

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE QUESTION OF SOVEREIGNTY IN THE SADC REGIONAL BLOC: RHETORIC, EXPERIENCES AND THE WAY FORWARD

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INTRODUCTION

This paper posits, rather candidly, that Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) leaders have over the years been putting some effort in trying to achieve the goals and objectives set out in the values of the initiation of regional body. From the time when the body was founded in 1980 in Lusaka, Zambia as the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) to date, the focus has a bit shifted from its original *raison d'être* (SARDC, 2001). The original idea was simply of coordinating development in the region. On 17 August 1992 in Windhoek, Namibia, member states signed the treaty

which transformed the organization into SADC. Although evidence shows that it had had fruitful results in its early years of infancy, SADC, through the various leaders of country members, has to a large extent faulted. In the subject of regional integration as discussed in the forthcoming paragraphs, it may have failed on the basis of incompatible values embedded in the notion of national sovereignty and the politics of patriotism instead of regionalism (Kindleberger, 1958; Tanaka and Inoguchi, eds. 1996). The article attempts to unravel some of the processes and paradigms in the direction of the extent to which SADC countries are trying to achieve the aims of regional integration. It is prudent to try and define certain key terms for this discourse – national sovereignty, regional integration and rhetoric. In this paper both sovereignty and rhetoric are

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key variables in influencing regional integration which roughly involves the association of nations in a regional bloc to determine their affairs economically, socially, and politically in a collaborative manner (Tjønneland, 2003). Brooks and Warren (1972:5) define rhetoric as simply "...the art of using language effectively". They say that effectiveness in this case is the attained through persuasion, logic and the transfer of meaning by the communicator to the recipient of a message. According to the Macmillan Essentials Dictionary (2003), national sovereignty is the right of a country to rule itself. This speaks of independence of governing its own nationals without outside or imperialistic domination by another. For Africa, the advent of independence from white colonial masters was one way through which national sovereignty was asserted.

1. REGIONAL INTEGRATION: A REVISIT TO THEORY

Glazewski (2010:2) has argued that: "The core of the problem is that the foundation stone of international governance is the concept of the sovereignty of nations. The notion is that nation-states are first and foremost in charge of, and have power over, their national territory, the activities, and the citizens in it. Sovereignty has been with us since the dawn of western civilisation. It has resulted in national self-interest taking precedence over the common good. Why should country X take expensive pollution control measures if its neighbour, country Y, is forging ahead economically, while spewing forth tons of atmospheric pollutants?"

From this quotation it is clear that sovereignty has overarching connotations. It stretches beyond national boundaries in its style and manifestation. But for Africa, a close look at this shows that it was Ghana and South Africa in 1957 and 1994, respectively, which first and last attained independence of imperialistic machinations. Behind, the national sovereignty argument was also the regional idea referred to as pan-Africanism. This was broader than regional blocs which were to be formed later in the continent. In effect, it touched on Africans including those in the Diaspora, particularly those in the Caribbean and Pacific regions, who had been shipped there during the inhumane slave trade era. The beliefs of Africans then, were highly supra-regional and political being influenced by the rhetoric of the times. It was a form of regional integration but less economic in nature. Evidence shows that the notion of Regional Integration, in the economic sense, was first tried during the 19th century, but it was not until World War I that the idea gained wide acceptance (Conkling and Yeates, 1976). Scholars have suggested that there are 5 degrees of integration which are the Free Trade Area (FTA), The Customs Union, the Common Market, the Economic Union, and Full Economic Integration (Conkling and Yeates, 1976). Apart from the notions already described, there is the aspect of rhetoric underlined in this paper. Rhetoric, according to the Macmillan Dictionary is definable as a style of thinking or writing meant to influence people. It has elements of agitating or propagandising people in a certain direction of thought. The paper will demonstrate how national leadership's rhetoric may or may not have influenced

thinking in SADC, from the times when the body was largely socialistic up to this time when countries in the body have transformed to embrace liberal capitalistic economies (Sibanda, Moyana and Gumbo, 1982; SARDC, 2001; Johannes, 2010). Before delving much into this debate, it is critical to show the composition and mandate of SADC as a sub-regional bloc under discussion.

