

# The Southern African Development Community: An Overview

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## Introduction

Amid profound global, continental and regional changes since 2001, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has been presented with a host of challenges and opportunities. The events of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent campaign in Afghanistan have redirected global attention to the fundamentals of multilateralism. In the absence of an effective and established order of global governance, emphasis has been placed on regional initiatives for the maintenance of peace, stability and development. This holds especially true for SADC. Its 14 member states have had to tackle myriad issues of common interest and concern. Most prevalent amongst these have been the situation in Zimbabwe, the continuing crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), restructuring, integration, the formal inception of the African Union (AU), and (perhaps most pressing), the growing human security dilemmas faced by many SADC member states. It is against this backdrop that this chapter documents recent developments within the Community.

## Restructuring

The issue of restructuring within SADC was a response to the realisation that regional developments had called into question the effective functioning and relevance of its multilateral framework. Amidst growing tensions in the region, the SADC extraordinary summit in March 2001, in Windhoek, Namibia, approved various recommendations for significant changes within the organisation's institutional and governing structures. A key recommendation involved the clustering of the 21 existing SADC sectors into four primary directorates. Those identified are:

- trade, industry, finance and investment;
- infrastructure and services;
- food, agriculture and natural resources; and

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- social and human resource development.

The March 2001 gathering also recommended the establishment of national committees comprising governmental representatives, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society, the private sector and labour unions. The primary objective was to ensure that expertise from a range of sources could contribute to the formulation of SADC policies and strategies within the four directorates identified.<sup>2</sup>

The restructuring process was further endorsed at a meeting of the Council of Ministers in January 2002, in Blantyre, Malawi. It became apparent, however, that the overriding concern of this meeting was the formal launching of the AU in July 2002 in South Africa. The primary focus of the Blantyre agenda was therefore:

- the possibility of SADC's hosting of certain institutions of the AU;
- the funding of the AU;
- the operation of the AU Central Organ for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution; and
- the functioning of the AU quota system.

Considerable interest was expressed by member states in hosting several AU institutions. Noting that countries outside SADC had expressed a similar interest in doing so, the SADC ministers of foreign affairs and finance recommended that the SADC Secretariat develop criteria to be used by SADC members in deciding the hosting of AU institutions so as to ensure regional balance. Other areas of concern included the quota system, which encompassed such issues as gender representation, the financial contributions of member states and equal representation within AU institutions (that is, equal burden-sharing).

To a large extent, the restructuring process remained a key feature of SADC ministers' meetings until the June 2002 meeting in Gaborone, Botswana. SADC restructuring plans have been clearly designed to retain its relevance and ensure the region's representation in continental and global affairs.

Given that peace and stability continue to elude much of the Southern African region, with member states such as the DRC, Angola and Zimbabwe embroiled in conflict and internal strife, central to the restructuring process has been the emphasis placed on the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (OPDS or the Organ). Launched in 1996, the OPDS was the product of a dire need to create a common political and security agenda, with a focus on conflict management for the region. Since its creation a fundamental flaw of the Organ was that it functioned independently of all other SADC structures, a position strongly favoured by its first chair, Zimbabwe. This operational handicap inhibited the effective functioning of the Organ in matters related to the conflicts in the DRC and Angola. Accordingly, SADC leaders at the Namibian

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<sup>2</sup> 'Role and composition of SADC national committees', *SADC Today*, 5, 3, August 2002, p.3.

extraordinary summit in March 2001 decided to integrate the OPDS fully into SADC structures. Agreement was reached that the structure, operations and functions of the Organ be regulated by the Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation, to be co-ordinated at summit level.<sup>3</sup> This move also put an end to Zimbabwe's chairmanship of the Organ, which had been a point of contention for some time. On 14 August 2001, the SADC Protocol that established the OPDS was signed in Blantyre Malawi by SADC heads of state and government.

