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Abstract

This article discusses the interface between governance and social policy as it plays itself out in the functioning and the agenda of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It proceeds from the premise that there is a correlation between progressive change in governance and the emergence of a sound social policy agenda. The paper shows that under conditions of weak and poor governance, social policy is undermined. In fact, in the dark days of southern Africa's governance, there was no attempt to develop social policies, at all. The improved governance situation in the region in the past two decades has given rise to a comprehensive social agenda in SADC's Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), broken down into deliverables and targets. But this has been undermined by the failure of governance reforms to improve institutional efficiency and effectiveness. Hence, the paper argues that SADC needs to remedy institutional deficiencies in order to translate grandiose social or developmental goals into tangible social development in the region.

1. Introduction

The relationship between the nature and conduct of the state, on the one hand, and the achievement of desired social and economic outcomes, is no longer a subject of dispute anymore. It is generally accepted that poverty and underdevelopment arise not only from economic inadequacies and social disintegration, but also from the failure of institutions and mechanisms that manage the relationship between governments and citizens. Leftwich (1993: 611) makes the point by saying: 'Governance … refers to a looser and wider distribution of both internal and external political and economic power. Governance thus denotes the structures of political and, crucially, economic relationships and rules by which the productive and distributive life of a society is governed.' Bad governance contributes to the spread of poverty and underdevelopment, and the fight against poverty requires strong and developmental institutions to succeed. Governance is good when it enables the representation of the welfare, rights and interests of citizens and residents; the creation and enforcement of policies and laws; the administration of programmes and provision of services, the management of natural, social and cultural resources; and negotiation with governments and other groups (de Alcantara, 1998; Bardhan, 1997).

Southern Africa is confronted with serious socio-economic challenges including general poverty, food insecurity, high incidence of disease including HIV and AIDS, low levels of social service delivery, high unemployment, disillusionment, social alienation and criminality.

These developmental challenges can be blamed on the failure of state and other institutions of governance to make difficult choices in pursuit of development and to fight poverty and underdevelopment. Deeper levels of poverty are a symptom of the crisis of the African state as much as this is an outcome of distortions and transformations caused by globalisation. This includes the manner in which Africa was integrated into this globalising economy under colonial rule and as part of neo-colonial processes driven by international finance institutions, NGOs and powerful states (Mhone, 2003; Murphy, 2001; Mkandawire *et al,* 1999).

This led to a view that regional integration and the creation of regional interstate institutions like the SADC established in 1992 would encourage a positive interface between governance and development in African regions. SADC, in particular, was established with the aim of galvanising the countries of the region to harmonise their policy responses and to develop common strategies towards these challenges, including poverty eradication. SADC, has since its inception, adopted a plethora of social policies and restructured its governance mechanisms in the hope that this will enhance its fight against poverty. This article examines the extent to which SADC has been able to effectively eradicate poverty and related social ills from the region. The paper also attempts to identify areas of weakness in SADC's endeavours at poverty eradication and proposes remedial actions.

2. The problem statement: Governance and social outcomes

The effect of social policy interventions depends to a large extent on the efficiency and effectiveness of governance institutions that control the provision of essential socio-economic services, management of power relations among various tiers of government, stakeholder engagement, citizen participation, and accountability mechanisms in society. Mkandawire (2001:18) says:

> *To the extent that such policies are driven by the values of different social actors with different ideological positions, and to the extent that they invariably entail intra- and inter-generational redistribution issues, they are the outcomes of political bargains and conflicts since they touch upon power in society, its distribution and accessibility to different political actors. In any society, it is obvious that the state will not institutionalise social policies that conflict fundamentally and consistently with principles of the dominant economic system and power relations.*

There is consensus that deficient governance arrangements and the deterioration of institutions of state and society lead to weak delivery of public goods essential in the fight against poverty (Dodson and Smith, 2003; Jütting et al, 2004). It has been argued that sustainable development can only be guaranteed by the existence of effective, strong, accountable and legitimate governance mechanisms. These institutions must be accountable not just to external actors, but also to internal constituencies. Institutions responsible for safeguarding people's rights to freedom from fear and want are effective when they allow space for people to participate in the determination of policy responses to development imperatives. Governance is weak when power is concentrated in a few without serious accountability to the people on the ground, when there are no checks and balances, when the citizens feel alienated from institutions of state and society that are meant to serve them, and when the state is unable to efficiently provide essential public amenities. Incompetence, ubiquitous corruption and nepotism in the public service, all contribute to deterioration in the socio-economic conditions in society. While corruption has to do with the degeneration of morality and related social values, it thrives in conditions where there are weak institutions for service delivery and accountability. In this sense, poverty and underdevelopment are partly an artefact of institutional failures.

However, the relationship between governance and social policy is a lot more complex than is generally assumed. The relationship between stronger and cleaner governance and the ability of society to overcome social ills is problematic. A comprehensive review of the correlation between democracy and modernisation in Africa found that 'few African countries have really reached a level of development that strongly correlates with the establishment of stable democratic regimes.'[i] This conforms to findings by studies elsewhere suggesting that the correlation between democratic governance and development outcomes is not simple and unproblematic. These studies indicate that the relationship is mediated by a host of other intervening factors including citizen-state relationship, institutional cultures, legitimacy, and credibility of institutions and leadership (Przeworski *et al*, 2000). There is a growing body of literature that suggests that sometimes poor governance does not hinder economic growth and social development. There is body of literature which argues that there is, in some cases, a positive correlation between corruption, economic growth and social development (Tullock, 1980; Beck and Maher, 1986; Munro, 1995). The point made in these studies is that corruption has positive outcomes for economic development. This has led some economists to agree on the notion of 'efficiency-enhancing corruption' (Bardhan, 1997; Huntingdon, 1968; Boycko et al, 1995). By this, they mean that in particular circumstances corruption does enhance efficiency in the economic system.