Emerging theories now are largely pro-globalisation as opposed to putting emphasis on factors and developments of localisation. Although the adage “Think Globally, Act Locally” holds much prudence and wisdom, it must be stressed that indeed the world is highly globalising. This implies a reduction in the importance of nation-states boundaries and elements of super-patriotism. There are more common issues to battle with as members of the global village than were there 50 or so years ago. For instance, in this line of thinking, Glazewski (2010:1) has thus stated:

“Given that we live in a world of sovereign states, each concerned in the first instance with its own self-interest and well-being, how do we bring about a reduction in global emissions to meet the common good? At the heart of the international environmental law climate change regime is the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” laid down in the UN Framework Climate Change Convention. This recognises that relatively greater responsibility lies with economically developed states to curtail the emission of harmful greenhouse gases than with less developed nations which were not the cause of the problem in the first place.”

Again, and expanding on the foregoing paragraph, former South African

President F. W. de Klerk in 2009, impliedly stated that the incoming president Jacob Zuma had two basic foes to deal with. Firstly, that of the imminent global economy (perhaps in recall of the 2007/8 Global Financial Crisis), and, secondly, that of managing the desires and expectations of the country people of South Africa. More specifically he said:

“This, in essence, is the dilemma that President Zuma will face: he will have to straddle the divide between the populist demands of his left-wing alliance partners and the macro-economic dictates of the global economy; between the collectivist traditions of Africa and the individualist freedom and constitutionalism-based values of the mainstream international community.”

From this statement, one can see how globalisation and localisation tend towards being forces that are mutually-exclusive rather than mutually-reinforcing. Globalisation is much broader than regional integration, its existence is a challenge for most African countries to manage. There are still a number of aspects to be managed at a nation-state level. Most initiatives in which there aspect of sovereignty is challenged tend to be interpreted and labelled as neo-colonial (Murithi, 2009; Murashiki 2010).

The African vision of regional integration is multi-faceted (Abbas and Niyiragira eds. 2009; SARDC, 2001). It has a peace-building component, not dissimilar to the European integration project in its early days, whose aim was to reduce conflict through greater interdependence and co-operation, as

1. Speech By Former President F W De Klerk To The Royal Commonwealth Society, London, 12 May 2009:6

well as by putting in place region-wide security arrangements. Uniting sub-regionally and ultimately continentally is meant to enhance international bargaining power. Beyond this is a fundamentally economic rationale of harmonizing policies and reducing non-tariff barriers which are critical elements in the regional integration process. By contrast to African priorities, the approach of the European Commission (EC) to regional integration for former European colonies via Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) is primarily focused on trade liberalization as well as behind-the-border measures such as investment rules and competition policy. These facets for organisation have clearly influenced SADC's efforts towards regional integration. Overall, proponents for regional integration assert that the rationale for establishing a regional economic bloc is so that economic, political and security benefits can be harnessed; such benefits bring to participating countries and their citizens positive downstream externalities. Historically, successful examples of regional integration have tended to entail gradual and flexible co-operation between member countries on a range of issues, spanning a great deal more than trade integration (World Bank, 2000).

Models of regional integration in Africa, in general have been crafted to include aspects of functional integration (World Bank, 2000). They aim at the formulation of priorities on joint projects aimed at overcoming production and infrastructure deficiencies, and building up regional public goods. The subsequent development integration builds on functional integration and also stresses the need for close political co-operation

(*ibid.*). Theorists, like Richardson (1969), Conkling and Yeates (1976) and Collier and Gunning (1995), agree and believe that it is very costly for countries in the same region not to integrate and move in economic harmony and cooperation. For instance small national economies (typically most in the SADC region) tend to fail realize their latent full economies of scale if they work independent of each other economically. Thus, smallness can be an overwhelming handicap to industrialization. Former World Bank economist Paul Collier has argued that approaches to regional integration and co-operation in Africa should directly target overall economic growth by focusing on fundamentals of reducing transaction costs, rapidly accumulating physical capital, and maintaining macro-economic stability (Collier, 1998). In light of this it is pertinent to examine the case of SADC.