The first meeting of the Committee of Ministers responsible for the SADC OPDS was held in Luanda, Angola, in December 2001. Attention was paid to developments in Angola and the DRC as well as preparations for elections in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho. In the light of the mammoth tasks ahead, the funding of the Organ also drew some attention. The ministers approved the development of the Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ (SIPO), which will spell out the costs of the activities of the OPDS as well as a strategy for co-operation with regional and international partners.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the greatest challenges the OPDS has faced since its integration into SADC structures have been the situations in Angola, the DRC and Zimbabwe. Angola has shown promising signs of conflict resolution since the death of UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi. However, the DRC and Zimbabwe continue to preoccupy the Organ.

## **SADC and the Zimbabwean elections**

The SADC Parliamentary Forum's initiatives in establishing norms and standards for elections in the SADC region were adopted on 25 March 2001 in Namibia. This project had been undertaken with the primary goal of promoting democratic governance in the SADC region. The recommendations offered by the SADC Parliamentary Forum were far-reaching, and included such aspects as voter registration, electoral commissions, the role of NGOs and the media, and transparency.

Ultimately, the recommendations were targeted at strengthening electoral institutions, reforming outdated legal frameworks and practices, and entrenching the democratic process in the conduct of elections, thus minimising the possibility of disputes over the outcome of elections among the contesting parties.<sup>5</sup>

The Zimbabwean presidential elections in March 2002 provided the ideal platform for SADC to demonstrate its newly-established mandate

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<sup>3</sup> 'Regional leaders clip Bob's wings', *The Sunday Times*, 11 March 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Communiqué of the meeting of the Committee of Ministers for the SADC Organ on Politics Defence and Security Co-operation, 18 December 2001, <http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/pr/2001/pr1218b.html>

<sup>5</sup> SADC Parliamentary Forum, 'Norms and standards for elections in the SADC region', adopted by the SADC Parliamentary Forum Plenary Assembly on 25 March 2001, Windhoek, Namibia, p.3.

for member states to engage in the region's electoral processes. The March elections proved to be the most stringent test for the new recommendations. From the outset it was apparent that SADC's handling of the Zimbabwean elections was attended by growing international attention and pressure. Considerable concern was expressed, both within and beyond the SADC region, over the Zimbabwean regime's policies regarding the land issue as well as documented reports of widespread violence and intimidation. In the wake of Robert Mugabe's victory in March 2002, SADC endorsed the Ministerial Task Force's assessment that the elections had been 'substantially free and fair', noting, however, that there had been incidents of violence and logistical problems. It also took cognisance of the concerns expressed by other observer missions. Quite significant though was the position adopted by the SADC Parliamentary Forum's 70-member observer mission. Taking into account such issues as the political and security climate, independence of the Electoral Commission, and voting and counting processes, they concluded that ultimately, the electoral process in Zimbabwe did not adequately comply with the norms and standards for elections in the region. The Parliamentary Forum made various recommendations. Of note was the call for SADC members themselves to engage the Zimbabwean leadership in dialogue and reconciliation efforts.

Since Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth and amid continuing tensions, SADC has expressed its unwillingness to comply with global calls for sanctions against that country. As SADC leaders have reiterated, sanctions would be counterproductive to the economic and political reconstructive efforts within Zimbabwe.

Ultimately, the crisis in Zimbabwe has proved to be a double-edged sword for SADC leaders. It has reflected a keen willingness by member states to play an active part in the multilateral efforts towards the betterment of the region. It has also caused serious criticism of SADC on grounds of the Community's refusal to adopt more stringent measures against a member state that continues to practise highly questionable means of governance.

## **SADC and the Democratic Republic of Congo**

Over the past six years, the conflict in the DRC has been a thorn in the side of the Community. Member states have been embroiled on both sides of the conflict. The deployment of foreign military troops from Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Rwanda and Uganda to the DRC has resulted in a protracted conflict complicated by the presence of state and non-state actors. The violation of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement of 1999 culminated in concerted efforts by SADC to host an Inter-Congolese Dialogue. This ended in the South African-brokered signing of a memorandum of understanding between the DRC president, Joseph Kabila, and the Rwandan president, Paul Kagame, on 30 July 2002.

Rwanda agreed to withdraw its troops from the DRC and the DRC agreed to stop supporting Rwandan militia groups.

