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DOES **ADVOCACY** HAVE A **FUTURE?**



**Civic voice, shrinking space, and the path
ahead for advocacy organisations in SADC**

Presented by Mokaloba Mokaloba

Key Actors in Making Advocacy Work

An increasingly diverse, overlapping set of actors — each key to the work.



CSOs – Local, Organised

The heartbeat of advocacy, taking leading roles.



Informed Citizens

Citizens aware of their rights and willing to take an active role in influencing change.



Media and Academia

Key drivers of information, awareness and knowledge – shaping perceptions.



Faith & traditional leaders

Deep community legitimacy on social-norm issues.



Government Officials

Policy makers, hold legislative power under which other players operate.



International NGOs / Multi-lateral Agencies

Better engagement with policy makers, better access to financing, work better in coalition with local partners.

Case Studies: Advocacy That Worked

Selected campaigns with documented policy or legislative outcomes.

Country	Organisation(s)	Issue	Outcome
Botswana	BOCONGO and MOTHEO O MOSHA	The government had initiated a constitutional amendment bill that had many clauses that the civil society did not agree to. There was also complaints against the lack of consultation of the civic society in the process	Civil society mobilized parliamentarians and other stakeholders, and the bill was rejected in parliament (2023–2024)
Malawi	Malawi - UN Women (Malawi), Girls not Brides Partnership	Child marriage	2015 Act raised marriage age to 18; 2024 national strategy (2012–2024)
South Africa	Sonke Gender Justice (South Africa)	Weak institutional coordination of GBVF response	National Council on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Act (2017–2024)
Zambia	MISA Zambia, ATI Coalition, Chapter One Foundation, TI-Z, Alliance for Community Action	Limited public access to government information and weak transparency	Access to Information Act No.24 of 2023 (2000s to 2023)
Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe Environmental Law Organisation (ZELO)	Outdated mining legislation	Mines & Minerals Bill (2025)

Patterns Across the Cases: What Made the Difference

The wins and the setbacks side by side.

What makes campaigns succeed

- Sustained, multi-year coalitions outlast single campaigns – most advocacy campaigns take time and require persistence to win
- A combination of interventions multiplies pressure (media, litigation, direct engagements)
- Clear, narrow policy asks are easier to win than broad reform (one Act vs. a regulatory regime)
- Local/ Community grounding helps build legitimacy

What makes campaigns stall or fail

- Perception – where advocacy campaigns are viewed as threat to government, moving away from issues needing attention
- Initial concessions can be reversed once urgency fades (underscoring the need for persistence)
- One-off mobilisation without a durable coalition loses momentum after the moment passes
- Regime change can weaken a cause when office bearers change priorities

Questions worth pondering

- *When does legislative delay count as a win — and when is it just a postponed defeat?*
- *How durable are our coalitions if a friendly government or donor cycle changes?*
- *Are we equipped to contest “security”-framed legislation, not just openly repressive laws?*

Common Threats Observed - SADC

Civic space is contracting across the region — CIVICUS Monitor, 2025.

80%+

of people in SADC countries live under
"repressed" or "closed" civic space

14 / 16

SADC countries rated obstructed,
repressed or closed

5

SADC states with new or proposed
restrictive CSO laws in 2026

- Legal & regulatory restriction — Cumbersome NGO registration, funding chokeholds and protest-permit laws (Zimbabwe, Botswana examples)
- Digital repression — shutdowns, surveillance, prosecution for online speech
- The Funding Trap and Mission Drift — narrow donor base, shifting priorities, limiting financial contributions from outside under the pretext of money laundering / terrorism
- Fragmentation — competition weakens grassroots reach
- Judicial Harassment and Arbitrary Arrests

Advocacy Interventions That Work

A well-established, steadily expanding toolkit.



Evidence & policy briefs

Data dashboards and research to ground demands.



Coalition-building

Pooling legitimacy and reach across issue areas.



Strategic litigation

Using courts to compel action or set precedent.



Community mobilisation

Grassroots organising, town halls, faith structures.



Digital campaigning

Hashtag movements, rapid-response online mobilisation.



Media & narrative framing

Shaping public understanding, reducing stigma.



Direct engagement

Lobbying legislators, ministries and regional bodies.



Monitoring & accountability

Scorecards and budget-tracking on implementation.

What Does the Future Look Like?

1

From institutions to networks

Formal CSOs and think tanks operate alongside agile, digital movements.

2

A harder, more digital civic space

Legal and digital restriction is the likely baseline, not a temporary dip.

3

Data-driven, localised evidence

Locally generated data becomes a key source of credibility.

4

Diversified, Africa-rooted financing

Domestic philanthropy and pooled funds reduce single-donor dependence.

5

Youth and gender at the centre

Shared leadership with younger, grassroots actors — not just consultation.

6

Regional & continental coordination

Cross-border issues need AU / SADC-level advocacy alignment.

Does Advocacy Have a Future?

The case for yes

- Real, durable wins keep happening — Malawi child rights (2012-2024)
- The toolkit keeps expanding — digital mobilisation, litigation, coalitions
- Local and International coalitions keep emerging

The case for concern

- Civic space is measurably shrinking across nearly every SADC state
- Wins are increasingly partial or at times reversed — Zambia's 2025 cyber laws, Zimbabwe's PVO Amendment Act
- Funding volatility and legal risk are rising at the same time

Yes — but not the same future. Advocacy in SADC survives by adapting: hybrid coalitions, resilient financing, legal preparedness, and a sharper focus on implementation, not just legislative wins.

Key Takeaway

Advocacy in Africa is entering a more contested, more digital and more youth-driven phase, against a civic environment that is becoming more restrictive, not less.

Organisations that combine rigorous evidence, genuine coalition-building, financial independence and organisational resilience will be best placed to convert civic voice into durable policy change over the next decade.

The Future of Advocacy in Africa

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