



## UNLIKELY BEDFELLOWS

Few people – from Johannesburg to Blantyre – know about SADC, and even fewer believe it to be the panacea to their social and economic ills. SADC simply is not a household name in the region.

Without the buy-in of citizens, regional integration in SADC is bound to remain an elite driven white elephant where the agenda is determined at the intersection of Western donors and the egos of undemocratic rulers. The media, not for profit non-governmental organisations (NGOs), research organisations, community-based organisations (CBOs), trade unions, faith-based movements and the private sector – collectively referred to as civil society organisations (CSOs) – have an important role to play in ensuring the critical participation of the general public in the process of creating a broader political, economic and social community in Southern Africa. But civil society in the region remains weak, divided and unable to optimise existing channels for participation or to create new ones. And to make matters worse, Southern African political leaders have an innate distrust of civil society and often undermine their ability to play a meaningful and participatory role in regional development.

Civil society can and should act, at both the national and regional level, to strengthen democracy by channelling the varied interests of their constituencies to elected parliamentarians. They can provide support for the democratic systems of government by promoting values of citizenship, governance, accountability and transparency. They have a 'watchdog role', and because of their largely bottom-up approach, they tend to focus on people-centred rather than donor- or government-driven development. Yet, in SADC, as in the EU, civil society does not speak with a unified, cross-sectoral voice. This is not surprising considering the disparate levels of development that characterise the region, our weak and young democratic systems, and the legacy of colonial rule and protracted civil conflicts. Nor should civil society necessarily speak with one voice, given that it represents so many different interests outside of the state realm.

There are a number of other issues that manifest in the weakness of CSOs in the region. Apart from the perennial problems associated with resource constraints – financial, managerial and human resources – there are significant internal tensions within civil society.

These are related to, amongst others, the discord between advocacy and service-oriented CSOs: their difference of opinion over strategy is divisive and deeply ingrained. Similarly there is the potential for friction between the professionals (NGOs) and the community (CBOs) where the dominance of either within umbrella structures carries the danger of leading to uniformity and centralisation. Individuals play an important role in defining the relationships between different CSOs at the national and regional level. Personalities also have an impact upon the relationship of the particular CSO they lead and the governance structures of the country and region.

In many sectors, CSOs compete for donor funding and other financial resources. Often the result of unco-ordinated and non-transparent practices by both the donors and the CSOs, this creates an unhealthy and unco-operative environment that fosters duplication and feeds the arsenals of those who oppose further inclusion of civil society in national and regional decision-making. Competition for financial resources is compounded by the general 'funding crisis' resulting from recent world events and the tendency of donors to funnel money through governments (thus potentially compromising the autonomy of CSOs); the 'brain drain' of the sector due to many former social society activists moving into government or international NGOs; a lack of internal democracy; and inappropriate management practices and inadequate planning.

Many of these problems are internal to organisations and countries, and therefore it is essential that CSOs resolve their difficulties at the national level before moving towards structured regional cooperation. However, there are certain benefits in pooling resources to influence both national and regional governance.

Through creating a regional co-ordinating structure (in the form of an umbrella body), CSOs can ensure greater representation at regional gatherings by redistributing funds and resources; they can counterbalance the dominance of South African CSOs and draw on the country's superior resources; and they can overcome some of the restrictions (legal and operating) that they face at the national level.

SADC itself, and the political leadership that it represents, would do well to go beyond paying lip service to the participation of civil society in its policy-making activities. It is not sufficient to include a few lines in its treaty! A big

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leap in the right direction would be to seriously consider, negotiate and then adopt a memorandum of understanding with the SADC Council of NGOs. Bolstering the private sector desk at the SADC Secretariat in Gaborone, and improving information distribution from the Secretariat would be further requirements. By regarding civil society as partners, rather than a threat, governments can augment their own limited resources in areas as diverse as information gathering and distribution, research, service delivery and lobbying for fairer treatment on the global stage. 

Gina van Schalkwyk



## Social Forum Seeks 'Another Southern Africa'

At a recent regional gathering, Southern African social activists demonstrated their increasingly radical rejection of neo-liberal capitalism and its international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). But can they agree on how to challenge neo-liberalism? And are Southern African governments, and SADC itself, part of the solution or part of the problem?

The first-ever meeting of the Southern Africa Social Forum (SASF) took place in Lusaka, Zambia, on 9–11 November 2003, bringing together 400 activists from social movements, trade unions, NGOs, churches and women's organisations. Most attendees were from Zambia and Zimbabwe, although South Africa was well represented; smaller numbers came from other countries.

SASF followed two Africa-wide Social Forums, held in 2001 and 2002. Because of the financial difficulties deterring many activists from attending such events, it was agreed that future forums should be organised on a national and regional basis to ensure wider grassroots participation in the growing anti-globalisation movement. SASF 2003 aimed to provide a platform that could enable activists to discuss issues of social, political and economic justice, and to agree on common positions for the Southern African social movement in preparation for the World Social Forum in India in January 2004.

### Unity in demands

SASF attendees demonstrated significant consensus on key issues of concern. It was agreed that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the international financial institutions (IFIs), namely the IMF and the World Bank, had no useful role to play in Southern Africa, and should 'pack up and go'. During the event, Zambian civil society organisations walked out of a scheduled meeting with the IMF, declaring that it was not welcome. The Forum 'unanimously agreed that the globalisation process, dominated by the giant transnational corporations from the North, is impacting negatively on the peo-

ple' of Southern Africa. The support of some regional governments for the neo-liberal agenda of free trade, privatisation, and a reduced role for the state was 'noted', and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) was rejected 'as an expression of support by certain leaders of our continent for the world's elite at the expense of the majority'. SASF called for the immediate and unconditional cancellation of Southern African debt; the comprehensive implementation of HIV/Aids treatment by regional governments; significant redistribution of land in the region to the poor; and the boosting of agriculture to achieve food security for all Southern Africans.

### Divisions over strategy

Whilst there was agreement on these demands, the Forum did not produce a plan of action. There was a noticeable division between NGOs (most of which seek to lobby governments and the IFIs to lessen the impact of neo-liberalism) and the more radical groups who question the underlying structure of the global economy. There is also no consensus amongst social movements as to how best to engage with their own governments. Some speakers described how NGOs had worked successfully with governments in agreeing on an African agenda for the WTO Summit in Cancun, arguing that this had enabled regional governments, as part of a wider alliance of Southern states, to prevent further free trade reforms. Others argued that this progressive stance in some of their governments was a response to rising popular pressure against neo-liberalism, and that this pressure needed to be increased rather than submerged in an alliance with governments that support the free market-oriented Nepad.

### Where was SADC?


There was little sign that the SADC was seen by SASF attendees as an important forum for the social justice movement, either as a target for their demands, or as a potential vehicle for the organisa-

tion of regional civil society. The final SASF statement, whilst making demands of national governments, made no mention of SADC, and the SADC Council for NGOs was apparently not represented at the event. Regional civil society appears to believe that it can achieve more by bypassing SADC and combining its forces with activists from the 'global South'.

Whilst this approach is understandable given the weakness of SADC structures, and the marginalisation of the region on a global scale, it may itself have the danger of marginalising specifically Southern African demands within a wider global movement, which may not share some or all of its priorities.

### Uneven development in Southern Africa

The uneven economic and social development of the SADC region also undermines the creation of a coherent regional perspective. The dominant political and economic role South Africa plays in Southern Africa was noted, and SASF criticised 'the expansion of South African corporations throughout the region at the expense of local economies', calling it a 'new form of colonialism and sub-imperialism'.

