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BRIEFS

UNCTAD XI and Africa

The 11th session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development opened on 14 June 2004 in Sao Paulo, Brazil. President Lula, the official host of UNCTAD XI, called on leaders of developing countries to build a 'new geography of trade' that has at its core South-South trade and co-operation. Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, as well as a high-level plenary session immediately afterwards on the 'New Geography of Trade', Lula invited developing countries to join Brazil in building a new world order capable of producing prosperity with social justice.

He underlined that such a 'new world geography' would provide an alternative path to the traditional European and US views of trade agreements. However, 'Western states will not make trade concessions merely because the South demands them – what is needed is a political force that can change the face of international relations'. Lula insisted that the Global System of Trade Preferences (GSTP) originally created in 1980s, could be 'reinvigorated', allowing developing countries to eliminate trade barriers among themselves without the need to extend this privilege to rich countries of the North. Countries of the South presently account for over 10% of global trade.

The Brazilian president claims that 43 countries have signed the GSTP, including Chile and France, with another 40 hoping to adopt it. According to the declaration adopted

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Foreign policy no longer the domain of governments only

Are the mandarins in Pretoria ready to interact constructively with external interest groups?

Hailed as one of Africa's largest engineering endeavours, the Lesotho Highlands Water Project is bringing benefits to both Lesotho and South Africa in the form of foreign revenue, electricity, roads and water. However, the role and involvement of interest groups in highlighting issues, like corruption, labour unrest and insufficient compensation to communities are often neglected. More than 40 interest groups are either directly or indirectly involved in the Highlands Project.

Interest groups in Africa are increasingly using advocacy to lobby actors in the international realm, especially where inter-governmental organisations, like the World Bank, or states are involved in government-led policies or programmes. In this way, they often circumvent national state actors, thereby contributing to the erosion of traditional sovereign jurisdiction boundaries and challenging commonly held notions about who should be making domestic and foreign policy.

Activity around the Highlands Project is not the only example. In 1997, two Himba chiefs from Namibia visited Europe to lobby potential funders to dissuade them from funding the proposed Epupa Dam in the Kunene River basin. Their visit included meetings with members of the German Parliament, the European Union, NORAD and also Norconsult, the Norwegian organisation that sponsored the Epupa feasibility study. The Namibian government responded by tarring the chiefs as co-opted by western NGOs. While relations between Namibia and Germany have not been soured by the chiefs' visit, the dam is not going ahead because of a lack of agreement between Angola and Namibia on a site for it — granting a welcome reprieve to the affected communities.

Interestingly, internationally based and local interest groups have been active particularly around resource issues. Global Witness and 'Publish What You Pay' have been lobbying oil companies in recent years to publish their tax and royalty payments to the Angolan government. The campaign seeks to collaborate with companies to find ways on how to disclose this information in a manner that does not compromise their dealings with the government. The purpose of the exercise is to create greater transparency about government income in the public domain. According to Global Witness, it will enable Angolans to hold their government accountable about the way that revenue is allocated for social expenditure.

It is to be expected that the involvement of interest groups in the foreign policy domain will continue. Ironically, this is not necessarily only due to a lack of access to national governments. The trend is also a reflection of the growth of democracy in Africa, which is opening up the political space for the questioning of government policies. However, because many interest groups do not enjoy so-called 'insider status' with governments, they will continue to use circumvention methods. It is clear that while democratic institutions are being consolidated in Africa policy processes need to reflect the plurality of actors involved

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more adequately. This requires an increase in communication amongst domestic actors. Governments are often accused that they are more responsive to donor demands than to the needs of the societies that they represent. The preference of interest groups that lobby international role players rather than national decision-makers is a reflection of this state of affairs.

In a globally more interconnected world, the lessons for foreign policy decision-makers are clear. Instead of viewing interest groups as a 'nuisance factor' a paradigm shift away from the predominance of sovereign jurisdiction is necessary. Yet, questions remain over Pretoria's readiness to respond to increasing demands by groups other than state actors to intervene as it increases its profile in Africa. This is partly a reflection of the Nepad process that is advocating a bottom-up process.

