

Prospects for the Southern African Development  
Community: A Political Economy Approach

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## **ABSTRACT**

The end of the Cold War globally and the anti-apartheid struggle in Southern Africa has created a more complex rather than simplified political economy of Southern Africa. This paper argues that the complex mix of localist tendencies, including cultural and ethnic nationalism, on the one hand, old style economic nationalism on the other and above all else global processes from which even Southern Africa is excluded occur according to rules, patterns and outcomes that are still not fully understood. Using the concept of 'global disconnect' from James Ferguson's ethnography of decline the paper suggests that the shift from liberation ideology to a neoliberal agenda that is more global than local has created for Africa and the SADC countries, relationships resembling those of colonialism. If this is an accurate representation of the investment patterns, resource distribution and entitlements generally, then issues of self-determination will develop alongside those of objective and irresistible globalisation with great potential for a variety of conflict scenarios. The solution must lie in combining local self-determination/decentralisation within the expanding boundaries of the SADC region.

## Introduction

The pace of change in Southern Africa over the past decade has been very rapid. While political transformation provided much cause for celebration and optimism that the attainment of peace and democracy in the region would usher in a new era of economic growth and development, this has not occurred. On the contrary, a prolonged economic crisis has started to impact negatively on the democratic achievements that marked the end of apartheid in South Africa and the return to multi-party politics in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. Indeed the end of the Cold War and South African intervention has not brought peace to Angola, instead the Angolan conflict has escalated and now threatens to spill over into neighbouring countries.

From its inception, the process of economic integration in Africa has had a highly political agenda and the origins of SADC in the liberation struggle are well known. For the Frontline States implementing the OAU mandate of ending colonial rule and apartheid in southern Africa, SADC was an economic bloc designed to promote collective self-reliance and reduce dependence on apartheid South Africa. A Cold War scenario however suggests that it was also a Scandinavian-led Marshall Plan for the economies of the countries devastated by the liberation war to compensate them for the losses incurred in the liberation struggle as much as to keep them out of the Soviet orbit (Amin, D. Chitala and I. Mandaza: 8). It should however be stressed that even without the need for an anti-apartheid alliance, there would have been some form of economic integration based on the very nature of capitalist economies to outgrow national and other boundaries, the colonial legacy of multinational mining firms that operated across the region, the interconnected railways and common British currency over much of the region. It was only with the attainment of independence in the 1960s that most national borders attained an economic and political reality. Ironically, colonialism that was based politically on the principle of 'divide and rule' had higher levels of economic integration based on the goal of 'unite

and exploit'. In contrast, political Pan-Africanism tended to go with economic nationalism as each country attempted to implement its own development programmes. The failure of national development plans in many countries has re-emphasised the need for economic integration in a globalised world that increasingly excludes poor countries from the benefits of new technologies. The paper will be divided into three parts, the first looks at the promising start that Southern Africa made after the end of apartheid and the democratic and economic reforms made by several countries in the region. This will be followed by a discussion of the political instability that currently divides the SADC countries and threaten to hold back the pace of reconstruction. The paper will then look at the problem of uneven development globally and locally and how globalisation does not mean greater interconnection. A process of global disconnect and redlining actually means more isolation for African countries. In attempting to reverse this, economic integration will be crucial

### **The Elusive Peace Dividend**

With the holding of democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 the SADC region appeared poised for a period of stability and renewal. The prospects for peace looked good after the end of the total onslaught policies of destabilisation which had wreaked havoc in Mozambique and Angola. If during the early period of the transition war subsided in Angola and Mozambique, South Africa itself was characterised by violence. The optimism was justified however due to the democratisation of one party regimes in Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi and the economic reforms that were being implemented across the region.