Even more promising are recent troop withdrawals from the DRC. Zimbabwe began withdrawing a small contingent of troops and equipment from the DRC on 3 September. As a result of negotiations held on 14–15 August 2002 in Luanda under the mediation of the Angolan foreign minister, Joao Miranda,<sup>6</sup> President Kabila of the DRC and President Museveni of Uganda signed an accord on 6 September agreeing to the withdrawal of Ugandan troops from the eastern parts of the DRC.

Though there is still some way to go before achieving final conflict resolution, recent developments in the DRC could bolster peace processes within that country. Although this constitutes a phenomenal challenge for SADC and in particular the OPDS, it also offers a host of opportunities to engage in conflict resolution and to sustain post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

Although political and security dynamics have underpinned developments within SADC over the past 18 months, economic integration and development continue to remain a key focus of the Community. Over the years SADC has continually stressed a developmental approach to integration, recognising that social and human development is fundamental to SADC's integration process.

## Development and the human security dilemma

At the SADC Council of Ministers meeting in Malawi in August 2001, it was acknowledged that as a region SADC is confronted by enormous challenges in the economic and human development spheres.<sup>7</sup> As indicated by SADC's Executive Secretary, Dr Prega Ramsamy, within the region approximately 76 million people or 40% live in extreme poverty, with high levels of malnutrition and unemployment, and declining life expectancy.<sup>8</sup> At the August–September 2002 UN World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in South Africa the linkage between economic growth and development, health issues, poverty reduction and eradication and the environment was reaffirmed. In recent years SADC has placed strong emphasis on developing designs for full economic integration, as indicated by the SADC Protocol on Trade which entered into force on 25 January 2000, when two-thirds of the members ratified the protocol. By September 2000 all members who had ratified the protocol agreed on a 12-month period to implement all agreements under the treaty. This was accomplished by 1 August 2001 when all instruments

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations: Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), 9 September 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Hamutenya H, *Report of the Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers Meeting*, Blantyre Malawi, August 2001 Available on <http://www.dfa.gov.za/events/sadcrpt.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Ramsamy Dr P, 'Poverty reduction: A top priority in SADC's Integration Agenda', *SADC Review*. Available on <http://www.sadcreview.com/sadc%20intro%202001/fintro3.htm>.

of implementation were achieved. SADC signatories will gather in March 2003 to thrash out problems related to the implementation process. The Protocol is indicative of SADC's efforts to put in place the macro-economic fundamentals necessary for the broader integration process.

It is apparent, however, that the implementation of macro-economic grand designs cannot be successfully achieved without addressing the more pressing human security dilemmas plaguing the SADC region. The food security crisis and the ever-prevalent HIV/AIDS pandemic continue to provide a source of concern in Southern Africa.

### **The looming food crisis**

The Southern African region has experienced one of the worst food shortages in recent times, which has been compounded by severe droughts and flooding and a decline in cereal production. Current estimates are that nearly 13 million people in drought-affected countries require food aid up to March 2003.<sup>9</sup> Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe appear to be the most badly affected. Many of these countries have begun to rely on commercial imports of grain that have been extremely slow in arriving, due to transportation problems. South Africa, one of the countries not affected by maize deficits, has used its Humanitarian Disaster Relief Fund to provide amounts of R500,000 to Malawi and Zimbabwe through the World Food Programme (WFP) and R500,000 to Zambia<sup>10</sup> through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

The current food crisis is likely to have its greatest impact on those most vulnerable in the SADC region. A recent survey conducted by Save the Children UK concludes that the food shortage being experienced in the region is increasing HIV/AIDS prevalence in the area.<sup>11</sup>

### **HIV/AIDS: SADC's greatest challenge?**

The impact of HIV/AIDS is recognised globally as one of the most profound obstacles to human and social development. Sub-Saharan Africa is the worst-affected region in the world, with an estimated 25.3 million people in the region living with AIDS.<sup>12</sup> This disease is one of the leading causes of death on the subcontinent, affecting those most productive in society (the economically active age groups). The *UNAIDS Fact Sheet* for 2002 indicated that seven SADC countries have prevalence rates higher

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<sup>9</sup> *SADC Food Security Bulletin*, 28 June 2002, Monthly Update.