2. SADC: AN OVERVIEW

SADC has existed since 1980. Formed in Lusaka, Zambia, it commenced as a loose alliance of a 'majority-rule' states in Southern Africa. At its initiation it was called the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC). Its founding member states were Angola, Swaziland, Tanzania, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. South Africa, Zambia, and Mauritius later joined in. The regional body was formed with the mandate of spearheading economic integration in the Southern Africa region. The member states of SADCC assigned each member country with duties including education, transport, health, and

industry and food security. Cooperation and integration were the terms of reference to ensure that the benefits of these sectoral goals were achieved by the entire region. Each country could only spearhead the process of mobilizing the benefits for the rest of the membership. Core values for the body were somewhat democratic, legitimate and effective towards attaining the common dream of the body and region, at large. There is no doubt that the members and signatories to the 'SADCC treaty' had a common fight and ambition to overcome underdevelopment, exploitation, and deprivation in the region (cf. Abbas and Niyiragira eds. 2009). This economic integration could be achieved through the promotion of common political values, systems and values, which could be transmitted democratically and legitimately. It is critical to show how different efforts have been coined to ensure that such a balance was struck.

SADC countries' leadership has played an important role over the past three decades in advocating for regional integration. On its initiation in 1980, the regional body had two possible alternative approaches to integration: common market integration, which members initially rejected, and the planned regional integration which sought to promote or co-ordinate nation's effort to create a more balanced form of integrated development. On being asked on the areas of priority for the regional integration process, SADC stakeholders generally emphasized supply-side constraints, including production, infrastructure, human resources, non-tariff barriers, as well as policy harmonization and political dimensions, before trade lubrication. Given the characteristics of most African

economies, private sector actors, governments, academics, and representatives of the civil society across the continent generally agree that addressing inadequate and undiversified production and other supply-side constraints should be the primary objective of the regional integration.

SADC leaders agreed on the planned regional integration. In this strand, a key project chosen by the body was a tractor project for all member countries whose envisaged gains included:

- Constituting a direct link between agriculture and industry hence increasing productivity in both. Increased tractor production could help in boosting levels of agriculture mechanization among member countries while on the backward linkages could reduce dependency on imports and increase region employments.
- Boosting the existing industry in the region of tractor parts brokering,
- expanding trade in tractor components leading to a vertical industry characterized by backward and forward linkage could create a dynamic trade potential in the regions, and,
- saving the scarce foreign exchange through the local tractor manufacturing endeavour.

Overall the above cited project could help in reversing the colonial legacy in the rural areas of SADC member countries. Colonialism like in the rest of the continent left rural areas lagging behind in terms of development (Abbas and Niyiragira eds. 2009). The issue and thrust remains of bettering rural livelihoods in this sector. The perceived ef-

fects of tractor manufacturing industry included fostering economic development in many ways. These could include bringing additional land to cultivation, improving timing of operations to use optimum tillage and planting dates, reducing the effects of weeds and harvest the optimum, and reducing labour requirements.

Regarding national sovereignty, SADC has over the years covered considerable ground in trying to reduce the dependency on the western and eastern countries. The states have tried to a greater extent to extricate them from a wave of dependency by the division of responsibilities to each of the member states (cf Abbas and Niyiragira eds. 2009; World Bank, 2000). This cannot be taken as rhetoric. But, Richardson (1969:89) coins the phrase the fear of “violation of sovereignty.” He argues that this is ‘fear of the unknown’. It might be one of the explanations why SADC countries still lag behind in terms of development. They want to main the old boundaries at the expense of the possible opportunities which are there (cf. World Bank, 2000). They do so in the name of national pride, patriotism and cultural identity.

3. PATRIOTISM AND SOVEREIGNTY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Although SADC faces daunting challenges to its own integration, it has nevertheless made some real gains. Examples include successful development projects including the Maputo Development Corridor, which maximized gains from major trade routes. The gains had spill-over effects in the

arena of activating and boosting the sectors of agriculture, industry, commerce communications and tourism which in turn enhanced intra-regional trade. In addition, there was the support of broader economic development objectives and the power sharing schemes such as the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP), which has provided cost saving efficiency for the contiguous countries (Collier, 1998). On an almost equal note has been the creation of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Members of COMESA, though somewhat more non-contiguous than SADC have derived common benefits showing the direction towards full regional integration, at least in economic terms. Perhaps SADC has certain functions which make it better than COMESA since it (SADC) has services of a development bank, banking and insurance institution and has a court of justice. This is in keeping with the organisations’ vision of a common future, in a regional community that will ensure the economic well-being, improvement in the quality of life, freedoms, social justice, peace, and security for the people of Southern Africa (SARDC, 2001; Tjønneland, 2003); cf. World Bank, 2000).

