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The role of political parties in regional integration in the SADC region

Khabele Matlosa

Introduction

This paper discusses the role of political parties in regional integration in southern Africa either directly or indirectly through other institutions such as parliaments. Regional integration denotes a deliberate effort by states in a given geographic area to cooperate in various policy spheres in order to achieve a common good. According to an authority on this subject, Margaret Lee (2003:8), regional integration (or what she terms regionalism) can be defined as 'the adoption of a regional project by a formal regional economic organisation designed to enhance the political, economic, social, cultural, and security integration and/or cooperation of member states'. While economic integration (e.g. tariff reduction) is conventionally the most common form of regional cooperation, it should be noted that integration also takes another form, namely political integration and supranationalism. Ideally, economic and political integration ought to be pursued in tandem, yet historical record suggests that the European model and post-independent Africa (including southern Africa) have tended to give pride of place to economic integration first. Politics matter greatly in regional cooperation strategies and, as such, political cooperation should be pursued together with economic integration, as a basis for later political integration.

The pursuit of both economic and political integration requires a clear definition of key role-players and their specific roles. This is where political parties are brought in as players in the process. Political parties are organised groups that are formed with the sole purpose of the articulation and aggregation of the interests of the group, contesting control over state power and government, and directing a country's development process in line with their own ideological orientations and policy frameworks as defined in their manifestos. Hess (1994:15) provides a much simpler definition of political parties as 'groups of people who have joined forces to pursue their common political and social goals. Parties have been formed in all societies and states where the population actively participates in the political process. They enable the people thus organised the party members-to articulate their political will and strive for

the realisation of their political aims as a group'. For Salih (2003:4), a renowned authority on political parties in Africa, all political parties have one common aim: control of state power. He isolates four major functions of political parties namely:

- They endow regimes with legitimacy by providing ideologies, leadership or opportunities for political participation, or a combination of all three;
- They act as a medium for political recruitment, thus creating opportunities for upward social mobility;
- They provide opportunities for the formation of coalitions of powerful political interests to sustain government (interest aggregation), have major influences on policies as a result of devising programmes, supervise policy implementation, political socialisation or mobilisation of people to undertake self-help activities; and
- They provide political stability in societies able to absorb increasing levels of political participation by the new social forces generated by modernisation.

The main aim of this chapter is to probe into the role played by political parties in the process of regional integration. We will argue that political parties (both ruling and opposition) have a strategic/key role to play if political and economic regional integration is to be achieved, sustained and deepened. However, the current pattern suggests that presently political parties play a fairly marginal role in the integration process in the SADC region. There is no evidence of a direct role played by political parties (save only ruling parties by virtue of the fact that they form SADC governments) in regional integration. A possible direct link between parties and regional integration may be through national parliaments which may be required to approve SADC declarations/protocols in some countries and through the SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF) - a regional body comprising parliaments, established in 1997 in line with section 9 (2) of the 1992 SADC Treaty.

The main argument in the chapter is runs through two distinct, albeit intertwined, assumptions namely:

- that the dominance of ruling parties in shaping national-level political developments further expresses itself in the form of the hegemony of ruling elites

over the regional integration project, leaving opposition parties will little, if any, role to play; and

- that the dominance of the executive branch of government over legislatures at national levels reproduces itself at the regional level in terms of the tenuous relationship between SADC proper and the SADC-Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF), in part because the former comprises ruling parties and the latter a combination of ruling and opposition parties.

Evidently, therefore, the regional integration project under way in southern Africa propelled through both the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) and the Strategic Indicative Plan of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (SIPO) are state-centric and driven by ruling elites and therefore lacks broad participation by other key stakeholders including political parties and legislatures. The ruling elite set the integration agenda and implement the same agenda with little involvement of other non-state stakeholders.