The feel good feeling has not lasted in most of the SADC countries. In the case of Angola, the end of destabilisation by apartheid South Africa has not brought peace and Africa's longest running war continues to produce thousands of refugees, internally displaced people and has made much of Angola a famine stricken and war weary country. The immense wealth produced

by oil and diamonds exports has mainly gone to finance the war effort of the Angolan government and Jonas Savimbi's UNITA respectively. The Angolan war threatens to spill-over into Zambia and incidents on the border have raised tension between the two countries. On 25 May, 2000, Zambia's President, Frederick Chiluba, warned the Angolan government that his country's forces would hit back if Zambia was provoked beyond tolerance following 'incessant attacks in the north western and western Zambia (news24.co.za 30 May 2000). Angola for its part has accused elements in Zambia of supporting UNITA.

Political instability in Zambia always escalates during elections. In 1996 there were serious disagreements over the constitutional amendments which were seen as giving the incumbent president an unfair advantage over his rivals. Although western governments tried to influence the Zambian government by with-holding aid they failed. Offers from president Mandela and other SADC leaders of mediation to settled the disagreements between the ruling MMD and the opposition were spurned by president Chiluba. The leading opposition party UNIP boycotted the elections. The MMD retained power by a big margin and soon after arrested opposition leaders Kaunda and Mungomba accusing them of complicity in an abortive coup. Most of the politicians were later released. With even more crucial elections due in 2001 Zambia politicians have already started positioning themselves to contest the presidency. Although president Chiluba is obliged to step down after his two terms under the current constitution, the Namibian example shows that the constitution may be amended to give him a third term. In the mean time opposition leaders have been under constant harassment and there is little that SADC structures can do about it without interfering in the internal affairs of a sovereign country. It is not just internal conflict that poses problems for SADC, indeed the intervention in Lesotho which re-established law and order was interference into an internal matter. Even where SADC members states are involved in war the role of fellow members has been problematic.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has also been a source of

instability in SADC and has the potential to become a prolonged conflict. The DRC's membership in SADC might be questioned given its location in Central Africa. It is however tied to Southern Africa through the colonial mining and transport networks and is an important market for South African, Zimbabwean and Zambian exporters. The DRC is also a potential supplier of surplus water and hydroelectric power to other SADC countries. It is understandable then that Zimbabwe and Namibia (and Zambia as a peace broker) have become involved in the war in the Congo. For Zimbabwe, the intervention in the Congo though it has probably prevented a Ugandan and Rwandan take over has been extremely costly. Zimbabwe like Zambia has reverted to its colonial position vis a vis South Africa though this relationship was never systematically challenged by development planners as it was in Zambia. Whereas Zambia attempted to break free of southern African economic structures, become more self-reliant and trade with East Africa for alternative partnerships, Zimbabwe retained its strong ties to South Africa. Delayed renewal of a trade pact had great negative impact on Zimbabwe's manufacturing industry and forced it to reluctantly look for alternative markets.

Generally stable and well managed, Zimbabwe's economy responded to reforms and good rains in 1995/96 coupled with a boom in tourism and the construction industry. The high unemployment rates have however made the government of president Mugabe unpopular especially in the urban areas. Zimbabwe continues to be the region's second even with the massive disruptions to the agricultural cycle caused by the land occupations. The fuel shortage and hostile international reaction to the political situation in Zimbabwe, especially in America, has also affected the economic prospects for the country. SADC countries have expressed their concern about the Zimbabwe democracy bill that the US Senate has passed and have jointly lobbied the US authorities to reverse it.

Although a de facto one party state since independence in 1980, Zimbabwe nevertheless has strong trade unions and NGOs which managed to put together

a formidable opposition in the form of the MDC. The political violence that was generated by the MDC's challenge to the ZANU-PF resulting in the loss of life and a break-down of law and order. The return to normalcy has been slow but again the SADC role was not very visible and certainly there was more protest at the loss of life from Europe and America than from other African countries.