Some analysts have argued further that in the face of cumbersome regulations, over-centralised public administration, and political authority, the onset of corruption may actually have the effect of improving efficiency and economic growth. This is because unwieldy governance mechanisms tend to frustrate service delivery, thus encouraging clients to find ways to get around systems and processes, and payment of bribes is a common recourse in this regard. In the private sector, the black market is more prevalant when normal or formal institutions of state and business become slow and tedious. In this sense, smuggling and informal channels of acquiring services and assistance may actually improve business and investment processes. According to Leff, quoted in Bardhan (1997:17), 'If Government has erred in its decisions; the choice made possible by corruption may well be the (sic) better one.' In this sense, corruption can be seen as much-needed grease for the squeaking wheels of a rigid administration. On his part, Huntingdon (1968: 68) surmised, 'The only thing worse than a society with a rigid, over-centralised, dishonest bureaucracy is one with a rigid, over-centralised, honest bureaucracy.'

Some have stretched the argument further by contending that, in fact, corruption and rent-seeking are a part of Coase Theorem of bargaining in which a bureaucrat, who is charged with providing access to public resources by issuing licenses and permits, and a private agent, who needs such access negotiate their way to an efficient outcome (Boycko et al, 1995). Studies in Asia revealed that because access is often given to the highest bidder in bribes, allocative efficiency is somewhat maintained because this form of corruption helps tp speed up the process of awarding contracts and thus the delivery of whatever services was desired (Bardan, 1997; Munro 1995). It was also found that bribes elped essential projects to jump the queue and escape the logjam in the administrative system. Corrupt officials practiced price differentiation among clients who had different time preferences, thus minimising loss of essential services that would have otherwise been lost due to administrative delays. This suggests that there may actually be what could be called developmental corruption as opposed to the predatory type that is typical of African public services.

Of course, these studies do not resolve the problem that corruption is not just an issue of economic and technical rationality, but it is also a matter of morality and values. It is a given that this body of literature does not seek to make the case for rent-seeking and corruption per se, rather, it seeks to examine why corruption thrives in certain situations and not in others. In these studies, there is no denying the fact that corruption corrodes confidence in public institutions; incorrectly enriches public servants at the expense of the poor; corrupt officials assume too much power over the provision of public services; there is no recourse when officials renege on their promises made in a corrupt encounter; corruption amounts to double taxation; and it leads to diversion of resources away from productive activities (Bardhan, 1997). The basic point made here, which is relevant to our discussion, is that there is, indeed, a close correlation between governance and development, and that this may be positive or negative, depending on the nature of governance. Corruption which compromises social policy is essentially an outcome of either bloated or weak governance systems.

3.Governance for social development

Governance in this case denotes processes, structures and institutions (formal and informal) through which a community or society distributes and exercises political authority and power, makes decisions, determines its strategic goals, and organises group and individual behaviour by setting rules of conduct and assigning responsibilities (Dodson and Smith, 2003). In a sense, governance is essentially about authority, power relationships and processes of participation and accountability that determine how decisions about human development are made. It describes how various stakeholders are given space to influence such decisions.

Although the concepts of governance and government are related, they are not necessarily synonymous. While government denotes jurisdiction and mandated control over members of a group, its land and resources, governance entails putting in place structures and processes necessary to exercise such a jurisdiction. This necessarily includes representation of rights, interests, and needs of constituencies, the development of rules to govern the management of power, the creation of developmental policies and laws to guide the delivery of public goods, the establishment of an administrative machinery for the provision of public services, the management of group resources, and negotiation with other groups or countries.

Our argument is that the manner in which governance functions has a direct bearing on the well-being of individuals and groups in society. The nature of governance may either enhance or hinder social/ human development in society. While emphasis is usually on the regulatory dimension of governance, concerned largely with legitimacy (governance as rule-making), it is crucial to note that governance is also about the capability (efficient and effective response to social and economic problems and needs), particularly of the state institutions to discharge their duties, including providing services to the people.

The latter has serious consequences for social policy, in particular, and social development in general. It is a common knowledge that effective development depends on how society manages the distribution of public goods, especially the enabling resources. The state's capacity to manage (planning and control), administer, and implement programmes that promote economic development, promote stability and meet people's needs is vital.

4. The State in Southern Africa and the governance conundrum

The post-colonial state has been blamed by various hools of thought for the failure of development in Africa. The analysis has focused on the structure of the state and its conduct. The first relates to a view that the African state was so strong that it intervened too much in the functioning of society and its economy to the detriment of human development.[ii] Analysis from institutions behind the neo-liberal policies imposed on African countries from the 1970s - principally the Bretton Woods Institutions - averred that the African state was a stumbling block to market-driven economic growth and its distribution among different segments of the population. It was argued that through parastatals, the state controlled key productive sectors like industry and agriculture, but was ill-equipped to efficiently manage the economy. It is also said that the state imposed many constraints to market activity including price controls and limitations on foreign exchange control in pursuit of economic protectionism.[iii]

Critiques of the African state decried it for being over-centralised, over-extended and predatory in character. In 1981, the World Bank released a report on its analysis of the underlying causes of the economic and social crises gripping Africa entitled *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*. It assessed the long-term constraints on development, skills development, and the use of technology and innovation. The report found that the causes of underdevelopment in Africa included wrong economic policies applied including the import-substitution policies that rendered commodity-based economies too dependent on export. This affected African countries badly after the oil crisis of the early 1970s. As unemployment rose and businesses collapsed, the African state intervened by expanding the range of activities it was involved in to create employment, regulate exchange controls and trade (internal and externally).

The analysis went on to say that governments became major employers without a concomitant increase in the quality and reach of public services. In this sense, there was no value added by increased absorption by the state of the unemployed. Governments imposed price controls to protect 'national interests.' As a result, governments increased budget deficits, as did balance of payments deficits. Imported goods including technology became expensive and, therefore, scarce. Unable to access imported inputs, factories and agricultural farms produced below capacity and sold at artificially low prices. The purchasing power of wages declined, in turn reducing the market for goods and services. The black or parallel market grew fast. The expansion of the state role in the economic arena created opportunities for rent-seeking and tribute taking. Government officials and politicians that controlled the state benefitted immensely, while the poor were deprived of essential services and goods. Corruption pre-existed these developments, but it increased drastically during this period.