<sup>10</sup> 'Parliamentary questions', 12 June 2002: SADC Food Aid. Available on <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/pq246.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> 'Food shortage worsening HIV/AIDS in SADC region', *Pan African News Agency*, 27 August 2002.

<sup>12</sup> SADC, 'HIV/AIDS in education strategic framework', SADC Human Resources Development Sector, April 2001.

than 20%: Botswana (38.8%), Lesotho (31%), Namibia (22.5%), South Africa (20.1%), Swaziland (33.4%), Zambia (21.5%) and Zimbabwe (33.7%).<sup>13</sup> Given that HIV/AIDS permeates every sector of society, the figures provided give a clear indication of the socio-economic implications of the epidemic.

In June 2001 the World Economic Forum organised a three-day SADC summit in South Africa on the HIV/AIDS problem. The summit covered the importance of leadership in the anti-AIDS battle, the affordability of AIDS drugs and, quite significantly, the relationship between HIV/AIDS and poverty. In February 2002, Namibia played host to a SADC strategic planning workshop on the role of parliaments in combating HIV/AIDS in the region. The workshop was primarily aimed at:<sup>14</sup>

- identifying and defining the roles and capacities of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, its standing committees on HIV/AIDS, committees of parliaments and parliamentarians in addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic; and
- developing a SADC-wide plan of action on the role of parliaments in combating HIV/AIDS.

Though encouraging, the current SADC initiatives to curb the AIDS pandemic may still be considered in their infancy. Such region-wide initiatives need an integrated approach backed by concerted political will and generous resources. Furthermore, the challenge for SADC is to translate such initiatives into practical action to prevent or mitigate the spread of the pandemic. SADC leaders have recognised that failure to do so is likely to have devastating consequences for the socio-economic development of the Community.

It becomes apparent, therefore, that broader processes of economic development and integration within the community cannot even begin to be addressed without tackling the HIV/AIDS problem. The vast majority of people living with AIDS are working adults. By 2005 Zimbabwe will have lost 19% of its workforce to AIDS, South Africa 11% and Botswana 17%.<sup>15</sup> Given that AIDS has a profound impact on economic growth, the UN estimates that for countries with national prevalence levels of more than 20%, GDP growth is likely to drop by an average of 2.6% per annum, a factor not to be overlooked by the Community.

## Conclusion

It is evident that the past 18 months have presented SADC with a phenomenal spectrum of challenges. The region's continuously changing

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<sup>13</sup> *UNAIDS Fact Sheet 2002*, Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>14</sup> Communiqué of the Strategic Planning Workshop on the Role of Parliaments in Combatting HIV/AIDS in the SADC Region. Issued at Windhoek, 24 February 2002.

<sup>15</sup> *UNAIDS Fact Sheet*, 'The Impact of HIV/AIDS'. Available on [http://www.unaids.org/barcelona/presskit/factsheets/Fsimpact\\_en.htm](http://www.unaids.org/barcelona/presskit/factsheets/Fsimpact_en.htm).

environment has also presented the Community with a host of opportunities, most notably to demonstrate its capacity and willingness to meet various entrenched difficulties. How well SADC has risen to these challenges is a point that will undoubtedly be debated.

SADC is not immune to the common stresses and strains evident in many global regimes. The question of design versus intention surfaces all too often. In other words, is the design of the SADC regime capable of producing its desired outcome? In most instances a desired outcome would imply a commonly agreed upon approach. If this is so have SADC members adequately agreed to act on issues of common regional concern rather than use the regime as a political platform to further their own political interests? The UN has served as a hard lesson. Political wrangling there has severely compromised the effective functioning and integrity of that institution. The pressing concerns highlighted in this chapter cannot begin to be addressed unless SADC members fully commit to homogenising areas of common interest and concern backed up by sound political will and resources

Nevertheless, it is essential to recognise the importance and necessity of the multilateral approach. SADC encapsulates the belief that issues of interest and concern cannot be dealt with in isolation, that is solely at the national level. A fully integrated approach is necessary to meet the many challenges ahead. One of these is to restore faith in multilateral frameworks on the continent.