This unevenness is also reflected in a lack of coherence in Southern African civil society. Whilst South African NGOs are constitutionally protected, the legitimacy of a critical civil sector remains contested in Malawi and Zambia. In Zimbabwe, social movement criticism of the government is routinely repressed; and civil society in Angola and the DRC is still finding its voice after decades of devastating conflict. SASF provided a valuable opportunity for social activists to share experiences and develop approaches that can contribute to the reduction of these disparities in the long term. The proposed organisation of national Social Forums across Southern Africa in 2004 appears to be a necessary step towards building a coherent regional approach in the future. 

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## Opinion

# Zimbabwe, SADC and CHOGM

In an official letter to Marlborough House, dated 11 December 2003, Zimbabwe formally terminated with effect from 7 December 2003 its membership of the Commonwealth. This confirmed President Mugabe's decision to leave the organisation following the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Nigeria, which indefinitely suspended Harare from the Councils of the organisation.

The protracted political acrimony among Commonwealth members over Zimbabwe's status reached its climax in Nigeria. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries (10 of which belong to the Commonwealth if you exclude Zimbabwe and the Seychelles) were at the forefront in supporting Zimbabwe's re-admission. SADC's position is that Zimbabwe's one-year suspension lapsed on 19 March 2003, and that therefore the country should be brought back into the fold of the Commonwealth. This position was reaffirmed at a meeting of the troika of the SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security — namely Lesotho (chair), Mozambique and South Africa, with Zimbabwe invited — in Pretoria in late November 2003.

In Nigeria, the Commonwealth decided to maintain its suspension of Zimbabwe and appointed a six-member panel to advise on the way forward. Following the CHOGM, SADC (supported by Uganda) issued a statement in which it expressed deep concern at what it called the 'dismissive, intolerant and rigid attitude' shown by some Commonwealth members toward Zimbabwe. SADC has consistently pleaded for greater patience and understanding of Zimbabwe, and cautioned against lecturing and hectoring.

### Implications for SADC?

First, it would appear that not all SADC states supported the statement. Botswana, which has in the past openly

criticised Mugabe, issued its own statement distancing itself from the sentiments expressed in the SADC one. Botswana has, however, consistently held that Zimbabwe's suspension should be lifted so that the Commonwealth can engage the country constructively.

Second, SADC, if it is to prove its Commonwealth detractors wrong, will have to show that its engagement with Zimbabwe is bearing fruit. One thing is clear: the Zimbabwe issue is hurting SADC states' relations with third parties. Pretoria should step up pressure to encourage constructive dialogue and meaningful reform over the next six months. Some SADC leaders, in attributing the Commonwealth's position to a white plot against Mugabe, have not only missed the point but failed to see that it is the constitutional rights of all Zimbabweans (the real victims) which must be addressed and respected. There are, however, no quick fixes for Zimbabwe.

Third, Zimbabwe's withdrawal from the Commonwealth is regrettable, as both SADC and the Commonwealth broadly share the same norms and values. This should have provided a good starting-point for resolving the political pathology, economic stasis and social fragmentation afflicting Zimbabwe. It is imperative, if SADC is to preserve its credibility, that it acknowledges Zimbabwe's departure from some of those norms. It is equally important to recognise that SADC states have valid grievances over the *process* by which Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth has been handled. Following the 2002 Coolum CHOGM, the Commonwealth Chairperson's Committee on Zimbabwe (troika) — namely Australia (chair), Nigeria and South Africa — suspended Zimbabwe from the councils of the Commonwealth for one year after Commonwealth ob-

servers claimed that the 2002 Zimbabwe Presidential elections had been flawed. The troika also decided that it would meet again in a year's time to consider the evolution of the situation in Zimbabwe. This meeting subsequently took place six months earlier than agreed, at which both South Africa and Nigeria opposed Australia's demand for additional sanctions, as this exceeded the troika's mandate. When Harare's suspension was due to officially expire in March 2003, the Commonwealth, despite opposition from South Africa, Nigeria and other African nations, automatically extended Harare's suspension beyond the agreed one year to the Abuja CHOGM in December 2003.

Fourth, SADC states should not be surprised if foreign investors, who have yet to understand the region's market and politics, do not take well to their position on Zimbabwe.

Finally, the 'official' and 'unofficial' Commonwealths — plural! — are unique in that they blend inter-state as well as people-to-people diplomacy (part of the 'new multilateralism'). Zimbabwe's exit from the 'official' Commonwealth means that it has lost a valuable forum to assist with both its domestic and international recovery. Using its prestige alone, the Commonwealth has in the past successfully encouraged democratic change in nations such as Fiji, South Africa and Nigeria. Individual Commonwealth members will not, however, turn their backs on Zimbabwe. It was widely expected that the incumbent Commonwealth Chair-in-Office, Olusegun Obasanjo, would mastermind a breakthrough on Zimbabwe. He may still be able to play this role outside of the Commonwealth. 

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## Civil Society in the European Union

As the European Commission (EC) is slowly taking over key portfolios from the member states of the European Union (EU), and the EU Parliament gradually gains experience in policy-making, Brussels has become the home of thousands of lobbyists defending a patchwork of different interests. The official civil society directory lists 762 registered European NGOs, which fall into 27 different categories. Their representatives range from business delegations to trade unions, from Greek farmers to the Japanese car manufacturers. However, it is noteworthy how few of the major lobby groups have moved their activities to Brussels thus far.

How do Europe's civic groupings organise their activities on a regional level? Although civil society has a strong voice in the EU's policy-making process and contributes significantly towards the emerging European multinational policy structure, it is not a unified cross-sectoral voice in which regional objectives override national considerations.

In order to describe the way European civil society works as a force in the EU, one needs to identify three major aspects.

- First, institutional overload in the multilevel policy system has made it difficult for secondary players to voice their demands, which has left most civil society groupings frustrated.
- Second, the dominance of corporate interests has led to a de facto undermining of the democratic principles of the EU's decision-making ideology.
- Third, European civil society is operating in a fast-changing environment. An overall policy-making structure has yet to be developed. The tension between Europe's national and regional institutions tends to make it more difficult for non-state actors to influence today's policies.

Let us discuss these issues in turn before looking at what civil society in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) may learn from them.

### Organised civil society

Europe's civil society contains a growing number of non-state actors. Driven by particular political or economic interests, each organisation lobbies for legislation that is favourable to its members. As Europe has a long tradition of labour movements, business alliances and the like, civil society participation is an integral part of the EU's policy-making system. When it was established through the Treaty of Rome in 1957 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) was created in order to represent employers, trade unions, farmers, consumers and the other

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interest groups that constitute 'organised civil society'. The EESC advises the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council (which represents the member states), and must be consulted by these institutions before any decisions are taken on economic and social policies. Given the huge amount of legislation the Brussels institutions have in hand, such external support is essential. The EC in particular depends on the numerous interest groups to supply it with information necessary to prepare its policies.

Despite its promising design, the existing institutional framework has evident flaws. Owing to the number of political bodies defending their individual constituencies, decision-making procedures are seldom transparent, and often take the form of closed-door diplomacy which benefits a small number of insiders. Con-

sequently, many criticise the current bureaucratic maze in and around Europe's administrative hub. Contrary to the clear-cut policy procedures that exist on a national level, the EU's decisions can easily depend on the personal outlook of a single commissioner. However, the fate of legislation always depends on national governments and their vote in the European Council. A single country's veto can annul the most elaborate proposal.

### Intricate decision-making

Influencing European policy-making is far from being easy. While it is fully transparent and democratic in theory, in practice the most influential players pull strings behind the scenes. Decisions are taken at the level of the parliament, the Commission and at the ministerial level in the European Council. Even though the Commission plays a definite role in shaping economic and trade policies, it faces a continual battle with the member states and the interests of their governments. The energy sector and the car industry present two of the most prominent examples of how national policy determines lobbying efforts.

Europe's civil society therefore remains largely dominated by powerful interest groups lobbying predominantly on the national level. This causes some to doubt whether there is a genuine *regional* civil society in Europe.