The crux of the World Bank argument was that the problem was sparked and sustained by the interventionist role of what was an inefficient African state, anyway. It argued that the only way out was through a series of structural adjustment measures aimed at reforming the economy by reducing the role of the state in the economy, among other measures. The actual content of the political reforms amounted to attempts to completely weaken and disintegrate this state without replacing it with a more capable and an effective set of institutions. As we shall see, these solutions imposed through structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), in turn deepened the problems of poverty and underdevelopment. When governments found themselves unable to pay for essential imports or to pay interest on their foreign debts or access new loans from commercial sources, they were forced into the hands of the World Bank and the IMF (Williams, 1994). The Bank imposed as its conditions for lending to these governments, a set of minimum economic and political reforms. No wonder, three years later the Bank reported in its next report, *Toward Sustained Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: a joint program of action,* that the fundamentals were changing in African economies, raising prospects of better growth rates and developmental outcomes. It pointed to 'recent experience in Africa … [that] some countries are introducing policy and institutional reforms' (World Bank, 1984: 2).

Public sector reforms amounted to nothing but an attempt to weaken the state and reduce its capacity to intervene in the economy. However, the issue that Bank and neo-liberal thinkers had with the interventionist state was not derived purely from cold analysis of the facts on the ground, but it was also part of their ideological perspective. Guy Mhone (2003:2) put it this way: 'The dogmatic insistence on a minimalist state role is based on the claimed virtues of the entrepreneur as the main economic agent and actor, the market and private sector as the driving forces of the economy, and unfettered pure competition domestically and internationally as the harbingers of dynamic efficiency and growth.' This was challenged by analysis that highlighted underlying structural deficiencies in the free-market system and world market imperfections (structuralists) and pointed out the limitations of the dominant theories of economic specialisation and competitive advantage (new trade theory). Empirical studies found that while structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) helped stabilise collapsing economies, they failed to rejuvenate them to the point where it was possible to reverse underdevelopment. In some cases, long-existing distortions in the economy such as export-dependence and budget deficits persisted and even worsened (Gervais, 1995). These studies led evidence to show that reforms imposed through SAPs led to a weak and incapable state and market forces failed to step in to play the benevolent role promised. They revealed the social costs of cuts in public expenditure in the form of deepened levels of poverty, disintegration of institutions of public health and education, collapse of social security systems, and the falling apart of families and communities (Lugalla, 1995; Bush, 1995). The hope that the market would step in and take over the social and economic roles that the state was being forced out of did not happen, resulting in a huge institutional vacuum. This made it difficult for even well intended policies to produce desired social and economic outcomes (Mhone 2003).

In 2000, the Bank released a report entitled *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century* in which it reflected on the impact of its interventions since 1982. The report found that, 'Since the mid-1990s, there have been signs that better economic management has started to pay off.' (World Bank 2000:8). It also reported progress in policy reforms, suggesting that the fundamentals were in place for economic growth to follow. Of course, this growth did not happen. When the World Bank finally admitted that the SAPs were largely a failure, it again blamed the African states for failing to demonstrate political will necessary for austerity measures to succeed. So, it failed to take responsibility for imposing governance reforms that did not promote positive developmental outcomes (Easterly, 2003).

The second set of criticisms, which focuses on the conduct of the African state, includes the works of African political economists like Claude Ake, Amilcar Cabral, and Samir Amin.[iv] In their view, the persistence of underdevelopment is partly an outcome of the manner in which African countries were integrated into a globalising economy during colonisation. They have argued that while developed countries that are today, the centres of globalisation, had the opportunity to define the terms of their integration into the world system and by so doing shaping it, African countries were integrated passively (through the intermediary of titular colonial powers). The result has been that while they became very instrumental in the smooth functioning of global economic order, they did not play any significant role in it. African countries' role in the system has been that of producers and exporters of essential commodities and raw materials that provide the basis of economic growth in the rich nations. Designed to service the core of the former colonial powers, the former colonial states became a key part of an unequal and exploitative global economic order. To fulfil this role, the African state became autarchic and its intervention in the economy tended to favour export trade instead of diversified production for local needs and export, at the same time. In Southern Africa, this produced a political economy marked by a sharp distinction between the opulence of a small settler economy and the abject poverty of the largely African majority. This is the state and political economy that the post-colonial society inherited.

This school of thought further argues that the problem is that post-colonial rulers were more interested in inheriting rather than in fundamentally reforming the colonial economy and state. In many cases, the African petit-bourgeoisie that controlled the liberation movements which captured the state and elements of the economy advanced their own class interests at the expense of the poor majority (Alhuwalia, 1998). State and nation-building took precedence over mass participation and the provision of essential socio-economic services to the poor. This is how neo-colonialism failed African social development according to (Amilcar Cabral in Nzongola-Ntalanja 1987). In this sense, liberation movements and the African petit-bourgeoisie that led the fight against white colonialism may have been anti-racist to the core, but were not necessarily fundamentally anti-colonial and anti-capitalist. In practice, the African political elite were not keen to fundamentally transform the state and related institutions that served an essentially colonial agenda and a capitalist economy that reinforced that agenda (Ahluwalia and Nursey-Bray 1997).

Therefore, under their rule, the problems of an externally-oriented economy persisted even in the face of the self-reliance rhetoric of the 1970-80s. The new elite helped sustain and deepen problems of corruption, autocracy, and inefficiency that defined the colonial state. Even the democratisation wave that started with the collapse of the Soviet Union has not led to a fundamental transformation of the state and the economy in southern Africa. The holding of regular elections, adoption of liberal constitutions, ratification of human rights instruments, and public service reforms have not produced a form of governance that makes it possible to attain the desired social and economic outcomes for the people of the region.