The recent call on President Mbeki by Amnesty International, supported by a range of domestic Zimbabwean interest groups, to exert pressure on the Zimbabwean government to end the violation of human rights in that country is one indicator of the new demands facing Pretoria. Are our foreign policy mandarins both locally and abroad ready to take up the challenge to engage effectively with a variety of African and international interest groups?

Richard Meissner
SADC Barometer researcher

Key indicators: Integration in Africa, 2002		
Region	GDP (\$ bn)	Total debt (% of GDP)
AMU	149.28	75.9
COMESA	169.45	84.2
ECCAS	41.47	145.5
IGAD	38.74	157.3
ECOWAS	79.92	100.1
SADC	162.48	92.7
1: This value does not include Somalia		
Source: World Development Indicators, July 2003.		

in Sao Paulo, increased South-South trade should foster economic complementarity, especially between regions.

Increasing trade among developing countries also received support from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and UNCTAD Secretary-General Rubens Ricuperro, who pointed out that a 50% reduction in tariffs in the trade among developing countries could generate an increase of \$18 billion in trade revenue. This stands in stark contrast to the record over the past five years, where economies of 55 developing countries have grown less than 2% a year and another 23 states experienced a substantial shrinkage in their GDPs.

The UNCTAD XI conference ended on 18 June 2004 with member countries releasing two documents emphasising that globalisation has been responsible for an increase in the economic and social inequality between rich and poor nations and that trade liberalisation should be pursued, but only as a vehicle of development. This point was reflected especially in the shorter of the two declarations, called the Spirit of Sao Paulo.

The documents have been postulated by some commentators as a major breakthrough in expressing the readiness of developing nations to defend their markets and implement protectionist measures if necessary. Many of the issues that were discussed at Cancun resurfaced in Sao Paulo. However, the asymmetrical levels of development among developing states and the dominance of traditional trade links with developed nations and industrialised markets have still not been adequately addressed.

In Africa for example trade is still predominantly with the former colonial powers. Africa's share of world exports fell from about 6% in 1980 to 2% in 2002, while its share of global imports declined from about 4.6% in 1980 to 2.1% in 2002. In 1991, African leaders signed the Abuja Treaty, which came into force in 1994, to establish an African Economic Community by 2028. Six regional economic communities, namely the Arab Maghreb Union, COMESA, ECOWAS, SADC, ECCAS and IGAD, have been selected as the building blocks for the implementation of this vision.

However, the track record of the six communities at achieving greater intra-regional trade has been dismal. Five of these have achieved rates of less than 10% with only ECOWAS accomplishing a higher rate at 11.1%. Trade with the rest of Africa is also low and although there is an increase in trade with the rest of Africa emanating from SADC, this is a reflection of South Africa's growing exports to the region.

Romy Chevallier, SAIIA KAS Intern. This is based on a SAIIA study done by Kaemete Tsotetsi, Business in Africa researcher. The complete Africa trade integration report can be obtained from SAIIA at grobbelaarn@saiia.wits.ac.za.

Internal trade of economic groupings as % of their total exports			
	1980	1990	2002
SADC			
Intra-regional	0.4	3.1	8.8
Extra-regional*	99.6	96.9	91.2
Rest of Africa	7.18	6.42	17.99
COMESA			
Intra-regional	5.7	6.3	5.6
Extra-regional*	94.3	93.7	94.4
Rest of Africa	6.19	4.78	7.29
ECOWAS			
Intra-regional	10.1	7.9	11.1
Extra-regional*	89.9	92.1	88.9
Rest of Africa	17.99	12.55	17.03
ECCAS			
Intra-regional	1.4	1.4	1.3
Extra-regional*	98.6	98.6	98.7
Rest of Africa	13.17	8.9	6.41
AMU			
Intra-regional	0.3	2.9	2.8
Extra-regional*	99.7	97.1	97.2
Rest of Africa	1.5	3.9	4.98
IGAD			
Intra-regional	N/A	N/A	N/A
Extra-regional*	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rest of Africa	8.78	19.33	20.49
* Extra-regional trade include EU, US, Japan and the Rest of Africa			
Source: UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics, Calculated from World Development Indicators, 2003			

Contradictions of Constitutional Reform in Swaziland

How will Pretoria's policies change in view of the constitutional crisis in Swaziland?