Problem statement

So, what then is the problem? Simply put, the crux of the matter is that the statist logic of regional integration constrains the extent to which the process is able to benefit the southern African peoples. The main problem addressed in this chapter is that the regional integration process in the SADC region is state-centric and thus elite driven. It is not people-driven and it does not encourage involvement of non-state actors such as civil society or even parties. The state-centric nature of the integration framework tends to marginalise the role of non-state actors such as civil society organisations, political parties and the ordinary people (see UNDP/SADC/SEPES, 2000; Schalkwyk & Cilliers, 2004; Makoā, 2005; Oosthuizen, 2006). To this extent, even organised non-state formations tend to play a marginal, if any, role in influencing the regional integration project. Given that the integration process tends to be driven by a statist logic, often it is the ruling parties that drive the process of regional integration through SADC structures. These SADC structures tend to be insulated from influences from the people and organised non-state formations. Thus by and large, it is the ruling elite in the different SADC member states that shape the

regional integration project. Good examples of this point relate to the 1996 SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (OPDS), the 2004 Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ (SIPO) in relation to the emerging regional security architecture, and the 2004 Principles Governing Democratic Elections in respect of the evolving regional democracy architecture. Political parties (especially opposition parties) in various SADC countries did not take part in the development of OPDS and SIPO. Even at the regional level, political parties did not influence the form and substance of OPDS and SIPO through their membership to the SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF) given the tenuous relationship between the SADC-PF and SADC proper. In a nutshell, not only do non-state actors (including political parties) play second fiddle in the larger regional economic, security and democracy projects, but they tend to be deliberately sidelined through statist machinations.

Contemporary trends in regional integration in southern Africa

Compared to other parts of the African continent, Southern Africa has a fairly long pedigree of regional integration. It boasts the oldest regional integration scheme, namely the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) established in 1910. A much broader regional integration scheme was established in 1980 in the form of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) comprising independent and majority ruled states excluding apartheid South Africa and Namibia. SADCC was established by a group of Frontline States (Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe) and included other countries such as Lesotho, Swaziland, and Malawi. It aimed at achieving the following objectives:

1. reducing economic dependence particularly, but not only on South Africa;
2. forging links to create genuine and equitable regional integration;
3. mobilising resources for implementation of national and inter-state policies; and
4. taking concerted action to secure international cooperation within the framework of the strategy for economic liberation.

While SADCC aimed to achieve the above objectives by pursuing functional integration premised upon sectoral coordination through the SADCC Programme of Action (SPA), it focused its attention predominantly upon mobilisation of external

resources above all else and thus earned for itself a bad reputation that it was a mere fund-raising forum. While it did certainly contribute to political solidarity and the liberation of a number of minority-ruled countries especially Namibia and South Africa, SADCC did not succeed in reducing economic dependence of regional states upon apartheid South Africa. Neither did it forge equitable regional integration among its member states. In a nutshell, SADCC was more successful in achieving the last two objectives above than the first two.

With political changes throughout the world, especially the demise of the Cold War and the accompanying process of accelerated globalisation as well as regional developments such as the demise of apartheid in Namibia and South Africa, SADCC underwent a profound transformation from functional (sectoral) to deeper (development) integration. It is, however, not yet a case of supranationalism, with legislative or executive institutions for the region as a whole. This paradigmatic shift in regional integration happened in 1992 when the regional integration scheme changed its name from SADCC to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) through a Treaty signed in Windhoek, Namibia on 17 August of the same year. The SADC vision is a common future in regional community that will ensure economic wellbeing, improvement of the standard of living and quality of life, freedom, social justice, peace and security for the people of the region. This shared vision is premised upon the common historical and cultural affinities that exist between the peoples of southern Africa. The 1992 SADC Treaty defines clearly the nature of the regional integration now under way in Southern Africa and this integration agenda is being pursued on the basis of the following principles:

- i. Sovereign equality of Member States
- ii. Solidarity, peace and security
- iii. Human rights, democracy and the rule of law
- iv. Equity, balance and mutual benefit
- v. Peaceful settlement of disputes.

The ultimate goal is to achieve a development community in Southern Africa on the basis of a SADC Common Agenda defined in the 1992 Treaty as aimed at:

- i. promoting development, poverty reduction and economic growth through regional integration;
- ii. consolidating, defending and maintaining democracy, peace, security and stability;
- iii. promoting common political values and institutions which are democratic, legitimate and effective;
- iv. strengthening of links among the people of the region; and
- v. mobilising regional and international private and public resources for the development of the region.