There are differing views on what should be the character and conduct of a state that would lead to a successful fight against poverty and underdevelopment. A commonly held view is that the region in particular and Africa in general, needs an activist or interventionist state that is at the same time democratic in substance. This is a state whose ideological orientation or philosophical underpinning is developmentalism. Such a state draws its legitimacy from its success in promoting sustained economic development and putting into place social policies that translate economic growth into human well-being. To be able to do this, such a state needs to develop technical and political capacity to implement economic and social policies that incentivise and encourage the markets to help overcome poverty and underdevelopment.

It must be autonomous from internal and external forces that have precluded the state from playing an active, but progressive role in the economy and society. It must also enjoy enough legitimacy in society to be able to mobilise all sectors of society in a concerted and well-defined effort to achieve all these goals.[v] Some have described this as a developmental state, founded on democratic norms as opposed to a dictatorial developmental state that emerged in Asia in 1980s.

The challenge is that not enough effort is being made to evolve and support the requisite holistic reforms that would undo the colonial and post-colonial traits of the African state. The state is central to the enhancement of governance in the region for economic and social development. Without this transformation, no amount of infrastructural development, economic reforms, social policy adjustments or electoral democracy will guarantee the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment in the long run. The failure of the huge amount of resources invested in the African economy and in governance by the donor community to engender any visible change in the region could be partly explained by the ill-advised weakening of the state through structural adjustment (SAPs) and the assumption that democratisation will on its own produce capable and efficient governance.

5.SADC governance for social and economic outcomes

5.1 Poverty and regional integration

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has recognised that the biggest challenge facing the region is not necessarily conflict and political instability as is the case in other regions of Africa. Rather, it is high levels of poverty and inequalities. When the Southern African Development Cooperation Conference (SADCC) was transformed in 1992 into the SADC, the primary impetus was to establish an effective governance mechanism for a concerted fight against ubiquitous poverty in the region. SADC was formed to respond to the socio-economic conditions of the majority of the 200 million inhabitants of the region. It was designed to address among others:

- Lack of access to income and productive resources necessary for human progress
- The vulnerability of many to chronic hunger and malnutrition
- Susceptibility of the population to endemic diseases
- Inadequate shelter and access to water and sanitary services
- Limited access to education and training
- Social exclusion and alienation
- Exclusion from decision-making and tracking processes in civil, social, economic and political arena

From the onset, the discourses at SADC were informed by a holistic view of poverty as both the shortage of assets as well as lack of voice and choice for the people. It was acknowledged that poverty meant that many people in the region lacked basic capacity to participate effectively in society due to these limitations. This generated a sense of powerlessness, despair and insecurity among many in the region. Two issues loomed large on the regional agenda in the build-up to the launch of SADC in Mbabane, Swaziland, in 1993: one was the bane of poverty as epitomised by a drawn-out incidence of severe drought and food shortages at the time; the second was the persistence of political instability in the form of conflict and oppression. There was recognition also that these challenges were mutually re-inforcing in that conditions of insecurity and instability bred poverty and, in turn, poverty generated or reinforced conflict in the region. The agenda of the Windhoek Summit of 1992 which preceded the Mbabane Summit was dominated by discussions on possible responses to the drought and the need to strengthen governance in the region with particular reference to the transition in Angola, Mozambique and South Africa. At that meeting, the SADCC also rejected a request from COMESA for a merger of the two organisations to fast-track economic integration by establishing a Free Trade Area. It was on this basis that the Conference adopted a framework for the establishment of a community, the SADC.[vi]

It seems that member states to the Conference were responding to the worsening food insecurity in the region due to dry seasons in the late 1970s as well as the devastation of wars of liberation.

This was partly the outcome of the global economic crisis that began with the 1973 oil crisis and expanded into all areas of the economy. The collapse of commodity prices in the world market impacted heavily on countries in the region because they depended on commodity exports for revenues. The economic depression led to shortages of food and rising prices of essential staples as the domestic retail market responded to supply constraints. Like in eastern Africa, the proportion of people engaged in productive agricultural labour in southern Africa had decreased by an average 7% during the 1970s. Domestic food production had increased, while consumption patterns showed consistent increase. It was in the 1970s that the region lost its food self-sufficiency in a matter of a few years (Zondi, 2004). The hunger of many was clearly of immediate importance. Therefore, poverty was difficult to avoid for an organisation that sought to promote regional co-operation.

5.2 From conference to community: Juggling with regional governance for social policy

The shift from conference to community was substantive in that it transformed the institution from one that pursued loose cooperation between member states, to one that advances integration of governance systems and the development of a common policy agenda. The former represented loose collaboration between countries in the region with countries retaining complete autonomy and control over their national agenda. This allowed member states to collaborate and still pursue different social and economic outcomes. For this reason, the conference had a weak centre in the form of a small secretariat whose legal mandate was limited to mere coordination and facilitation of regular meetings. It did not have any mandate to ensure implementation of decisions of the conference. Thus, the conference did not have a sufficiently distinct legal and institutional identity per se and its decisions were not binding on member states.

Therefore, with the establishment of SADC, the regional governance framework changed substantially in the sense that SADC member states committed to surrender to SADC elements of their policy sovereignty in order to empower the organisation to harmonise and integrate economic, social and political policies in the region. The Declaration Treaty and Protocol that established the SADC gave it international legal personality that was to enable it sign binding contracts and, domestically, to exercise its functions in the territory of member states (Articles 2 and 3). The Treaty also established institutions of governance including the Summit of Heads of State or Government, Council of Ministers, Standing Committees of Officials, the Tribunal, and the Secretariat. The first three were charged with political work involved in the integration process, including, giving strategic direction to the policy harmonisation process. The Tribunal was mandated to guide the interpretation of the Treaty and other legal instruments of SADC. The Secretariat was given an enhanced position with a legal mandate to execute the decisions of SADC and coordinate the implementation of SADC protocols and policies. It was also given room to establish a regional public service with strong strategic planning and management, and capacity to implement and to coordinate.