For civic groupings it is difficult to prioritise between the national and the different continental institutions. It is costly to maintain a significant presence at all levels, so it becomes a budgetary question whether or not to lobby from Brussels. Consequently, only well-funded interest groups are able to sustain a meaningful representation in the city. This puts the corporate part of civil society in a far better position to gain from the power structures in Brussels. More socially-oriented interest groups — despite their global networks — have trouble making their voices heard by Europe's top-level policy-makers in consequence.



## Regionalism versus nationalism

The overlap between national and regional activities adds to the confusion, to the advantage of some sectors that have a clear lobbying mandate. For example, the influential pharmaceutical industry, which is one of Europe's few world-class advanced technology sectors, has managed to position itself so well within the EU policy networks that its umbrella organisation enjoys a significant degree of independence from the EU, creating a de facto self-regulating industry on the continent. In general terms, however, such integrated policy structures are rare. More commonly, lobbying relates to multilevel policy-making, that is, juggling national, regional and continental interests.

National governments show a significant reluctance to let interest groups act on the European level, and often maintain a tight grip on particular sectors. Parisian trade politicians for example, are more than happy to regard the French airline industry as their country's flagship. Apart from being protectionist, this policy is clearly counterproductive to European integration and hampers progress towards a 'level playing field' within the European transport industry. Another example is France's notorious agricultural subsidy schemes. The same reluctance to adapt to regional norms can be observed in the recognition of professional training. Although the EU has undoubtedly achieved far better regional integration than its critics thought possible 20 years ago, no German lawyer is given professional and academic recognition (and hence permission to open a practice) in France's parochially-driven bureaucracy.

Despite legitimate doubts about its real commitment to regional integration, the EU is gaining in credibility. Over the years, its regional legislation has progressed from abstract policy documents towards pragmatic decisions, impacting on the daily lives of 370 million citizens. In addition, Europe's enormous politico-economic weight in all parts of the world

means that much EU legislation has immediate consequences for countries outside Europe. In turn, this encourages countries outside the EU to seek to influence its policy.

Even though unanimous agreement is rare in EU politics, recent years have shown that a common policy is in the making. This will ultimately lead to a genuine regional policy structure. That the EU presented a united front in its bid to force the US to abandon national steel subsidies in December 2003 proves that in the long term, a uniform EU policy (guided by civic participation) can increasingly influence world politics. As soon as Europe's leaders acknowledge the overall benefits of a common policy for its member states, and adopt a common locus for decision-making in Brussels, civic groupings will follow suit. Until then, their lobbying will have to shuttle between national and regional institutions.

In sum, civil society participation in EU policy-making is extremely flexible and often undetectable. The creation of a regional structure is not attractive to most of Europe's leaders, and will become less so when, after May 2004, 10 additional states join the EU. While Germany and France as the Union's prime promoters are pushing for rapid integration in order to make the EU a decisive player in global politics, less powerful member states prefer to keep their sovereignty and make their membership work for their national interest. Spain and Poland vetoed a common EU constitution on 13 December 2003, the most recent example of the different motivations within the European Council. For decades, national lobbying groups have helped to shape the political landscapes of most member states: now civil society waits in the wings until the 25 member states allow Brussels to take over.

## Linking the European experience with civil society in the SADC region

There is little doubt that Europe wishes to integrate civil society into its policy-making

system. It even prioritises civil society participation in its biggest aid and trade programme with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. Although governments continue to determine national policies, the Cotonou treaty, for example, recognises the need for non-state actors and local authorities to be involved in the planning of national development strategies. Even the *EU-South Africa Trade, Development and Co-operation Agreement* of 1999 refers to 'the strengthening of civil society and its integration in the development process', and promotes 'dialogue and partnership between public authorities and non-governmental development partners and actors'. These efforts are closely linked to the Union's promotion of regional integration in developing countries.

However, civil society activity in Southern Africa remains distinct from that in the EU of today. The regionalisation of civil society's efforts in Southern Africa is occurring in a different context.

SADC's institutional framework provides little opportunity to lobby on a regional level. As member states are unwilling to relinquish their sovereign rights, SADC legislation remains arbitrary in its effects. Out of the 23 protocols signed to date, only 14 have been ratified and entered into force. In addition, the community has no supranational authority to enforce its decisions. As the example of the EU has shown, regional policy-making works only if national governments profit politically or economically from its consequences. So far, SADC member states see little merit in a regional policy structure, and remain reluctant to authorise a more powerful SADC to take over national decision-making on a regional basis. If regional legislation never goes beyond a protocol, it cannot affect the situation in any given country, which means that Southern Africa's civil society has little reason to focus on the regional level.

Second, we cannot speak of a dominance by corporate interests within the SADC region. Rather, civil society — as well as the individual member state — is

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## Civil Society's Role in Managing Conflicts in Africa

While long seen as a crucial element in the struggle for increased respect for democratic rule and human rights within African countries, civil society actors are only slowly recognising their role in addressing conflicts that pose threats to regional and sub-regional peace and stability. In many ways, this recent emergence coincides with the increased attention that regional economic bodies pay to security issues. The Fund for Peace, a Washington DC research and advocacy organisation, recently convened a series of sub-regional workshops that brought together civil society representatives in West Africa, East and Central Africa, and Southern Africa. At the three meetings, participants took part in two full days of plenary discussions on the role that civil society should play in strengthening African capacity to manage conflicts. In the end, each workshop agreed that civil society indeed had an important role to play in such matters and the participants crafted recommendations tailored to the specific challenges of their own sub-region.

Understanding civil society's role in managing conflict requires an initial assessment of what characterises civil society in each of the three sub regions under discussion. The relationship between civil society actors and governments is based on historical, political, and cultural precedents. In some regions, civil society has had a history of antagonistic interactions with local governments and is viewed with suspicion if not outright hostility. In this regard, the ability of civil society organisations (CSOs) to lobby effectively and advocate on behalf of local populations is challenged. In these regions, overcoming obstacles through repeatedly engaging government officials, improving the transparency and accountability of civil society, and networking across national boundaries has become a main focus. In other regions

civil society actors acknowledged their responsibility in becoming more active in engaging governments, regional and sub-regional bodies. In several countries, although the relationship between civil society and national governments was not openly antagonistic, previous interaction and collaborative work had been limited. A focus on finding points of entry and opening channels of dialogue were viewed as a first step in creating a stronger relationship with regional and sub-regional bodies.

In West Africa, a candid recognition that the region's conflicts spill over borders and create instability in neighbouring countries has pushed CSOs to work together more closely across national boundaries. Similarly, the region's organisation, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), has much more experience than other African bodies in confronting humanitarian crises and conflict. ECOWAS has intervened militarily in Côte D'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone and diplomatically in Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé and Príncipe. In a positive move, ECOWAS has undertaken a number of steps to institutionalise the channels of communication with the region's CSOs, including the recent creation of a Civil Society Liaison and the convening of a large conference in December 2003 in Ghana that brought together over one hundred organisations. Although it is too early to tell whether these initiatives will translate into actual sustained communication between ECOWAS and the region's CSOs, the Civil Society Liaison attended The Fund for Peace civil society workshop in October and the recommendations produced from that meeting were then taken to the December ECOWAS-sponsored meeting in Ghana.

