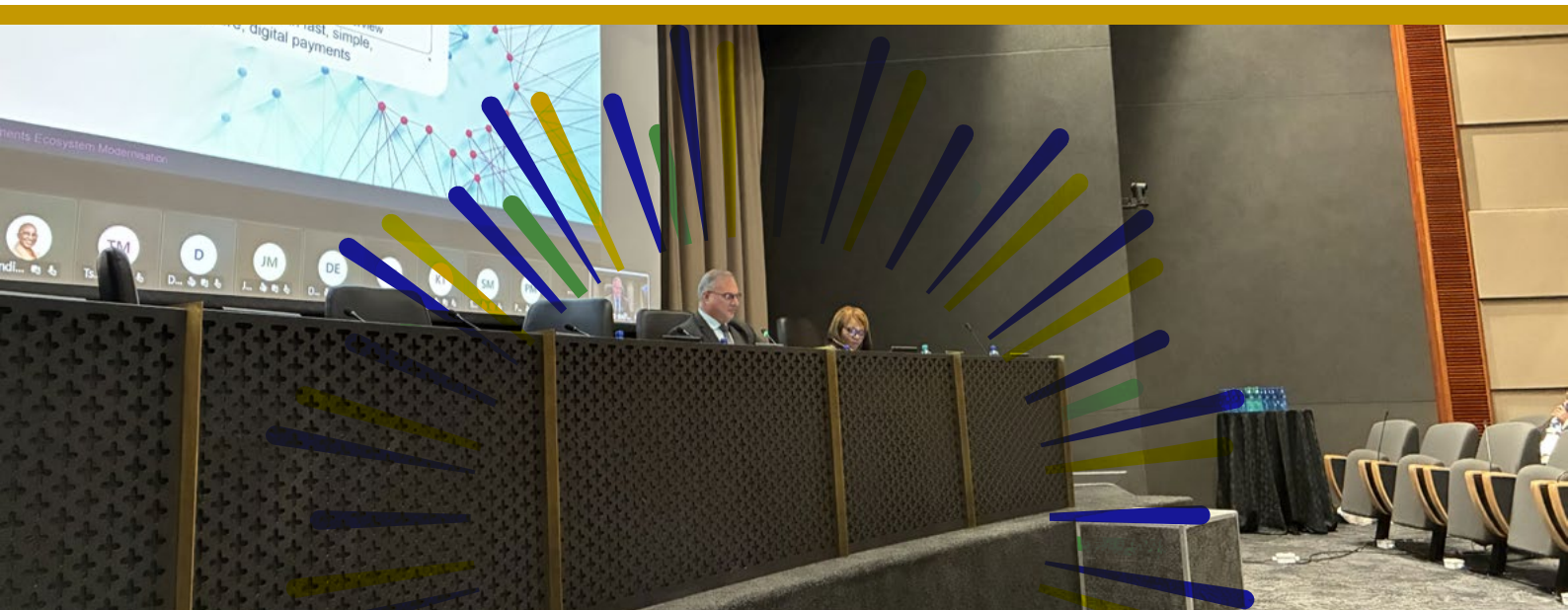
- Limited infrastructure and digital access
- Low levels of trust and financial literacy
- Weak legal and regulatory frameworks
- Rising living and borrowing costs
- Limited insurance uptake
- Inadequate MSME data systems
- Limited regional financing mechanisms focused on MSME development
- Weak business and financial management capabilities among survivalist enterprises.

Discussion synthesis and next steps

In closing reflections, the facilitator observed that discussions consistently returned to the relationship between financial services and broader development outcomes.

A central theme emerging from the session was that financial access alone does not guarantee improved resilience, financial security or economic opportunity. Participants emphasised the importance of complementary factors such as income stability, appropriate product design, insurance coverage, digital literacy and supportive public policy.

The session was positioned as an initial step towards developing a longer-term regional framework for measuring financial health outcomes within SADC.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a regional financial health measurement framework aligned to SADC development priorities
- Expand financial inclusion metrics beyond access indicators to include resilience and long-term well-being outcomes
- Strengthen understanding of the relationship between financial products and developmental outcomes
- Recognise the interconnected nature of household and MSME finances in policy and product design
- Integrate climate resilience considerations into financial health frameworks
- Improve data collection relating to resilience, shocks and long-term financial outcomes
- Continue regional dialogue on how financial inclusion can better support sustainable livelihoods and inclusive economic development.

Financial inclusion capacity building programme – Building Africa's capacity for responsible inclusive financial systems

Bobby Berkowitz and Todd Malone

Senior Analytics Specialist, FinMark Trust
Chief Executive Officer, Digital Frontiers



The session introduced a proposed Africa- and SADC-focused financial inclusion capacity building programme designed to strengthen institutional capacity for responsible and inclusive financial system development.