Through planned integration states in SADC tried to form agreed governing standards of how political, social, and economic affairs are executed in a just manner. In practical terms, this is the issue of ‘good governance’ put into action. This, they believed, would empower member states, enabling them to encourage economic development in the region. However, not all Southern African countries have adopted this principle ‘by heart’ (Johannes, 2010). Challenges facing SADC states today have colonial

roots (Sibanda et al 1982; SARDC, 2001; Johanes, 2010; Murashiki, 2010). Inequities created by colonial powers, say regarding infrastructure provision are some of the deep challenges countries in SADC have to find solutions to. The issue of poor infrastructure has been topical in SADC. In 2005, a high level conference on infrastructure and poverty reduction (ADB, 2006) estimated that many SADC countries lost growth due to poor infrastructure. But after that realization, not much has happened in the past 5 years to redress the situation, reducing the whole issue to being mouthful of the SADC leadership. Low infrastructure in SADC nations has made it difficult for member states to form an integrated system, yet it remains the only way to increase development in the Southern African states. In most SADC countries like Angola, communication networks are not at par with its group members. Transport and communication is the lifeblood of any economy (SATCC, 2003). However for SADC, inadequate transportation networks, market integration has not been reaping the anticipated results (SATCC, 2003). This has led member states to reluctantly engage in economic activities with other nations fearing exploitation in economic activities with fear of exploitation at their expense by other countries (cf. ADB, 2006). Overlapping membership by members of the regional bloc in question is a critical issue. This is a problem especially in terms of harmonization of goals and processes towards effective integration (World Bank, 2000). For instance there are members which are in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) while they are also those which belong to the

Commonwealth or Francophone societies or groups. This is also true at continental level. Africa's regional economic communities, many of which have overlapping memberships, consist primarily of trade blocs and, in some cases, some political and military cooperation. These are the SADC, Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS/CEEAC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Union du Maghreb Arab (UMA). Though SADC has done much towards regional integration, such as establishing the Southern African Customs Union, and abolishing the need for visas amongst countries such as South Africa, Zambia, and Mozambique, the nations in the region still need some time to synchronize their essential functions in areas such as economics and governance. SADC governments themselves concede (Tjønneland, 2003; Johannes, 2010) that these overlapping memberships reduce the effectiveness of many of their regional arrangements and organizations, because of high transaction costs, burdensome layers of complexity, and limited resources, related to – for example – complex rules of origin and multiple membership fees. Since SADC leaders have recognized some of these limitations, they are increasingly committed to solving them (Johannes, 2010). Overall when members in overlapping memberships find that there is increasing friction within the bloc, they tend to concentrate to issues that concern them as a nation and not as

members of a regional bloc. Thus there is a direct relationship between overlapping memberships those enhanced sovereignty and patriotism (World Bank, 2000; Kindleberger, 1958).

SADC leaders have been very particular in terms of safeguarding their national sovereignties. For example, Economic Partnership Agreements being suggested by the European Commission (EC) have not been well received by these leaders. They have opted for a wider perspective of regional integration than the one EU has been advocating for. The argument that the SADC leaders having bringing forward is that the EU is adopting a 'do as we say' not 'as we did' approach towards SADC's integration. A deeper analysis of the Economic Partnership agreement negotiations reveals that EPAs will not help this process (Abbas and Niyiragira eds. 2009; cf. BuaNews, 03 July 2007). The EU's position that EPAs will assist Africa's regional integration is based upon a number of claims that do not stand up to scrutiny. For example that free trade area between the European Union and Southern Africa is undermining diversification into value added products for the southern African regional market. In another case scenario, Kenya has observed that it will suffer a 15 % loss in its regional trade through an EPA. It has estimated that the value-added goods will be worst hit, and that dependency on primary exports will rise eventually (ADB, 2006). Critical analysis suggests that EPAs will generate increased defensiveness between countries within regions, leading to tighter border controls and more burdensome restrictions for the private sector (cf. World Bank, 2000).

From the foregoing analysis it can be observed that while there are objective and ideal goals for regional bloc integration in SADC as elsewhere, there are a number of challenges and constraints which member states have to overcome. In the next section this will be demonstrated by how rhetoric in the form of statements can be of use towards that cause.