In 2003 the BBC described Swaziland as 'an island of dictatorship in a sea of democracy'. Is this a fair assessment? Of course, this statement hardly applies now given that Zimbabwe has also fallen into political turmoil. However, it does serve to illustrate the extent to which the small mountain kingdom's policies are being criticised.

Swaziland remains sub-Saharan Africa's last absolute monarchy. In 1973 King Sobhuza II issued a decree that abolished the constitution introduced at independence, giving the king absolute legislative, executive, and judicial powers. Little has changed since this period. King Mswati III has retained the 1973 decree, which also bans political parties and political gatherings, restricts trade union activities, and seriously undermines the rule of law. For example, in November 2002 the government refused to comply with a ruling by the Appeals Court, Swaziland's highest court, to end Mswati's power to rule by decree. Seven judges resigned in protest.

Despite a ban on political activities several political groups operate openly within the country and continuously challenge the government to advance political reform. Reports of harassment and arrest of members of these pro-democracy groups are not unusual. This was particularly the case in the run-up to the October 2003 parliamentary elections. During this period, the Swaziland Democratic Alliance (SDA), an umbrella group of banned political parties, labour organisations and human rights bodies, called for a boycott of the elections because they were not being held under a democratic multiparty system and would thus not yield genuine parliamentary representation. Under Swaziland's *Tinkhunda* electoral system, the King appoints ten members of the 65 member National Assembly and the rest are elected nationally from candidates nominated by chiefs. Furthermore, the National Assembly has limited power as it acts only

as an advisory body to the King. He can pass legislation without consulting parliament and can dissolve the assembly without consultation.

Steps towards a more democratic political dispensation in Swaziland were taken in 1996 when King Mswati III embarked on a constitutional review process, following growing internal pressure mounted by various political actors who were influenced by the democratisation wave in Africa in the early 1990s. Pressure came also from South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and other international actors who impressed on the monarch the need to pursue multiparty democracy.

A Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) was formed in July 1996 with a mandate to consult civil society in making recommendations on a new constitution. The draft constitution was presented to the Swazi nation on 31 May 2003, seven years after the process commenced. The King is expected to sign it into law before the end of 2004.

However, the final result has received little praise from Swaziland's political reformers and international political commentators. Both the proposed constitution and drafting process have been criticised as flawed, and are being challenged by various interest groups.

The 30-member CRC was hand-picked by royalists and chaired by Prince Mangaliso Dlamini. The Constitution Draft Committee (CDC), responsible for the writing of the constitution, was headed by Prince David Dlamini. Both are family members of the King. Village chiefs were present when local communities made their submissions to the CRC, preventing them from speaking out against the King.

The National Constitutional Assembly, a pro-democracy movement, consisting of lawyers, human rights activists and opposition parties, are planning to challenge the draft constitution in court before it is passed into law. They believe that the review

process lacked transparency and accountability and that there is no record of consensus reached within the wider Swazi population on the CRC's recommendations to the constitution writing committee.

Ultimately, executive authority still rests solely in the hands of the King who maintains his dominance over all state institutions, and who remains above the reach of the law. Section 166 (c) of the draft constitution of Swaziland states that the Human Rights Commission is prohibited from investigating 'a matter relating to the exercise of any royal prerogative by the Crown'. Because it does not state clearly what such matters are, the draft constitution leaves a loophole that allows the monarch to infringe on the rights of others without legal recourse for the victims. The King also has the authority to revoke constitutional laws. In short, the draft constitution fails to provide sufficient checks and balances on the exercise of the monarch's powers.

Hopes for a constitutional monarchy in Swaziland began to diminish towards the end of 1998, when the reform process was supposed to have been completed. In 1999 the EU, the original funder of the CRC process, withdrew its funding because of uncontrolled expenditure by the CRC, and a lack of timely delivery on the draft. Now that the process has been completed, it seems that, for the most part, the draft constitution maintains the political status quo in that country, setting the stage for further suppression of political and individual freedoms.