Critical in this transition was the link made between structures and the substantive agenda of SADC in the wake of the vision of a regional community that ensures economic well-being and improvement in the standards of living and quality of life of the population of the region. The conditions of citizens were given greater prominence in defining the mission and substantive agenda of integration. This informed the choice of areas of co-operation as follows: food security, land and agriculture; infrastructure and services; industry, trade, investment and finance; human capital development; science and technology; natural resources and environment; social welfare and information; culture; politics, peace and security; and diplomacy and international relations. Most of these thematic policy issues were further elaborated in protocols adopted later. A total of thirty four protocols and other legal instruments were developed between 1994 and 2007 on issues like trade, shared water systems, finance and investment, energy, transport, education and training, health, culture and sports, food, and gender. This includes charters and declarations on social rights, HIV and AIDS, agriculture, ICT, and macro-economic convergence.

In light of the fact that the overarching goal of SADC is poverty eradication, the organisation has a strong emphasis on the social and economic dimensions of regional integration. An overwhelming number of legal and policy instruments established at SADC deal with these matters. One of the criticisms of SADC is that it has paid less attention to issues of security and peace-building than it potentially could. This affirms the point that SADC has focused more on a social and economic agenda, or what others call a developmental regional integration process (i.e. regional integration fundamentally focused on holistic development). The very idea of making poverty eradication the ultimate goal of integration has focused SADC governance structures and its conduct on social and economic policy matters.

The reforms that took place in SADC in 2003-5 were informed by two considerations: enhancing the institutional effectiveness and efficiency of the governance systems at SADC; and seeking to sharpen its socio-economic agenda by adopting a single strategic policy framework that incorporates all relevant areas of cooperation.[vii] The aim was simultaneous reform of the structure of SADC and its social policy. This was recognition that governance and social policy are so intertwined that transforming one without tinkering with the other is not likely to yield the expected outcomes. The question in some quarters was whether governance reforms at SADC could be justified if they were undertaken simply to enhance efficiency, or should SADC be thinking about reforming its institutions in order to enhance its capacity to implement a refined development agenda (Zondi, 2007). However, the distinction between institutional efficiency and effectiveness is rather artificial in this regard. Clearly, SADC wanted to infuse its institutions with modern principles of public management with a view to enabling them to deliver better social and economic outcomes for the region, the reason for which they exist, after all.

5.3 Recentralisation of SADC for poverty eradication

This process led to the dissolution of Sectoral Coordinating Units that coordinated integration of policies in each sector on the SADC agenda. These units were part of a decentralised governance structure for SADC. They had been established in the first place in the belief in the 1990s that decentralisation leads to devolution of decision-making powers and allows greater participation by ordinary people. Neo-liberal theorists and sympathetic institutions like the IMF and the World Bank blamed the economic failures of the 1970s and 1980s on the centralised state. To remedy this, they adopted wholescale decentralisation to ensure a better fit for locally-driven preferences and stronger accountability and ownership.

At the establishment of SADC in 1992, the dominant neo-liberal agenda had gained ascendancy in Africa owing to a near collapse of African countries' economies and the deepening of poverty following the end of the Cold War. This found expression in the IMF and World Bank-driven economic reforms forced on Africa in return for financial aid during the economic crises of the 1990s (Mhone, 2003). The International Financial Institutions (IFIs) understood that economic austerity measures would not work if corresponding adjustments to governance were not made. Hence, inordinate emphasis was on the restructuring of the state through downsizing and decentralisation. Downsizing was not limited to reducing the size of the public service and trimming its tentacles' reach in the economic arena, but included cutting its social spending. Decentralisation involved devolution of powers in the hope that this would enhance service delivery, encourage collective public action, people ownership of public services, and improve the reputation of government at the local level.[viii] Of course, the massive retrenchment of public servants increased unemployment and cuts in social expenditure led to collapse of health, social security and education systems. Wholescale privatisation of state institutions and some public utilities like water and electricity deepened socio-economic inequalities. A mean and lean state was left incapacitated to respond to the dire effects of structural adjustment.[ix]

In keeping with this neo-liberal paradigm that had come to dominate the capitals of SADC member states, the founding states of SADC created a lean and mean central administration in the Secretariat by decentralising some of its functions in the Sectoral Coordinating Units (SCUs) based in member countries. South Africa hosted the SCU on finance and investment, meanwhile the SCU on natural resources and food security was based in Zimbabwe, while that on trade was in Namibia, to name but these three. The Gaborone-based Secretariat was meant to provide strategic policy coordination between the SCUs. Yet, this lean centre of SADC simply could not effectively implement Summit decisions and SADC policies simply could not be effectively carried out. Consistent with the findings of studies of decentralisation elsewhere, the devolution of the Secretariat's mandate to SCUs resulted in unnecessary differentiation and competition, lack of synergy, poor harmonisation, unequal development and capacity between sectors, and uncertain social and economic benefits. The decentralised governance stalled integration and promoted disintegration of the SADC agenda and structure. Under these conditions, a common vision and policy agenda suffered immensely as SCUs became mechanisms for consolidating desperate visions and agendas rather than greater synergy and integration.[x]

6. Regional development framework

The second dimension of the 2003/4 reforms was the rethinking and redesigning of the SADC's development agenda and policies. The 2001 Summit of SADC tasked the secretariat to prepare an all-encompassing socio-economic plan for southern Africa, building on a range of SADC's sectoral plans and drawing from NEPAD and other international plans like the Cotonou Agreement, and the MDGs. The result was a 15-year plan launched in March 2004 under the title, Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP). The Plan begins with a succinct reflection on the fundamental impediments to integration and development in the region, highlighting the problem of uneven development among countries, with regard especially to the eight countries of the region that are among the Least Developed Countries in the world. These countries (The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) suffer from heavy dependence on dwindling returns from primary commodity exports, narrow production bases and high incidence of poverty. Secondly, the Plan concedes that SADC has failed to forge a common regional identity and vision. It also laments institutional failures at SADC itself including weak coordination and implementation capacity and the Secretariat's lack of political clout to champion SADC's decisions effectively.[xi]