One obstacle that West African civil society and ECOWAS must overcome is the tension created by Nigeria's regional dominance. While Nigeria's

leadership and resources have enabled ECOWAS to mount military interventions to stop conflict, the country's own civil society, as well as that of the rest of the region, feels overwhelmingly alienated from these interventions and is ignored when they sound the signals of early warning of conflict. At the outset, governments and regional bodies should better explain the steps leading up to the decision to intervene militarily, in order to allow for public debate to take place in advance of the intervention. In addition, better co-ordination and inclusion of the region's civil society in the civilian components of peacekeeping operations will contribute to a greater sense of regional identity and co-operation. This coordination can take two forms. First, CSOs have already been brought in to provide general training to West African troops in humanitarian issues, particularly in regard to the impact of interventions on women and children. This should continue. Second, once a country has been identified as a possible case for intervention, intervention planners should utilise the knowledge and expertise of local CSOs in assessing the needs of affected populations. In not considering holistic and culturally appropriate methods to peacekeeping and peace building, an intervention has the potential of causing more harm than good. A failure to include civil society expertise in past interventions has further resulted in the loss of a valuable source of reference for 'lessons learned' from previous interventions. As one participant stated, without attempting to learn from the failures of past interventions, ECOWAS is constantly "reinventing the wheel" when it attempts to avert or halt a humanitarian emergency.

While civil society has flourished in certain countries in East Africa and the Greater Horn region, the political dynamics of the region – the ongoing





Sudan conflict, the complete collapse of Somalia and the terrorist attacks in Kenya – have pushed non-governmental organisations to stay focused on national issues. The region also suffers from unresolved interstate disputes, such as the continued tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea. A number of overlapping regional bodies exist, such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the East African Community (EAC), and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern African (COMESA) but these have traditionally focused on development, trade and food security issues.

Only recently, with the increased attention given by IGAD to the Sudan and Somalia peace processes have civil society actors sought to engage regional bodies on peace building and security matters. Kenya's lead in reviving the failed Somalia peace process in October of 2002 under IGAD's auspices was characterised by the creation of technical committees to address concerns specific to civil society. The creation of a civil society committee tasked with dealing with issues of education and health care and a separate committee to address the needs of women and children were bold new initiatives. Additionally, women and village elders were brought into the consultative process on issues of disarmament, reintegration of combatants, and the creation of a reconciliation council. The collaboration was the result of strong lobbying on the part of several civil society groups and the recognition by IGAD that without the inclusion of local actors experiencing the effects of failed or collapsing states, comprehensive peace and security in the region would remain elusive. Furthermore, in its attempt to stem pastoral conflicts, IGAD has developed CEWARN, an early warning mechanism to determine signs of conflict along members' borders. This is a fledgling initiative but shows promise as it connects the regional body directly to actors on the ground who report on a comprehensive set of events and conflict indicators.

In Southern Africa, civil society has a history of cooperation as Front Line States struggled to help South Africans overcome the scourge of apartheid. With the events of 1994, the regional body, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and its members had to re-examine the organisation's mandate. In a series of protocols and public statements, the organisation conveyed its commitment to ensuring the human security of its populations. To date, however, SADC has not involved the region's civil society in regional processes of preventive diplomacy, early warning, and peace building. As in other regions – and some would argue to an even greater degree – there exists a pervasive lack of knowledge about the organisation, its components, and its protocols amongst CSOs. Civil society in Southern Africa, however, has undertaken on several instances to push for involvement in peace building processes on their own. Examples from Mozambique and Zambia, demonstrate civil society's effective partnership with government based on a mutual appreciation of the necessary roles played by each. South African organisations with regional links have contributed to peace negotiations in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda and education and research institutions have employed their peace-building expertise to train populations in post-conflict societies.

Critics argue that the failure of governments and SADC to more fully integrate civil society into diplomatic and conflict management initiatives reflects the organisation's tendency to place a higher value on protecting the sovereignty of its member states and their leaders than on addressing violence and conflict in the region. South Africa now holds an extremely influential position in the region. Civil society in neighbouring countries, however, expressed concern that South Africa, as a whole has been reluctant to take the lead in a number of regional

crises, particularly the political instability in Zimbabwe. For Southern Africa to achieve the goals laid out by SADC, South African civil society should be more active in working with its partners throughout the region and in pressuring its own government to fulfil the leadership role bestowed on it by its political history and resources.

When asked about the African Union (AU), civil society representatives across Africa said that it was clearly too soon to assess the impact of the newly transformed organisation. Some voiced concern that the sheer size of its members – 53 countries – makes it unable to react swiftly and decisively when crisis threatens or is occurring. Most importantly, the AU needs to do a better job of communicating its mission and instruments to Africans at all levels of society if it is to avoid being dismissed as nothing more than another social club for the continent's "big men." Civil society representatives throughout the continent acknowledged, however, that responsibility also falls to them to publicise the work being done by regional bodies and to provide serious analysis of these efforts.

If Africa's regional and sub-regional bodies are to succeed in reducing the continent's level of violence and political instability, civil society has a vital role to play. Below are recommendations made by African participants at The Fund for Peace's workshops and meetings with over one hundred African civil society representatives from more than 45 African countries in October and November 2003.

- First, CSOs should serve as interlocutors and educators, together with national governments, to local populations to communicate the guiding principles and functions of Africa's political organisations. If most Africans feel no connection to these bodies then their national leaders will have no homegrown incentive to abide by their principles and norms. Outside pressure can only go so far in creating the changes that Africa's visionaries imagine.

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way of South Africa's position within the region. Although praised for taking a leading role in regional affairs, South Africa faces increasing criticism for its political and economic expansionism. Before SADC moves towards a regional policy-making structure, a more balanced relationship should be achieved between its member states. (In the EU, the most powerful countries, France and Germany, provide an equilibrium.) Again, international actors from outside the Southern African region are often perceived as using SADC to promote a pro-Western agenda. When engaging on a regional level, international civil society organisations and their development partners will therefore have to live with scepticism as to their motives.

Third, civil society in Southern Africa should resist the temptation to shift its focus from a national to a regional level. In contrast to European countries' long tradition of civic participation in policy-making, many Southern African states do not allow for such active involvement in national legislation. As a result, civil society is attempting to make its opinions felt within the regional context. With a SADC policy structure in the pipeline, interest groups should make a push to be included in its functioning. However, the EU's experience shows that it may take decades before national governments are prepared to yield some of their independence to make a political community work.

With the above in mind, it is more important for non-governmental groups active in SADC to first organise themselves effectively at the national level. Only then will it become feasible for them to create networks to extend their reach to the regional context. Regional co-operation should be the result of, rather than the precondition for, effective lobbying at the national level. (G)

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(...continued from p.7)

· Second, CSOs, where possible, should continue to recognise that the newly created political space for civil society actors in many democratising African countries places upon them a new responsibility to constructively engage African policymakers on issues of conflict management and crisis prevention. No longer are civil society and national governments solely adversaries. But in playing a more assertive role in the policy-making process, CSOs must acquire new skills, expertise, and analytical tools.

· Third, CSOs should continue to form linkages across national borders and along overlapping issues of concern. Civil society representatives from across the continent lamented the limitations associated with over-dependence on donor funding from the West, which often leads to competition and precludes collaboration. While recent donor initiatives have sought to encourage partnerships among funding recipients and to maintain transparency about donor activities, these developments do not obviate the need for increased leveraging of local capacity. Pooling skills, resources, and knowledge will allow African civil society to begin to maximise their existing assets and establish a base from which to increase local and national investment in their work.

· Lastly, governments, regional and sub-regional bodies should recognise the wealth of value that civil society actors have in contributing to conflict prevention and management. Two areas specifically call for input from civil society: (1) the accumulation and communication of information for more effective early warning mechanisms, and (2) the training and participation of civil society in the planning and implementation of civil-military co-ordination in responding to humanitarian emergencies. In order for these inputs to translate into real action by policy-makers, the relationship between civil society and African's political organisations must become more formalised and more focused on collaborative policy-making. (G)

*Jason Ladnier and Patricia Taft of The Fund for Peace, Washington DC.*

## Protocol Update & Publications

On 31 October 2003 South Africa ratified the SADC Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement allowing for the Protocol to enter into force on the 30th of November 2003.

Mauritius ratified the SADC Protocol on Forestry on 8 October 2003.