A border dispute between Botswana and Namibia has been settled peacefully at the International Court of Justice at The Hague in favour of Botswana. Ideally, this small matter of the unpopulated island on the Chobe river that forms the border between the two countries should have been resolved using SADC conflict prevention mechanisms. Nevertheless war between the two neighbours no longer appears likely, though the potential for conflict still exists in this part of the region. Namibia still faces a suppressed secessionist movement in Eastern Caprivi close to the Zambian border. This conflict may develop into a wider one with the Zambia's Western Province, which is also agitating for greater autonomy mainly due to the Lozi elite's perceived exclusion from power. The aim of the rebels in the Caprivi and the Lozi nationalists in Western Zambia may or may not be to form a unified new state of Barotseland. I will suggest that such localist tendencies are not a threat to 'national unity' and should be incorporated into the regional integration process as an answer to one major problem caused by exclusion from global processes.

Given this unflattering overview of simmering conflict in SADC the role of its Organ on Politics, Defence and Security has become crucial for the stability of the region and SADC Foreign Affairs ministers have examined a draft protocol, which will define the organ's structures, procedures and responsibilities and make it more effective for 'co-ordinating the policies and activities of member states' which was to be submitted to the Heads of State and Government at the SADC summit held in Windhoek Namibia in August 2000 (news24.co.za 30 May 2000, 1). Experts on the politics of the SADC security mechanisms such as Naison Ngoma and Mwesiga Baregu are still

analysing the negotiations around the Organ, but the main contenders for control appear to be Zimbabwe and South Africa.

To monitor, resolve and prevent conflicts will clearly be a full time occupation of SADC governments. Attempts to bring peace to the DRC and Angola have failed so far but regional peace keeping and security is a problem that involves the United Nations and other global players who share part of the blame. What is missing is a common understanding of the needs of member states in SADC. At present, the DRC and Angolan conflicts have exposed differences (based on competing interests) between the key players South Africa and Zimbabwe. SADC security and peace keeping structures will need to be redefined and their capacity enhanced if the region is to be made stable.

The land question in Zimbabwe has understandably been likened to that in other settler societies in the region. For Namibia and South Africa, uneven human development inherited from the past continues to be the single most powerful influence on political life. While South Africa continues to be a violent place, political killings more or less ended after the 1994 elections and negotiated agreements in Kwazulu-Natal. Criminal violence against women and children, drug dealing and armed robbery continue to hold the majority of the population in a state of fear provoking vigilante groups and pro-hanging lobbies to accuse the ANC government of being weak on crime. The rates of violent crime can seriously affect the development of tourism but this is not a problem that can be fully tackled without a regional strategy. This is true of most of the sources of instability in southern Africa.

South Africa for example has played a major role in peace initiatives but has also has been accused of fuelling violence in other countries and media reports have it that South African arms are to be found in the Sudan-Uganda border conflict, Rwanda, Burundi and other war zones. Although not directly connected to the state, the private companies that provide military training

and security services like Executive Outcomes have also been a source of instability as they are active in African countries where the state has collapsed and been replaced by informal structures: Angola, DRC, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The link between political instability and the diamonds industry in West Africa makes the achievements of Botswana and Namibia contrast with the chaos in the countries producing conflict diamonds such as Angola and DRC.

As a regional power that is reluctant to impose its will upon smaller countries forcing them into compliance with any sort of regional or international agenda, South Africa nevertheless continues to influence SADC politics directly or indirectly through its private companies. The global campaign against conflict diamonds' cannot but tarnish the image of De Beers which dominates the world's diamonds market. In Angola and other states with collapsed states conflicts have prevented people from realising their economic potential and foreign interference is a major cause of poverty. Very low levels of Human Development have resulted from the chaos that results from war. The campaign against 'blood' or conflict diamonds may deny UNITA of the foreign exchange with which to finance the war but there does not seem to be any end in sight to the Angolan war in the absence of a political solution.

The ever present threat of ethnocide and civil war in Rwanda and Burundi has spilt into the DRC and fed up with receiving refugees from Burundi where the army is the greatest source of insecurity for the majority of Burundi, the countries of the region applied economic sanctions against the Buyoya regime. The aim of the sanctions was to force the soldiers to talk to and eventually hand power back to the civilian government they had overthrown but again the power of SADC to influence political processes even in small countries has been seriously tested although the peace talks in Burundi have made some progress since Nelson Mandela became the mediator between the Tutsi military government and the Hutu rebels. If the SADC region is politically unstable, the economic situation is equally serious as will be

briefly spelt out below.