However, the plight of many Swazi opposition groups has resonated in South African society, particularly within COSATU and the ANC Youth League. Pretoria has been unable to influence the debate in Swaziland beyond using persuasive diplomacy. It is an open question how the dynamics will change to accommodate the expected growth in political tension in Swaziland.

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South Africa and Cuba: A Divergent Foreign Policy Trajectory?

Africa and Cuba, while sometimes treading a similar rhetorical path in berating neo-colonialism and American hegemony, are increasingly on a divergent economic and political trajectory.

More than 40 states in Africa now hold regular multiparty elections and most are committed to a liberal macro-economic reform process through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Meanwhile, Cuba shows little sign of following in this direction, at least while Castro is still around.

Fidel Castro – now 77 years old – has been in power for 46 years, representing the only political party in Cuba, the Cuban Communist Party (PCC). In that time Castro has lived through 10 US administrations and a 40-year long embargo (or blockade), which, together with revolutionary ideology, has shaped Cuba's foreign policy.

Cuba's foreign policy today is based on the same principles it used to justify interventions in Africa and Latin America throughout the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Cuba's foreign relations, including military assistance and presence in partner countries, are characterised by the 'continued absence of material interests' and the 'absence of conditionalities'. Cuba also seeks to promote 'autonomy and self-sufficiency' in the recipient country over and above the aid it provides. In return Cuba expects co-operation in international forums and unconditional support against 'US aggression'.

These international activities, which continue to be carried out in Latin America and particularly Africa, are undertaken within the broader framework of principles underpinned by solidarity and the respect for national sovereignty.

The Cuban revolution has always maintained a critical position against the 'Americanisation' or imperialist activities of a 'hegemonic' power. Cuba therefore has stuck to a clear anti-colonial and pro-decolonisation policy. This could be construed as broadly similar in outlook to South Africa and most other African countries. However, Cuba also regards a

number of integration initiatives as designed entirely for the benefit of imperialist powers, most notably, the US. For this reason Cuba is adamantly opposed to the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), so-called neo-liberal globalisation initiatives and even development initiatives such as Puebla-Panama—which proposes infrastructure and basic economic development in an effort to generate commercial activities and attract investment to a severely poverty stricken part of Latin America.

The fact that such integration initiatives are seen to be based on neo-liberal fundamentals results in automatic rejection by the Cubans, despite the emphasis on social development such initiatives tend to promote.

Through the eyes of the Cubans, certain priorities in South Africa's foreign policy such as NEPAD and the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) forum would be criticised for their neo-liberal undertones. This could represent a rift in relations between South Africa and Cuba as each country starts to prioritise very different aspects of their respective foreign policies and choose alternative paths to global integration.

South Africa and Cuba thus appear to be on different foreign policy trajectories, which could signify a new era in South Africa-Cuba relations.

Previously based on ideology and solidarity through the struggle, bilateral relations are increasingly based on more pragmatic issues. Though two-way trade barely reaches R10 million a year, there is a large health-care exchange programme. Pretoria sponsors more than 1,000 Cuban doctors to South Africa, Burundi, Lesotho and Mali, and there are 420 South African medical students in Cuba. Yet Pretoria is focused on a foreign policy agenda that is heavily underpinned by

neo-liberal trade agreements and various integration initiatives that would be regarded by Havana as 'counter revolutionary'.

South Africa is not alone in its shift from an ideologically based foreign policy. Other African countries, which have begun to realise that solidarity and revolutionary rhetoric have not delivered sustainable economic growth or helped alleviate many of the domestic problems prevalent in their countries, have signed onto NEPAD and slowly begun to prioritise these so-called neo-liberal approaches to integration and bilateral relations.

The economic and foreign policies advocated today by most African countries are focused on the need for sustainable economic growth and development. Thus while the solidarity between Cuba and Africa may continue to exist in elaborate speeches or even support in certain multilateral meetings, this is unlikely to extend to action plans on the continent or bilateral relations abroad.

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Cuba: Fast facts

Cuba has diplomatic relations with a 182 states (133 diplomatic representations in 109 countries).

Health assistance from Cuba has replaced traditional security co-operation with the developing world. The Latin American School of Medicine in Havana has 8,500 students from 24 countries, of whom 215 are from Africa. There are 2,500 Cuban medical practitioners in Africa today.