'Defending the State or Protecting the People? SADC Security Integration at a Crossroads' by Anne Hammerstad. Published as SAIIA Report number 39 (2003). Available from [www.wits.ac.za/saiia](http://www.wits.ac.za/saiia)

'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Some reflections on the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence & Security Co-operation' by Hussein Solomon. SAIIA Report No, 10 (2003). Available from [www.wits.ac.za/saiia](http://www.wits.ac.za/saiia)

'Gender in Southern African Politics - Ringing up the Change' is a qualitative study released in December by **Gender Links**, a non-governmental organisation.

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## No Substitute for Politics in Angola

In Angola, the phrase 'civil society' has resonances far beyond the meaning of the term in other countries. Rallies or conferences might advertise the presence of a representative of civil society (almost invariably a lawyer or an academic), as if 'civil society' were a coherent organisation that can send a spokesman. Often, the term is synonymous with extra-parliamentary opposition. But at the other end of the political spectrum in Angola, the term can include the National Spontaneous Movement, a group which exists solely to hold demonstrations in support of the president.

'Civil society' is frequently taken as referring only to a group of intellectuals based in Luanda, and it is only through the churches that organised civil society can claim to have a wider reach. Social organisation has been most effective at the grassroots level, with umbrella groupings providing co-ordination and expertise. This has happened primarily in the coastal provinces, but more recently the reach of organisations has started to extend inland little by little.

This state of affairs has much to do with the stagnation of party politics in Angola. The old system of a single legal party (the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* — MPLA) versus an armed guerrilla movement (*União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* — UNITA) has not yet transformed itself into a dispensation where loyalty is determined by political choice rather than by the use of force. And for the most part the smaller parties which came into being after the official adoption of multiparty democracy owe their existence to the personality of a leader rather than the needs of a constituency.

Civil society in Angola coalesced around opposition to the civil war. From the late 1990s onwards, concerned civilians started to question the logic of the government and Unita, who both talked of their desire for peace but refused to call a ceasefire. Organised civil society became associated with a political third way, the need for which continues even

after the government and UNITA (following the death of Jonas Savimbi) concluded a peace settlement that excluded any input from civil society.

Although Angola's civil society organisations have benefited from vertical partnerships with international NGOs, which in many cases provide them with funding and organisational experience, horizontal links with civil society elsewhere in the region are notable by their absence. When co-operation does happen, it is seldom on the initiative of local NGOs. For example, when members of the Free Education Now coalition attended a regional workshop in Mozambique, the visit was initiated by Oxfam, an international NGO with a presence in both countries.

Language differences are an obvious barrier between Angola and the largely English-speaking countries in the region. Even among educated Angolans, knowledge of English is still the exception. Within the Portuguese-speaking world, Angola has always tended to look across the Atlantic to Brazil and to Portugal, rather than across the continent to Mozambique.

A more profound reason for the isolation of Angolan civil society may be the country's unique history, determined by decades of war, which has made its needs and priorities different from those of its neighbours. The country also lacks a democratic environment in which grassroots organisations might flourish. In a time of peace, and with the promise of greater political freedom, Angolans could well learn from the successes and failures of their neighbours.

The first step must be to build bridges between organisations working in corresponding areas, such as land, HIV/Aids or education. Those NGOs in the region that have experience of cross-border co-operation should make a particular effort. But it is clearly Angolans who best know their own needs, and who could profit most by seeking out those organisations in the region whose experience is most relevant to Angola's own. Although Angola may not always profit


### *Small successes in Angola*

**HIV/Aids:** Community-based groups have proved effective in providing education and guidance, to young people and to sex workers in particular.

**Land rights:** Pressure from the Land Coalition, a grouping of grassroots NGOs, persuaded parliament to extend the period for discussion of a new draft land law, so that more interested parties might be able to contribute to the debate. The NGOs believed that the bill did not give sufficient guarantees to peasant farmers and herders, who have the most to gain or lose from the new laws, and that the short timeframe and the legalistic language of the draft made it inaccessible to these people. President dos Santos tried to override the extension, saying in his 2003 New Year's message that parliament should approve the existing draft unchanged, but this has not yet happened. In the area of urban property rights, the human rights NGOs have succeeded in drawing attention to cases where the authorities have illegally demolished homes. However, attempts at legal redress have been hampered by the inefficiency of the judicial system.

**Education:** The Free Education Now coalition has reported some success in securing free education for primary-level pupils. Although primary tuition without charge is guaranteed by Angolan law, teachers or school administrators often impose arbitrary fees on parents. This initiative has in turn exposed the plight of teachers, who may go for months without receiving their government salaries.

from adopting models based on successes achieved elsewhere, Mozambique surely has particular lessons for Angola, given the shared language and colonial history, and comparable experiences of war and Marxist-Leninist administration of the two countries.

The rest of the region could in turn benefit by studying the small but significant victories achieved in Angola by organisations functioning with few resources in a not particularly friendly environment. 

Justin Pearce



## Struggling Without Support

Although there is an urgent need for private sector support of the regional economic environment, since its inception the SADC Association of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASCCI) has not been able to come up with viable, private-sector-friendly alternatives or recommendations for a regional policy. It has not been able to achieve its goals (financial strength and independence), and has not yet developed a regional culture of private sector support to counterbalance the national focus of its members. However, ASCCI is little more than the sum of its parts and reflects the weaknesses of its constituent members (the private sector support institutions of the 14 SADC states, excluding the DRC).

### Why is a regional chamber necessary?

By 1999 it had become evident that *ad hoc* private sector promotion by national business associations did not provide a sufficiently coherent strategy to combine public and private sector interests in the region. The Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry took the lead, drumming up support from donor organisations to establish ASCCI. The aim was to link the national chambers in Southern Africa and create a regional network to combine the voices of the private sector to promote its interests with SADC officials.

With the exception of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), all SADC national chambers are represented in ASCCI. In principle ASCCI's chairmanship rotates between the member countries every two years. The Mauritius Chamber held the chairmanship for the first term, and handed over to Malawi in 2002. However, it soon became evident that a revolving chairmanship led to organisational problems, such as difficulties in preserving institutional continuity. Also, the president and CEO of the Malawian Chamber resigned in 2002, which left the chamber temporarily anchorless. During 2003 the chamber resumed its functions, and is

preparing business plans for the SADC national chambers. To avoid another such experience, ASCCI decided its Secretariat should remain in Malawi for the time being where it will be run by the Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry and funded by ASCCI donors (mostly German and American).

ASCCI respects the sovereignty of the national chambers, but hopes to improve intra-regional trade and investment. ASCCI has made clear that it is no substitute for national chambers, which are supposed to work closely with their members and solve day-to-day issues. Rather it is a complementary organisation whose aim is to open a dialogue with the SADC institutions that will give private sector interests a voice in regional policies.

### ASCCI's plan of action

ASCCI's first action was the publication of a *White Paper on Economic Policy Issues in the SADC Region* in 2001. This aimed to shift the attention of the business community towards socio-economic issues, and initiate a debate about private sector involvement in SADC policy-making. The White Paper analyses trade, investment, competition and harmonisation policies, and assesses the economic impact of HIV/Aids within SADC. The fields of investment and growth, improved international competitiveness and expansion of intra-regional trade are identified as foci for private sector support. The White Paper also formulates general proposals on how to tackle the economic weaknesses of the region.

However, this document, with main inputs from the Mauritian Chamber of Commerce (also the initiator of ASCCI) and some contributions from the Malawi Export Promotion Council and South African Chamber of Business, has shortcomings. It relies on generalisations about constraints on economic development in the region (such as high dependency on primary commodities, high incidence of

poverty, lack of human capital and the low level of international competitiveness). The recommendations it makes (to promote diversification of production; increase efforts to foster training; and so on) are also commonplace. It does not go into sufficient detail about exactly what needs to be done at the regional level to help foster export diversification, for example, or assist the fight against HIV/Aids, and how the private sector can support these efforts.