The substance of the RISDP consists of twelve priority areas of policy action, namely: poverty eradication, combating HV/AIDS; gender equality, science and technology; environment and sustainable development; private sector; statistics; trade liberalisation; infrastructure; food security; and social/human development. The RISDP went further to set ambitious targets to be achieved in each of these areas. For instance, with regard to poverty eradication, the plan was to achieve 7% economic growth and to halve the number of people living on less than one dollar a day by 2015. To combat HIV and AIDS, SADC agreed to ensure that by 2010, 95% of young people have access to essential information to empower them to adopt preventative behaviour.

There are eight targets on gender development including the strengthening of national gender machinery and policies by 2003 and to adopt a regional gender policy by 2004. These targets were set not knowing that the institutional reforms would take longer than anticipated and, as a result, they were missed. In 2008, SADC adopted its Protocol on Gender and Development, four years after the date set. The delay was also caused by what seems to have been a deliberate decision to wait until the AU Gender Policy was in place first. Indeed, the AU adopted its own in 2008.

Among the seven targets for advancing science and technology was the idea of putting into place, regional policies and strategies by 2005 and institutional mechanisms for cooperation in this area to be established by 2006. From the evidence gathered, it emerges that all these targets have not been met. But there are discussions at both official and ministerial levels towards a regional policy on science and technology. This may not be in place until 2010 or beyond. The policy will provide guidelines for the creation of cooperation mechanisms as well as norms and standards for environment and development.

The target with regard to environment and development was to develop a legal instrument for regional cooperation by 2006 and to adopt environmental standards, norms and guidelines by 2008. A SADC Plan of Action on implementation of World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) outcomes was to have been agreed and publicised by 2005. Both the envisaged protocol and the Plan of Action have not completed, partly because the targets were set in anticipation of the RISDP becoming operational in 2003, but it became effective in 2005/6 partly because of failure of officials to move quickly on these matters.

Recognising the critical importance of data gathering, SADC decided on a target to establish a legal framework governing statistical work in the region by 2006, followed by the adoption of indicators for monitoring and evaluation by 2007. Both targets have been missed. Part of the problem is that it has taken SADC officials much longer to interface between national statistical institutions necessary to develop the regional framework. The M&E indicators will be derived from this framework. However, some work has gone into developing general guidelines on data gathering and statistics that SADC officials are using to organise discussions in the region on this issue. But there is no indication that non-state actors are being drawn into these discourses. At a recent SADC conference on poverty, the need for harmonising guidelines on collection and use of data on poverty trends to inform more effective policy interventions was underlined.

The focus on infrastructure development was intended to contribute to the fight against poverty by facilitating the movement of goods and people including entrepreneurs. The overall goal of infrastructure intervention is to build an integrated, efficient and cost effective infrastructure system to support regional economic development, trade, investment, and agriculture, thus contributing to poverty eradication. SADC expected grandiose social outcomes from these interventions. As a focal area, it is divided into 4 priorities, namely: energy, water, transport and communications. Energy targets include establishing energy data banks and planning networks by 2005; harmonisation of energy policies by 2006; and centres of excellence in energy research and development by 2008. The first two targets have been missed and this suggests that the goal to have 100% connectivity of the member states to the regional power grid by 2012 may also not be met. On the transport sector, key targets are liberalisation of regional transport markets by 2008; harmonised transport rules by 2008; and removal of avoidable hindrances to free movement of goods, services and labour in the region. The failure to meet the first target is understandable given the complexity of the work that is needed to realise it, but non-movement on the second, relatively easy, target is difficult to justify. The last target is tied to targets on trade integration. A long-term regional water policy and strategy was fixed for March 2004, although the date was rather too close to the beginning of the implementation phase. But the failure to meet the target to harmonise water sector policies by 2006 and to establish water banks and planning networks by 2007 is inexcusable.

With regard to food security, the goal is to halve the number of people suffering from hunger by 2014. The targets include establishing a technical facility to support land reform programmes by 2005/6; doubling cropland by 2015; and increasing the use of fertiliser from 44kg to 65kg per hectare.

The facility was established as planned and has started functioning. The realisation of the other targets will depend on the ability of SADC to induce member states to accelerate food production, to invest in communications infrastructure and to provide income support for the poor.

On human development, the plan reflects awareness of the fact that progress will only be realised if human needs are met, viz: food, water, education, health, culture, welfare, information and employment. It also calls for elimination of various threats to human wellbeing including the unusual incidence of communicable diseases, violence, hunger and poor nutrition, illiteracy and social alienation. It underlines the importance of social support systems with special emphasis on vulnerable groups like people with disabilities, women, children and the elderly. It also stresses provision of quality education and training including life-long learning for all as a critical long-term investment in the human potential in the region. There is also a mention of promotion of positive culture, arts, sports and crafts. Ideas about support for informal trade and employment creation are also included. There are no time horizons given for these complex goals because the RISDP avoided confusing countries busy trying to achieve Millennium Development Goals. Instead, the plan calls for harmonisation of policies in all these functional areas in a reasonably short period of time.

It is the plans, strategies and targets on trade integration that have received the biggest public attention and focus from the member states themselves. These relate to the decision to create a Free Trade Area by 2008, which indeed happened in time; to complete negotiations towards a Customs Union by 2010; to establish a Common Market by 2015 and a Monetary Union by 2016. This sequence of trade developments follows the classical trade integration paradigm often seen as non-developmental, even though it is not anti-development per se. It is about stabilising and growing the regional economy and not necessarily to produce desirable social outcomes of this economic development. Of course, SADC chose not to be dogmatic by pursuing development at the exclusion of economic growth, but tried to provide linkages between the two such that economic growth gets translated into development by a host of social plans adopted in 2004.