### **Globalisation, disconnect and redlining**

The dependencia school of political economy and especially Egyptian economist Samir Amin postulated “delinking” from the global imperialist system as a way of reducing historic dependency and unequal development (Amin, S. 1987. ‘Preface’, in S. Amin, D. Chitala and I. Mandaza (eds)). As if to turn Amin on his head, the global economy has become detached from much of Africa and relegated many countries to a fate worse than dependency, a situation that Ferguson refers to as disconnection. Unlike delinking, disconnection is actually a relationship in which one side hangs up on the other without necessarily cutting the link. Using the example of the liquidation of Zambia Airways in 1996 and the replacement of its flights to Frankfurt, Rome, New York and London with only the British Airways flight to London as the remaining overseas connection, Ferguson refers to this as a failure of modernisation and humiliating expulsion from the rest of the world.

Given the minuscule contribution of African economies to global trade, a gloomy process of decline and abjection rather than new forms of world-wide interconnection and globalisation is what the capitalist economy has come to in declining economies where people experience a sense of disconnection and of having been cast down back into the second class status from which independence had delivered them (Ferguson, : 237-9). Analysing the process of redlining by which countries like Zambia are excluded from development in the neoliberal new world order, Ferguson describes the sense of frustration which the workers on the Copperbelt feel at having been denied access to modernisation. What he does not go into but which is clear from the way ethnic politics have been developing in many parts of Africa is that rebellions against the central state in Angola, DRC and other countries as well as the demands for increased regional autonomy in Zambia, Namibia and other countries are driven by this sense of abjection, of being excluded

from development and being second class citizens. The political conflict so generated can be blamed on the way economic development has been implemented in southern Africa.

The privatisation of Zambia's state owned enterprises for example, has been followed by the importation of foreign managers. This has created tensions within the privatised industries but also in the society at large as Zambians have found themselves barred from hotels and restaurants just like in the bad old colonial days. The regional integration process can be held back by the development of colonial relations between South Africa, the most powerful economy in the region and the countries in which its businesses have recently invested. The interdependence of the region is recognised by everyone but the uneven development is usually ignored. It is likely to be a source of tension between member states if there is no formula for redressing the imbalances. As the SADC website notes, "The challenge for SADC is how as a regional organisation it can bring about accelerated economic growth, create more jobs and reduce poverty so that its peoples can lead higher quality life." Since the growth rates achieved by SADC economies fall below the 6 percent required to reverse unemployment and unless the immense potential of the region is untapped by investors, the majority of the SADC population will continue to be poverty stricken. This situation is politically explosive.

## **Conclusion**

One does not wish to be too pessimistic and I hope the other papers to be presented in this workshop will highlight the successes scored in SADC economies nationally and collectively. The Mozambican economy for example has been praised as an example of successful structural adjustment and a rapidly growing economy. Zimbabwe despite the economic problems that have resulted from its military expedition to Congo and the violent elections still has a well organised economy and the potential to make a recovery. Although the Zimbabwean crisis has some unique features the unequal land distribution and the high unemployment are nevertheless shared with other SADC countries.

Democratic elections, in many SADC countries highlight the state's weaknesses. They thus are likely to exacerbate social tensions and may even lead to violence. Zimbabwe may be an extreme example but other countries have also had destabilising elections. Similarly, privatisation though justified as a way of attracting new investment by reducing the role of the state in the economy also diminishes the opportunities for the ruling elites and workers alike and unless there is rapid job creation in countries that implement economic reforms, the competition for political office will continue to be a desperate struggle for control of the only remaining source of power in poor countries, the state. As the dispersal of Angolan, Congolese and other refugees shows, conflict in one country will always affect neighbouring countries in one way or another. The SADC region continues to promise development if the right political and economic conditions prevail, releasing its full potential will not be an easy task.

Although I have not referred to it here, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is the single most serious threat that the SADC region faces and just as peace and security initiatives and economic development strategies require regional cooperation so too does a campaign against AIDS.

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