The presenters outlined the rationale for the programme, noting that despite significant gains in financial inclusion, approximately 23% of the population across Africa and SADC remains financially excluded. Challenges related to MSME access to finance and broader financial health outcomes also persist.

The programme was presented as an implementation-oriented model intended to move beyond traditional training approaches toward practical institutional application and long-term organisational impact.

Programme structure

PHASE 1 Foundational learning	PHASE 2 Intensive use case development	PHASE 3 Peer learning and post-programme support
Self-paced online learning developed jointly by FinMark Trust and Digital Frontiers, incorporating practical adult-learning methodologies and tailored learning pathways. Content development partners include CGAP, the Center for Financial Inclusion, AFI and Tufts/Fletcher School.	A five-day residential workshop in South Africa focused on practical application and institutional use case development. Participants engage in thematic masterclasses and specialised elective tracks covering policy and regulatory innovation and digital product design.	Ongoing support over approximately two years through peer learning networks, facilitated knowledge exchange sessions and access to expert support. Success measured by institutional implementation outcomes rather than certification alone.

The programme is intended for:

- Central banks and regulators
- Government ministries
- Financial service providers and fintechs
- Development finance institutions and development agencies.

Indicative thematic focus areas include:

- Digital Public Infrastructure
- Climate finance and climate risk
- MSME finance
- Financial health
- Digital financial services and digital currencies
- Consumer financial protection
- Financial inclusion data and analytics.

Discussion and feedback

The SADC Secretariat welcomed the initiative and noted its alignment with regional financial inclusion priorities.

The SADC Digital Finance Research Centre (DFRC) highlighted its own mandate and recent launch of the DFA Academy, which similarly focuses on practical, implementation-oriented learning. DFRC proposed further engagement with FinMark Trust regarding potential collaboration and co-design of digital financial services-related content.

Participants also discussed the decision to host the residential component in South Africa. Presenters confirmed that this decision was based primarily on regional travel affordability considerations.

Delegates were invited to complete a survey to provide feedback on programme relevance, willingness to participate, institutional priorities and potential funding considerations.

Next steps

- Participants to complete the programme feedback survey
- FinMark Trust to assess demand and participant interest
- FinMark Trust to engage further with the SADC DFRC on potential collaboration
- Ongoing partnership discussions with the SADC Secretariat to continue
- Detailed programme planning to proceed, subject to regional interest and partner engagement
- Tentative programme launch targeted for late 2026.

Closing remarks

Brendan Pearce

Chief Executive Officer, FinMark Trust



The closing session provided delegates with an opportunity to reflect on the two-day Forum, discuss priorities for future collaboration and reaffirm commitment to the regional financial inclusion agenda.

The SADC Secretariat emphasised the importance of moving from discussion to implementation and proposed that future work should focus strongly on tracking progress against Forum recommendations.

A delegate from Lesotho reflected on the importance of the Forum in revitalising momentum around the regional financial inclusion agenda. The delegate noted that member states had continued implementation efforts even during periods when the Forum was less active and committed Lesotho to continued participation irrespective of the availability of external funding.

Magauta Mphahlele, representing the Southern African Communications Regulators' Association (SACRA) and the Financial Sector Conduct Authority (FSCA) Consumer Advisory Panel, highlighted SACRA's work on credit and risk reporting frameworks across the region, including benchmarking engagements with Lesotho and Botswana. She also outlined efforts to establish a national, centralised business information reporting framework to enable MSMEs to build credit profiles in their business names.

FinMark Trust confirmed that the Forum remains open to participation from industry associations and welcomed SACRA as a full participant in future engagements. Credit information and MSME financing were identified as priority areas for future Forum programming.

The SADC Director acknowledged progress made over the past decade in raising awareness, advocacy and regional coordination on financial inclusion. However, the Director also highlighted the need for stronger monitoring and accountability mechanisms to track implementation of the SADC Financial Inclusion Strategy across member states. Data governance and cybersecurity were identified as additional priority areas requiring sustained regional attention.

In his closing reflections, Brendan Pearce noted that financial inclusion across the region increased from approximately 50% to 75% over the past decade. He observed that the regional conversation has evolved significantly from a primary focus on access and regulation toward deeper discussions on outcomes, Digital Public Infrastructure, eKYC and MSME finance. He described this evolution as the next phase of regional financial inclusion, focused on understanding how financial inclusion can contribute to measurable improvements in livelihoods, resilience and economic participation.

The closing remarks also stressed the importance of collaboration beyond the financial sector, including engagement with communications regulators, identity authorities and other government institutions.

Delegates were encouraged to continue leveraging regional institutional capacity, including organisations such as SACRA and academic partners, while recognising the critical coordinating role played by the SADC Secretariat.

Acknowledgements

The closing session concluded with appreciation to all delegates, speakers and partners for their participation and ongoing commitment to advancing financial inclusion across the SADC region.





2026 Forum Report



Commemorating 10 Years of Regional Financial Inclusion

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