7. Progress, what progress?

Notwithstanding weak political will to fully implement these SADC policies and laws or the fact that many of the targets have already been missed,[xii] the existence of a comprehensive development plan provides a significant impetus for a multi-stakeholder push for keeping focus on social and economic policy matters paramount in the region. SADC is supposed to provide the platform for adoption of common visions and policies as well as assistance for their implementation at the country level. The adoption of a common developmental plan and agreement on strict targets should thus be considered a major success for SADC in a drawnout process of inducing concerted efforts to overcome poverty in the region.

However, the governance reforms which saw a greater centralisation of institutional power at the Secretariat, in Gaborone, has meant that the Secretariat is expected to shoulder greater responsibility with regard to coordinating and ensuring the implementation of agreed policies. This is where the challenge lies at the moment. While SADC has finally developed a clear development agenda in the RISDP, its governance remains ill-prepared to advance this agenda effectively. There is hardly any problem with SADC policies on water, energy, food security, infrastructure development, investment or trade, but their implementation is increasingly undermined by weaknesses in SADC's governance.

There are two ways in which this problem of governance deficit manifests itself. The first one is lack of institutional effectiveness and the second is weak political clout on the part of SADC coordinating institutions. The recentralisation of SADC's public administration was designed to respond to inefficiencies in the functioning of SCUs. The centralisation of sectoral work helped enhance policy harmonisation and also engendered a common vision. It allowed the Secretariat through its four directorates to give strategic direction to implementation of the SADC agenda by national governments. It also brought the various sectors of SADC into close proximity with other, enabling them to harmonise their coordinating role, whereas before there was a huge physical distance between them, producing a lack of synergy (Zondi, 2007).

However, with weak national committees that coordinate national implementation, recentralisation of functions did not lead to effective implementation of the SADC vision. Many national committees exist only in name and when they actually exist, they are not fully operational. Member states are battling to properly establish these committees, partly because of the provisions that they should be multi-stakeholder in their composition, and institutionalise consultation with citizens. National governments experience a democracy deficit have an added challenge to overcome, while the rest simply do not take this matter seriously enough. Until National Committees are properly established, the implementation of the SADC agenda will remain poor.

The Secretariat itself is experiencing capacity constraints with regard especially to coordination between the centre and the peripheries (member states). There is a shortage of adequate human resource and technical expertise in Gaborone. The infrastructure necessary for ensuring a smooth centre-periphery interface is also weak.[xiii] There is also a weak management structure in the Secretariat. The reforms introduced new positions of two deputy General Secretaries to assist the General Secretary with the management of the Secretariat and allow him/her to act as a political champion of the SADC agenda in the region. However, one of the new positions had not been filled at the time of writing because of rigid application of quotas. The position of Executive Director to whom directors of the four units in the Secretariat report, has also been vacant since the transitional incumbent's term lapsed in 2004. Because the Executive Director is equivalent to a Chief Operations Officer, the position involves managing the ongoing transition after the restructuring of the organisation. This means two critical positions at the apex of the Secretariat management have been vacant for many years. This is undermining its institutional efficiency and its effectiveness in terms of inducing implementation of the SADC agenda at national level.

The challenge of political clout is the old problem of distribution of political power between SADC as an interstate institution and its member states. For integration to progress, member states needed to cede sufficient sovereignty to the Secretariat to enable it to champion the SADC agenda and to intervene where there are serious backlogs. The shared sovereignty includes giving the Secretariat power to push slow moving countries in the agreed direction, to make technical interventions where technical expertise is in short supply, to give direction to member states with regard to implementation of adopted decisions and plans, and to exercise oversight over the domestication of regional instruments. However, while SADC member states would want SADC to consolidate and grow, they simply have not been willing to part with even the most insignificant elements of their sovereignty such as allowing SADC to recruit and appoint the most competent citizens of the region regardless of their country of origin. This rigid understanding of sovereignty is also behind the general exclusion of regional citizens and civil society formations in the business of SADC. While SADC leaders assert that SADC integration will only grow if built on the participation and involvement of the peoples of the region, their conduct constrains this from happening. SADC member governments jealously guard their control over decision-making at SADC, thus arrogating to themselves the right to decide for all. Under these conditions, there is no incentive to open the policy space up to allow for a greater role for the people and civil society formations.

8. Poverty conferences: Accelerators or parallel initiatives

8.1 Gaborone Conference on Poverty and Institutional Reform

In October 2002, SADC convened a Consultative Conference in Gaborone, Botswana, on regional responses to poverty under the theme, *SADC Institutional Reform for Poverty Reduction through Regional Integration.* The conference was attended by SADC member states with the exception of Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritius and Seychelles; officials of donor countries; representatives of UN agencies, organs of civil society and organised business. The meeting aimed to build consensus among stakeholders on how the region could ensure that the ultimate outcomes of the institutional reforms was poverty reduction and eradication.

Opening the conference, President Festus Mogae of Botswana underlined the fact that SADC integration was meaningless unless it led to improved living standards for peoples of the region. But, he said, this depended on the willingness of governments and other stakeholders to take bold decisions towards harmonisation of anti-poverty measures. The immediate challenges of a creeping food crisis with 14 million people facing starvation as well as the related problem of the HIV and AIDS epidemic dominated the discussions. The problem with allowing immediate problems to dominate a discussion of this nature is that it takes attention and energy away from a need to discuss and arrive as workable solutions to the long-term and structural factors that perpetuate poverty. The meeting itself underlined the inter-linkages between poverty eradication, economic growth and regional integration. It also agreed that peace and stability, institutional reforms at SADC, and the emergence of NEPAD created opportunities for achieving visible progress towards halving the number of people in abject poverty by 2015.