A combination of weak policy and insufficient engagement by all of the national chambers has also meant that the priority tasks identified in the White Paper and assigned to Mauritius, Malawi and South Africa respectively have not been effectively implemented. The original timeframes of 12 to 18 months were over-ambitious.

Due to restructuring made necessary by its ASCCI chairmanship, the Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry handed over responsibility for the training programme (which focuses on practical knowledge of export marketing for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and which currently run as a pilot scheme in Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia) to the Malawi Export Promotion Council from whence little progress has been reported so far.

The Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry took responsibility for the establishment of the Southern African Business Network (SABN) with a website (<http://en.sabusiness.net>) to provide market information in SADC. However, because of difficulties in obtaining relevant information from national chambers, so far the website provides only the addresses, also website addresses, of the ASCCI members. In terms of making recommendations on the reduction of customs procedure and bureaucracies to the SADC Secretariat, the South African Chamber of Business has not reported any progress since sending a questionnaire about trade barriers to all ASCCI members in January 2003.



## Credits and constraints

Despite the apparent weakness and inefficiency of ASCCI, it remains the only private sector representative body that is officially accredited by the SADC Secretariat where it is represented through a private sector deck manned by Gideon Phiri. It could become a more robust tool that represents and lobbies the private sector at a high level.

However, the problem is that the national chambers are weak, and are unable or unwilling to support ASCCI. Most of the chambers lack human capital, management capability, finance, equipment and technical resources. At the time of ASCCI's inception, the Mauritian Chamber did not take these factors into account. The rotating chairmanship and transfer of ASCCI from Mauritius to Malawi has been a major problem and led to huge delays of the implementation of the three priority tasks mentioned above. The biggest constraints of the SADC chambers of commerce and industry are that none were initiated solely by the private sector and all are more or less donor-dependent.

The minimum range of services ASCCI should offer, such as the availability of business, information and trade support (for example in the field of customs procedures) has not yet been determined. No core objectives, like the promotion of small and SMEs, trade facilitation and entrepreneurship seminars have been developed. As a result ASCCI can hardly benefit from the experiences of the national chambers. Again, the private sector within SADC is highly fragmented, which is partly attributable to donors, who wished to support private sector development in the region but did not co-ordinate their various approaches.

The harmonisation of the different private sector support institutions is difficult enough on a national basis, as the example of South Africa, which is currently trying to merge its various nationally based chambers into one, shows. The task is even more complicated on a regional basis, because there is the difference be-

tween South Africa's businesses and those of the rest of SADC's members, and also variations between the different sectors. However, as ASCCI is not supposed to be a substitute for national chambers but rather a private sector lobby within SADC, there are shared regional-level private sector interests, which if allowed to influence SADC's policies, can act as a counterbalance to the interests of governments. For example, ASCCI could contribute to the debate on the implementation of the trade protocol, or support the creation of an investment protocol.

ASCCI needs to offer services to its members for which they are willing to pay. At present it raises high expectations by offering a series of services it is unable to deliver. Instead it should develop a central competence in areas of relevance to its members' needs. Moreover, the lobbying of national governments and regional decision-makers should be intensified so that policies that serve the interests of the private sector are decided and implemented. Only then will ASCCI earn its membership fees of around R10,000 per annum, payable by national chambers (at present payment morality is generally quite bad).

ASCCI is a mirror of national business associations and faces similar problems. Its aim to develop financial strength and become independent is highly dependent on the interaction with its members. It can survive only if it develops a regional culture of private sector support that transcends purely national interests.

## The way forward


ASCCI can function only if the national chambers engage with it, which most have yet to do. So far they have not realised the advantages of becoming members of ASCCI. (Botswana has withdrawn because it regards the membership fee as too high. However, officially it is still an ASCCI member.) Currently the question is which countries engage in ASCCI. At present, partly because of the failure to implement the *White Paper*, the agenda is mainly determined by the *Deutsche*

*Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS).

In 2003, recognising the weakness of capacity in many of its members, ASCCI started to draw up business plans that should enable the national chambers to improve their business operations and participate more fully on a regional level. To strengthen national chambers, ASCCI also plans to provide a series of workshop training programmes to improve the management skills of businesses, especially of SMEs, so as to make them more competitive in a challenging trade environment. Eventually, of course, ASCCI's job should be the support of national chambers – most of all – to lobby the SADC Secretariat on regional matters.

In November 2003, ASCCI and other private sector organisations such as the Southern African Enterprise Network (SAEN) and the Small Enterprise Promotion Advisory Council (SEPAC) and representatives of the mining, textile and banking associations debated whether the ASCCI's strategy should be included in SADC's 15 year Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP). To date the outcome of these discussions has not been published. Neither is it known in what form the White Paper would be incorporated into the revised RISDP.

Although it is discouraging that the acknowledgement of private sector interests by SADC planners is coming to fruition 10 years after first being mooted, it is essential that it should take concrete form now. The interests of the private sector should be formally incorporated into the RISDP, which would then take into account the need for proper planning for technical and human resources.

However, whether ASCCI remains an institution dominated by donors or becomes self-sustaining and independent depends on the political will and the active participation of its members. 

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## Unleashing the Watchdogs

Nearly three years ago, all 14 SADC heads of state signed the SADC Protocol Against Corruption. Similarly, signatories from Southern African governments were in Maputo last July, pen in hand, to sign up to the AU Convention Against Corruption. They again primed their nibs in Mexico on 9 December 2003, when governments queued to commit themselves to the UN Convention Against Corruption. The political will to support legislative instruments designed to counter graft in the private sector, government and civil society should not be taken for granted. It is only the first cautious step in the right direction which, failing the will to implement these undertakings effectively, can be trivialised into a mere political photo opportunity.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) — the media, not for profit non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community based organisations (CBOs), trade unions and the faith-based movement — constitute a sector that has widely disparate interests. However, it is characterised by a nominal independence and an informed understanding of the effects of corruption on the poor. In both the South and the North it is these organisations that fulfil a necessary role in raising awareness of the need to combat the age-old scourge of graft, to research the nature of the problem and to suggest policies that will stem such practice. In the dominant party states of the SADC region they also make a crucial contribution by acting as 'watchdogs' — particularly where political party opposition is weak, leaving rogue members of the ruling party to plunder state resources either alone or in collusion with partners in the private sector.


The relationship between CSOs and government is often an uneasy one, with less progressive regimes wavering between questioning the legitimacy of such organisations and clamping down on their activities. A case in point is the arrest of the chairperson of Transparency International Zimbabwe, who, together

with church leaders and trade unionists, was shackled by the police following a peaceful civil society protest in Harare late last year. This was a case of the state impounding the watchdogs. A few days prior to his arrest, John Makumbe was quoted in the press as stating that, '...the [Zimbabwean] economy is being stripped of its assets by corrupt practices both in the private and government sectors...' He was effectively censured for telling it like it is, in an overt warning to civil society in that country. Similarly, CSOs in other countries, like Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo, struggle to keep a check on official corruption having been decimated by both colonial rule and the subsequent civil wars.