4. REGIONALISM, RHETORIC AND SOVEREIGNTY: A DISCUSSION

SADC leaders have in response called for EU to fulfil its duty as set out in the EPAs. In the ACP Brussels, 16 March 2006 document No43/05 paragraph 26, SADC has stated that:

"We call upon EU member states to ensure that the EC fulfils its obligation laid out on the Cotonou agreement to examine all alternatives to the EPAs that are no less favourable in terms of market access. They should not demand reciprocity and must genuinely promote regional integration; instruct EC to take pressure off African countries to support EPAs that are not supportive in their current form of regional integration, by guaranteeing that the equivalent level of preferences will be extended until a suitable solution is found so as not disrupt current trade; demand that the EC desists from pushing current African customs unions or insisting upon single starting lines in places where regions have made clear this approach to neither realistic nor helpful; [and], step up development for genuinely African led regional integration priorities backed up with a clear statement that such support is in no way in contingent upon signing the EPA..."

The statement shows that it is the duty of leaders to define, in more concrete terms, the purpose and function of the regional bloc they form. But always constraints are there to overcome. One of these is about managing exogenous factors including the influence of more powerful organisations. BuaNews (03 July 2007) entails an aspect to which rhetoric by leadership or resultant policies by them have failed to address. This element points to some corollary challenges that explain differentiation in the level of development in the countries in the African regions. Unlike in the developed regions – for instance the European Union or North America, where development has equilibrated and differences between countries are minimal, in Africa and SADC, in particular, inter-country differences are quite magnified (Tjønneland, 2003; Johannes, 2010). For instance South Africa alone has the biggest cake of the region's wealth such that some circles say it should not be counted as one of the developing nations (cf. Johannes, 2010). In this aspect, BuaNews (03 July 2007) asserts:

“Our countries throughout Africa do not have the same level of development and it will take some time before we have the proper infrastructure in place to make that integration which we all agree upon possible.”

This is quite a balanced statement. It looks at the incapacities at country level while calling upon the engagement of forces of countries' cohesion to address 'common challenges. Though SADC has been trying to do so, there are still a number of notable gaps in this. One founding Pan-Africanist and founding member of SADC, the late President of Tanzania Mzee Julius Nyerere outlined that:

“African nationalism is meaningless, dangerous, anachronistic, if it is not, at the same time, pan-Africanism”¹

This statement is revealing to the effect that true nationalism (which could be equivalent to sovereignty) should have its vision wider and embracing beyond a national boundary. The possibility for his emphasis could have been his foresight into the problems associated with isolationism and self-contentment. Contrary to both Gaddafi and Nyerere assessments of pan-Africanism and regionalism, President Mugabe once said:

“If the choice were made, one for us to lose our sovereignty and become a member of the Commonwealth or remain with our sovereignty and lose the membership of the Commonwealth, I would say let the Commonwealth go.”²

What President Mugabe is suggesting is that what counts more to a country is its national sovereignty. Yet in regional economic practice, at least in keeping with the theory, if regional integration is to be meaningful, boundaries of nation-states will have to cease being ardently observed.

CONCLUSION

Regional integration is a highly political process. Its aims are quite noble and critical to the development of the member nations as they embrace all aspects of development. Africa, and in particular the SADC region has produced

1. Julius Nyerere, http://thinkexist.com/quotation/african_nationalism_is_meaningless-dangerous/189985.html

2. Robert Mugabe, http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/r/robert_mugabe_1.html

great leaders some of whose ideas and philosophies that could have transformed the whole region. Yet, these ideas have remained rhetorical given the little action on these ideas or the challenges to do with mismanagement of resources. This rhetoric by leaders and other stakeholders, experiences in the region in question could have played an indispensable role in the manner in which a regional bloc functions. This article has attempted historical and current affairs analysis to understanding prospects for full integration of SADC as a region. It has demonstrated that SADC states still have to find a clear path of tackling their constraints to economic empowerment as a region as they still have a big challenge of balancing between sovereign ambitions against those of the region. There is need for the leaders to reckon their statements and policies towards what is attainable during their time. While the stating of grandiose visions is highly tempting, it is high time leaders move towards strategic visioning backed by appropriate targeting. It is the time they realise that the cherishing of their leadership will hinge on what they said and was attainable.

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