The conference resolutions included the following:

- Wealth creation should be the underpinning approach to the fight against poverty
- Accelerate the implementation of the SADC Trade Protocol to facilitate cross-border trade, including informal trade
- Removal of all legal instruments that inhibit women's participation in the economy
- The development and adoption of a regional poverty reduction strategy to guide concerted national efforts
- Improve research into food production, food markets and agricultural development
- SADC should address the link between poverty and health and devise strategies to respond to this
- Harnessing new and alternative sources of energy
- Attract investments from the region and beyond towards the arts and culture and tourism industries
- Improve the mobility of communities, especially those that are vulnerable to poverty and natural disaster[xiv]

The weakness of this meeting was that it placed too many expectations on an incomplete process of institutional reform. SADC was too optimistic about prospects of the new institutions acquiring requisite capacity to follow-up on these resolutions, and also to relate them to MDGs and NEPAD objectives. This latter matter would prove very complex because the conference identified many desirable outcomes without any attempt to prioritise. It was positive in that it provided some ideas on the implementation of the RISDP. It also helped develop consensus between member states and other key stakeholders on the broad parameters of the regional developmental agenda.

8.2 The Port Louis Conference on Economic Integration and Poverty Eradication

In April 2008, SADC hosted an International Consultative Conference on Poverty and Development in Port Louis, Mauritius. It was held under the theme 'Regional Economic Integration: A Strategy for Poverty Eradication towards Sustainable Development' to highlight linkages between deeper economic integration and the fight against poverty. The conference brought together member states led by heads of state and government, donors, UN agencies, business organisations and organs of civil society. There were delegates also from other parts of the world: Asia, Latin America and Europe.

The aim was reflect on and devise innovative approaches to the region's poverty eradication strategies using economic integration as a vehicle. It was also designed to help SADC states engage the international community on commitments made towards poverty eradication in compliance with the Millennium Development Goals. The conference reviewed progress made since the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development in 1997; the Maseru Declaration on HIV and AIDS in 2003; and the Dar-es-Salaam Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in 2004. These declarations represented consensus among member states on how to deal with three factors in the persistence of poverty in the region, namely: gender and inequality; the incidence of HIV and AIDS and communicable diseases; and weak agriculture and the incidence of food crises. The meeting reaffirmed the undertakings made in all three and called upon member states in partnership with other stakeholders to accelerate their implementation.

In conclusion, the conference identified six priority challenges for urgent concerted action:

1. Achieving food security in a situation of growing global food shortages.
2. Addressing the adverse impact of climate change in the fight against poverty.
3. Increasing capacity in power generation and transmission as well as secure greater use of renewable and alternative sources of energy.
4. Achieving higher economic growth through accelerated regional integration, pro-poor trade liberalisation and economic development.
5. Developing and sustaining human capabilities through increased access of the population to quality and appropriate education, training, welfare and social development, nutrition, health, and sporting services as well as information in all member states.
6. Accelerating development, rehabilitation and maintenance of infrastructure for regional integration.

To achieve these goals, SADC member states committed themselves to a number of strategies and measures. This included regional collaboration on trade, agriculture and finance to facilitate productivity and improve cross-border trade; establishing a task force to lead the regional emergency response to the current food crisis; taking special measures to promote micro-finance and credit; preparing mitigation plans on climate warming; and intensifying public-private partnerships.

The conference also resolved to 'work towards the establishment of a Regional Poverty Observatory to monitor progress made in the implementation of actions in the main priority areas of poverty eradication'. Since the idea of its creation was only endorsed in April 2008, it is difficult to make an assessment of progress with respect to the establishment of and location of the SADC Poverty Observatory.

In addition to these initiatives, SADC has adopted a number of strategies to address the poverty situation in the region. For example, several SADC Member States drafted and adopted Poverty Reduction Strategy papers (PRSPs) which stipulate how they intend to address poverty. Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zambia each prepared PRSPs in broad consultation with stakeholders continue to monitor poverty reduction and growth strategies. PRSPs support policies that aim at helping the poor so that they can benefit from growth by expanding their opportunities, with a focus on safety nets, pro-poor economic growth emphasising productive sectors and employment creation, building human, physical and other capital assets of and for the poor, good governance and a conducive macroeconomic environment.

9. Conclusion

In the face of governance dilemmas related to inefficiency and the sovereignty question, achievement of the laudable social policy and economic agenda for the peoples of southern Africa is slowed down, if not encumbered. Notwithstanding the recognition that social and economic progress depends on the efficiency and effectiveness of the institutional mechanisms that drive SADC integration, SADC member states are still reluctant to give the new governance arrangements the necessary policy sovereignty and technical competence they need. So improvements in governance remain largely cosmetic at SADC and the same can be said of reforms at national level as well. Evidence of pro-poor development strategies and plans in southern African countries is there for all to see.[xv] All these countries, except South Africa, have dedicated poverty eradication policies and strategies. South Africa has integrated poverty fighting into its economic and social policies too. Most of the countries have also undergone governance reforms of one form or the other, ostensibly to enhance their substantive legitimacy and their capacity to deliver essential public goods. This paper warns that unless countries and SADC take steps to translate these cosmetic changes into substantive moves towards effective governance, the peoples of the region will not see the fruits of the changes ushered in by the post-Cold War environment.

The interventions provided by institutions like the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) will have limited effect until the technical competence and policy sovereignty of the regional bureaucracy is enhanced. The DBSA's infrastructure support requires institutional effective-ness and efficiency at both regional and national levels to translate into desired social outcomes and a return on the investment. This makes it necessary for the DBSA, therefore, to consider expanding its technical support to these bureaucracies while using its influence to highlight the importance for national capitals of the region to cede sufficient power to Gaborone. This could be done by generating research that does not only point out the problem, but also teases out strategies for ensuring a better fit between regional governance and its socio-economic agenda. This paper is an attempt to begin such a process by problematising the relationship between governance and social policy in southern Africa.

DBSA Development Bank of Southern Africa

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