However, in line with similar developments in the Americas and Asia, new organisations dedicated to combating graft through research and advocacy are emerging in the region. Active at a national level in countries such as Malawi, Mauritius, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, such NGOs, many of them chapters of Transparency International, combine local expertise with the work undertaken by regional CSOs such as the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and the Southern African Human Rights Trust. Equally important are the numerous other organisations that may not have a specific anti-corruption mandate but are essential to ensuring democratic accountability at a local and provincial level. The media is another key player. For example, journalists associated with the independent press in Mozambique have made a major contribution to anti-corruption efforts in that country. The murder of the investigative journalist Carlos Cardoso, who had been probing the theft of \$14 million from the country's largest bank, rocked Maputo in late 2000. As a supporter of the national liberation of Mozambique, Cardoso exemplified both courage and credibility, qualities which some opposition leaders in the region lack. The trial of his alleged murderer, televised live on public television, has arguably made

a significant contribution to entrenching public accountability in that country. It also remains true that the biggest fish remain the hardest to catch. Civil society — including the media — play a crucial role in ensuring that not only petty corruption is prosecuted but that political will is sustained to ensure the exposure and prosecution of prominent corrupt members of the business and political elite — the 'grand corruptors' — who have the power to plunder state assets if not kept in check.

Public and private sector anti-corruption initiatives need to be supported and nurtured. Equally, however, capacity needs to be built within civil society to ensure their long-term effectiveness. At a regional level some initial, albeit cautious steps were taken to promote co-operation amongst members of the (now dormant) Southern African Civil Society Anti-Corruption Network (SAC2.net) in 2002 and the more active Southern African Media Network Against Corruption (SAMNAC). At the national level, a Civil Society Network Against Corruption (CSNAC) was established in South Africa in 2003. This has drawn together approximately a dozen CSOs involved in anti-corruption work. Not designed as providing yet another structure, CSNAC presents an opportunity for CSOs with limited capacity to co-operate and avoid duplication of initiatives, so making the most of the skills within each organisation.

The relationship between the state and civil society in the region is likely to continue to be both confrontational and complementary. Civil society in the region is unevenly developed, for reasons noted above. But the combined efforts of civil society and the state to act on initiatives to combat corruption are a promising indicator that the civil sector will, despite some resistance from official quarters, continue to give voice to citizens' demands for democratic accountability in Southern Africa. 

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## The Role of the Media and Other Civil Society Organisations in Elections in SADC

It is now more than a decade since a number of African countries, including several in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), took their first tentative steps towards democracy. Civil society — the loose collection of voluntary organisations, groups, associations and networks that form an intermediary level between the state and the household, and which, defined broadly, includes all forms of non-governmental co-operation — played an important role in making these steps possible. In Zambia, for example, the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), led by Frederick Chiluba, in collaboration with various other civil society groups such as church organisations and academia, successfully challenged President Kenneth Kaunda's 30-year incumbency in 1991.

Encouragingly, at least two general elections have been held in most SADC states since 1990, and five SADC states (Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa) are scheduled to conduct multiparty general elections in 2004.

While this could suggest that democratisation in the region is moving from a phase of transition to one of consolidation, not all signs are positive. Zimbabwe is currently in political turmoil; the recent local elections in Mozambique were marred by reports of vote-rigging; and Swaziland continues to be ruled by the continent's last absolute monarch. In order for democracy in the region to be strengthened and consolidated, it is crucial that the five elections in SADC states in 2004 are well organised and that they are conducted in a free and fair manner. Although democracy is not an *ad hoc* event (every five years), where civil society should be galvanised, civil society does have an extremely important role to play in ensuring that elections accurately reflect the wishes of a well-educated and demo-

cratically responsible citizenry.

It is vital that civil society involvement begins well before the actual day of the election. It should continuously lobby the government to institute free and fair electoral procedures. It should also undertake pre-election monitoring, as this is often the phase during which elections are rigged, or when intimidation mars their fairness. Voter education programmes covering issues such as voter registration and the process of voting itself should be provided prior to the election. Such programmes should go deeper than just 'voter education'; and extend to civic education, which de-

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**Civil society does have an extremely important role to play in ensuring that elections accurately reflect the wishes of a well-educated and democratically responsible citizenry.**

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monstrates the importance of the electoral process and how a democracy should function. This is necessary if democracy is to be understood and practised. Civil society should also mobilise the electorate by encouraging them to register and participate in the election.

The monitoring of the voting and counting procedures on the day of the election, to ensure that there are no incidents of electoral fraud, is another important role of civil society. Although it is common for international organisations to participate in the observation of elections in SADC, local organisations are better placed than international observers to monitor the *entire* process of the election from a much earlier stage, having a better understanding of the language, culture and context in which the election takes place. For this reason, it is critical that local and re-

gional organisations learn to perform this function effectively and transparently.

Finally, civil society groups such as religious bodies can act as informal arbitrators of disputes both on election day and following the election by using their standing in the community. In this way they can encourage the various parties to resolve their issues peacefully through discussion and mediation.

However, the political space must be open to allow civil society to make a contribution. Within SADC there are a number of possible obstructions that might prevent civil society from fulfilling these roles in elections. Firstly, governments may attempt to constrain civil society through regulation or legislative means. This is the case in Zimbabwe, where the Private Voluntary Organisation Act stipulates that all such organisations must be registered with the government, which has appointed a board with the power to decide which organisations to accredit. Secondly, government may try to co-opt civil so-

cety leaders that it finds potentially threatening. This is often the case with trade unions and student organisations, as these groups are more prone to activism than other parts of civil society. Thirdly, a lack of funding, exacerbated by economic conditions, might restrict the role that civil society could play in elections. This is often linked to weaknesses in skills capacity and knowledge about doing advocacy and lobbying work and a lack of organisational capacity. As a result of these constraints, civil society often suffers from a lack of influence or power, especially in countries in which the government is highly centralised and dominant.

Although most civil society organisations can be involved in ensuring that electoral practices are free and fair, it is the media that are best placed to play

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the most significant role. The potential of the media to assist the consolidation of democracy is undeniable. The press and radio and TV networks have access to a significant proportion of the electorate, and can communicate invaluable information, such as where and how to register, and where and how to vote. It is also important that voters are provided with sufficient data about the political parties, the candidates and their policies, so that the choice they make when voting is an informed one. The provision of such knowledge is largely the responsibility of the media. Television, radio and print allow political parties and their candidates to communicate with the electorate, and give voters a way to articulate their views to political leaders. Even more important, the media can and should facilitate debate, not only between the various political parties, but also amongst the electorate. As Dr Tawana Kupe, head of Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, comments, this role is extremely important in SADC countries, where there is currently very little engagement between candidates.

William Bird, director of the Media Monitoring Project in South Africa, suggests a more dynamic role for the media in South Africa. 'The media needs to dictate the news agenda', argues Bird, 'instead of merely reporting on an election event such as a campaign rally'. By being proactive, instead of allowing politicians to direct the coverage of elections, the media can help the electorate to identify which parties are most likely to serve their particular interests. Kupe supports this view, and argues that the lack of critical analysis of both the party manifestoes for upcoming elections and past policies contributes to voter apathy. These arguments are applicable to all SADC countries. The media are also well positioned to act as 'watchdogs', detecting and reporting any events that are contrary to the country's electoral law. Finally, they have one other important responsibility: the reporting of the election results.

The media suffers its own difficulties in performing its roles in the electoral process. One significant limitation is that of access. The high rates of illiteracy in SADC states and the lack of an adequate distribution network, especially in rural areas, mean that the effectiveness of print media is severely constrained. A lack of resources is also

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## Local organisations are better placed than international observers to monitor the entire process of the election...

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a problem. As Bird points out, without resources and skills, the media will be unable to shift from reporting events to debating issues. The independence of the media is another reason the media often finds it difficult to perform certain roles in elections. While radio is a medium that allows for greater accessibility to the population in many SADC countries, it is often, like television, controlled by the state. Clearly, when media is owned by the state, even if it does have some degree of autonomy, it is difficult for it to avoid accusations of bias and act as a watchdog. This is evident in South Africa where the SABC has recently been accused of giving the ANC an unfair advantage by covering the launch of the ANC's 2004 election manifesto. Although all SADC member states have endorsed the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Media, the autonomy of the independent media in a number of states is also very fragile, as events surrounding the closure of the *Daily News* in Zimbabwe have shown. Threats to the autonomy of the independent media extends to the press in Swaziland, where journalists are frequently threatened when they are critical of leaders; Angola, where *Radio Ecclesia*, an in-

dependent radio station, is often the target of intimidation; and Namibia, where, in March 2001, the state banned all government advertisements from appearing in *The Namibian*, a newspaper critical of the Namibian government's policies. In fact, there are examples of the autonomy of the media being threatened in almost all SADC states and, furthermore, the weak response to the appeal by MISA against the closure of the *Daily News* does not bode well for the future of media freedom in the region.

In order to report accurately on issues of malpractice in elections and be able to fulfil their monitoring role, the media require independence from government. According to Dr Kupe, in many Southern African states, 'the government is the greatest threat to electoral independence'. For instance, in Malawi, he argues, political leaders hold economic stakes in the media, which are therefore tied to a particular interest. Without independence from government and politicians, it is impossible for the communication networks to provide all political parties with equal and impartial coverage, and consequently to enable the electorate to make informed decisions when voting.

The media, however, like all other groups that make up civil society, also have a responsibility towards both the public and the government. Civil society organisations often have their own political agendas which can affect the outcome of elections, especially when those organisations are co-opted by government. It is the media that has the added responsibility of being objective, although not neutral. While it is not necessary that the private media remain entirely objective, it is extremely important that they provide a reasonably balanced view of events and avoid sensationalism. In this way, the media will best achieve their roles of informing and educating the public about the elections; monitoring the electoral processes; and strengthening and deepening democracy in SADC. 

Michael Davies





## Foreign Aid and Regional Co-operation

Shortcomings in SADC's co-ordination of aid flows, and in particular its failure to take into account support for regional co-operation that is channelled outside the formal SADC structures, limit the organisation's ability to provide direction to these aid flows and carry out its development agenda. The flow of external aid to regional co-operation has slackened, and the impact of regional co-operation efforts has been reduced, curtailing efforts to improve national capacities to participate in, and benefit from, improved regional co-operation.

Foreign aid donors have played a crucial role in the evolution of SADC and the implementation of regional co-operation projects. SADC itself estimates that approximately 80% of funds for SADC's project portfolio in the year 2000 came from foreign sources. Foreign aid also often includes significant technical assistance provided by expatriates and consultants in the various project implementation units at the national and regional levels.

In an unpublished SADC document, reprinted as annex 12 in the *SADC/European Commission Regional Strategy Paper and Regional Indicative Programme for the period 2002–2007*, the SADC Secretariat provides a list of donor contributions to SADC. It shows that major donors such as the European Commission, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the British Department for International Development are key contributors. Some donors (like Germany and France) focus heavily on technical assistance, while others concentrate on single issues. (Norway provides special funding for the institutional restructuring of SADC.)

The SADC list is, however, incomplete, particularly in failing to report the support for regional co-operation that does not involve the formal SADC structures. Such aid may assist national authorities to participate in regional co-operation; or fund regional organisa-

tions, private or public, that fall outside SADC structures; or even support the regional activities of national organisations.

### Composition and direction

The bulk of donor support for regional co-operation is probably directed outside the ambit of SADC. For example, in the financial management areas, such as auditing and statistics, most funding for regional co-operation is channelled to other institutions. Donors such as Sweden, Denmark and the African Capacity Building Foundation are major funders of several financial foundations, including the Regional Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions and the Macro Economic Financial and Management Institute of Eastern and Southern Africa. Support for regional efforts to improve governance, human rights and democratisation from donors such as Denmark or USAID is mostly routed to a range of private and civil society organisations and to independent bodies such as the SADC Parliamentary Forum, the SADC Election Commissioners Forum, the Southern African Human Rights Trust or the Southern Africa Legal Aid Network. Again, Norway, Denmark and the Open Society Foundation are major supporters of initiatives to strengthen a free and independent media through organisations like the NSJ Southern Africa Media Training Trust, the Media Institute of Southern Africa or the Southern Africa Media Development Fund. Norway and the UK also provide support to the regional outreach activities of national organisations in South Africa (and to a decreasing extent in Zimbabwe) to assist the regional project. Other donors provide funds to private institutions in Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa especially, enabling them to monitor and report on regional co-operation.

Such support is also a reflection of existing needs. Increased regional co-operation in Southern Africa requires external assistance at many levels and

through a variety of channels, not merely through formal inter-governmental SADC structures. However, many donors privately express reservations about the slow movement and poor performance of SADC, and actively seek alternative channels to assist regional co-operation. Many also find that SADC has limited capacity to absorb additional aid funds.

### Restructuring

The current restructuring and refocusing of SADC pose several challenges for SADC–donor relations. In the past the Community was preoccupied with managing regional co-operation projects through decentralised and country-based project units. Now it is moving towards a centralised structure, focusing more on policy formulation and harmonisation and less on project activities. This requires changes in the way SADC interacts with foreign donors. Developments at the pan-African level, especially following the Nepad initiative, require new dialogue between African countries and donors in the North to meet greater demands on external finance for development.

SADC's Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan also recognises the need for a new relationship with donors. This plan acknowledges that SADC needs to strengthen its aid co-ordinating mechanisms, but does not specify how. Other SADC documents envisage the establishment of a small unit in the Department of Strategic Planning that will monitor foreign donors.

### National and regional

The most challenging task, however, may not be to recalculate the composition and direction of foreign aid allocations to different regional projects, but to ensure that support provided for regional co-operation is co-ordinated with the much larger aid allocations for individual SADC countries. In almost all external aid agencies the relationship


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between regional and country support is poorly conceived or non-existent. Do the country allocations assist in building national capacity for regional co-operation? Can aid funds provide benefits that compensate for the costs associated with increased regional co-operation and integration?

Increased co-operation requires improved co-ordination, both of which will meet new demands. National institu-

tions in individual countries and their capacities need to be strengthened so as to take part in SADC. This includes assisting both SADC's new national committees and the government departments charged with implementing SADC programmes. Furthermore, improved co-ordination involves support to individual countries and the provision of compensation to those bearing costs resulting from the transition to economic integration.

The foreign donors themselves are fragmented, and are pursuing too many agendas to improve co-ordination in any effective way. Ideally, SADC should orchestrate better relations between foreign donors and regional initiatives. A first step is to map and monitor what aid donors are doing apart from providing direct financial support to the SADC Secretariat. 

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### Selected SADC meetings: January - March 2004

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<b>January</b>		
Meeting of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security	11-13 January	Lesotho
EPA (EU Economic Partnership Agreement) Preparatory Meeting	19-20 January	Belgium
Food Security Monitoring Systems meeting	24-26 January	South Africa
Draft Finance & Investment Protocol Discussion	29 January	Botswana
<b>February</b>		
Donors Roundtable Meeting for Presentation of Capacity Building Project Proposals	2-3 February	TBA
Trade Negotiation Forum and Trade Ministers Meeting	9-13 February	TBA
Ministers of Finance Meeting	23 February	South Africa
SADC Council Chairperson's visit to the SADC Secretariat	23-24 February	Botswana
SADC Information 21 Project Regional Consultative workshops	3 February-24 March	All member states
<b>March</b>		
Standing Committee of Senior Officials	9-10 March	Tanzania
Finance Committee	11 March	Tanzania
SADC Council of Ministers	12-13 March	Tanzania
Roundtable on Dispute Settlement Mechanism	15-16 March	South Africa
Launching of the SADC Culture Trust Fund	24 March	Mozambique
Launch of SADC EPA Negotiations	29 March	Belgium
SADC-EU Media Practitioners' Workshop on the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan	March	Zambia
SADC Information 21 Project Roundtable for Media Training Institutions	March	TBA
A number of other committee and subcommittee meetings will be taking place. Further details can be obtained from the SADC website: <a href="http://www.sadc.int">www.sadc.int</a>		