Thus, the new SADC today pursues development integration on various fronts, primarily economic and political intergovernmentalism. The economic integration agenda is being pursued on the basis of the new regional strategy styled the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) adopted in 2003. The political integration agenda is being pursued through another complementary regional strategy styled the Strategic Indicative Plan of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (SIPO) adopted in 2004, which is not integration but intergovernmental cooperation, which allows for sovereignty as defined in the Treaty, RISDP and SIPO.

Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP)

RISDP is the main macroeconomic policy framework driving the socioeconomic integration in southern Africa. The plan is scheduled to evolve over a period of fifteen (15) years since 2003 when it was adopted. The main objectives of the RISDP are to:

- i. promote sustainable and equitable economic growth and socio-economic development;
- ii. accelerate poverty eradication; and
- iii. attain other economic and non-economic development goals.

The RISDP is meant to be implemented by SADC member states through the SADC National Committees (SNCs) while coordination takes place at the regional level through four main directorates namely (a) Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment;

(b) Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources; (c) Social and Human Development and Special Programmes; and (d) Infrastructure and Services. All four directorates are responsible for socioeconomic aspects of regional integration within the framework of RISDP. Another department in charge of security and political integration has been established in the form of the Division on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation. This is the department that is responsible for coordinating implementation of SIPO. At the top political level, the RISDP is the responsibility of the Summit Troika comprising the outgoing chairperson (currently Botswana), the incoming chairperson (currently Lesotho) and the deputy chairperson (currently Zambia) assisted by appropriate ministerial committees. The main prerequisites for successful implementation of the RISDP include:

- i. Peace, security, democracy and good political governance;
- ii. strong and sustainable political will and commitment;
- iii. trade liberalisation and development;
- iv. liberalisation in the movement of factors of production;
- v. good economic and corporate governance; and
- vi. macro-economic stability and policy convergence.

The major milestones of the RISDP are set as follows: (a) free trade area by 2008; (b) Customs Union by 2010; (c) Common Market by 2015; and Monetary Union by 2018. The focus of the latest ordinary summit of the heads of state and government held in Maseru, Lesotho in August 2006 rotated around challenges for attaining regional integration and specifically the extraordinary Summit held in Midrand, South Africa, in October 2006, and explored strategies for achieving free-trade area in 2008. Deliberations in both the Ordinary Summit and the Extraordinary Summit suggest clearly that while the progress towards achieving the first milestone of free-trade area by 2008 is fairly slow, the major challenge confronting the medium- to long-term goals of the RISDP is the extent to which both state and non-state actors (including political parties) participate in this initiative. For instance, to what extent have political parties, as key agents of democratic governance, participated in the conceptualisation and implementation of the RISDP? More pointedly, did political parties participate either directly or indirectly in the organisation and deliberations of

the Ordinary Summit and Extraordinary Summit of August and October 2006 respectively? We will attempt to answer these questions later.

Strategic Indicative Plan of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (SIPO)

SIPO provides the main institutional and policy architecture for politico-security cooperation and as yet unspecified political integration in Southern Africa. It is coordinated at the regional level by SADC's division on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation. The politico-security structure envisioned within SIPO is divided into four clusters or sectors as follows:

- i. The Political Sector
- ii. The Defence Sector
- iii. The State Security Sector.
- iv. The Public Security Sector.

At the top political level, the implementation of SIPO is overseen by the Organ Troika, namely the outgoing chairperson (currently Namibia), incoming chairperson (currently Tanzania) and the deputy chairperson (currently Angola) assisted by the Division on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation which is organised into two directorates, namely the Directorate for Politics and Diplomacy and the Directorate for Defence and Security. Two main committees play an important role in driving these sectors, namely the Inter-State Politics and Diplomacy Committee (ISPDC) in charge of political cooperation broadly and the Inter-State Defence and Security Committee (ISDSC) in charge of the defence and security cooperation specifically. The primary goal of political cooperation and integration is harmonisation of political institutions, values and systems for purposes of promoting democracy and redressing political instability. The primary goal of security cooperation is to strive towards peace and the attainment of both human and state security as well as encouraging constructive management of violent interstate and intrastate conflicts. Some of the key objectives of SIPO as elaborated in the 2001 Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation are to:

- i. protect the people and safeguard the development of the region against instability arising from the breakdown of law and order, intrastate conflict, interstate conflict and aggression;
- ii. promote political cooperation among State Parties and the evolution of common political values and institutions;
- iii. develop common foreign policy approaches on issues of mutual concern and advance such policy collectively in international fora;
- iv. promote regional coordination and cooperation on matters related to security and defence and establish appropriate mechanisms to this end;
- v. prevent, contain and resolve inter- and intrastate conflict by peaceful means;
- vi. consider enforcement action in accordance with international law and as a means of last resort where peaceful means have failed;
- vii. promote the development of democratic institutions and policies within territories of State Parties and encourage the observance of universal human rights;
- viii. consider the development of a collective security capacity and conclude a Mutual Defence Pact to respond to external military threats;
- ix. develop peacekeeping capacity of national defence forces and coordinate the participation of State Parties in international and regional peacekeeping operations; and
- x. enhance regional capacity in respect of disaster management and coordination of international humanitarian assistance.

Within the framework of political cooperation and integration, one step that SADC has already undertaken is the adoption in 2004 of the Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. However, as we have observed elsewhere, signing democracy declarations is one thing and translating these into political culture and practice is quite another (see Matlosa, 2005b). SADC has been found impressive in signing quite progressive democracy declarations, yet severely wanting in translating these declarations into enforceable legal instruments and public policy practice (see Landsberg and Mackey, 2005). With respect to the defence and security cooperation, SADC has tended to focus its attention more on addressing issues of state security and in the process paying lip services to demands for human security. This is why priority has been given to the development of the Draft Mutual Defence Pact which perceives security threats in purely military fashion and defines security as state

security. In this scheme of things, human security (socioeconomic and environmental security of people) is hardly put on SIPO's radar screen by the region's securocrats.

The role of political parties

The regional landscape of the state of political parties points to interesting developments, which generally seem to conform to global trends. The country-specific and regional contexts in Southern Africa generally point to a trend in which authoritarian politics of yesteryear has transformed profoundly from mono-partyism to political liberalisation marked by a multi-party political dispensation. This is part of a global political wave that has ushered in democratisation following the collapse of the cold war and accompanying the onset of globalisation. This essentially means that political systems of Southern Africa have not been left untouched by the twin processes of political liberalisation and economic liberalisation triggered by the demise of the cold war and accelerated globalisation since the 1990s. Within the context of liberalising world political economy has emerged a paradigmic/systemic shift away from authoritarian rule marked by either mono-party, military or no-party rule to multi-party systems of different varieties as discussed in this report. Thus, within southern Africa as a whole, only two countries can be classified as long-enduring stable liberal democracies namely Botswana and Mauritius. Three others, namely Angola, Swaziland and DR Congo, have not undergone a democratic transition. These countries have therefore not yet embraced a political culture of multi-partyism. The DRC is still in the throes of a democratic transition. The apex of the transition process was marked by the parliamentary and presidential, and the second round of the presidential elections and provincial elections of July and November 2006. Following this historic elections, a new political dispensation is underway in the DRC. Depending on how the former belligerents relate to each other, this resource-rich Central African state could either witness a historic moment for sustainable democratic transformation or regress further into the abyss of a protracted violent conflict. So far, the transition has been smooth and despite the initial post-election conflict, peace prevails in most parts of the country. In yet another country, Zimbabwe, while progress was made towards institutionalising a multi-party democracy following its independence in 1980, there has been a marked regression towards centralised politics and the erosion of civil liberties since the mid-

1990s up to the current situation of a de facto one-party system wherein, even if opposition parties exist, the ruling party exercises unfettered political hegemony bolstered further by its political control and influence of other key state institutions including the security establishment. This environment has led to many scholars classifying Zimbabwe as an electoral authoritarian regime or liberalised autocracy (Schedler, 2002; Bratton et. al., 2005; Breytenbach, 2005).

The picture is also varied in the rest of the other SADC countries. Since the early 1990s, South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique have joined Botswana and Mauritius in the league of relatively stable liberal democracies and have institutionalised multi-party political systems. However, in all the three countries, whereas a multi-party system exists and has increasingly been institutionalised, it is constrained by the dominant party syndrome that continuously entrenches the political hegemony of ruling parties under conditions of enfeebled and fragmented opposition parties. This situation is exacerbated by the entrenched culture of liberation politics in which ruling parties in South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique are former liberation movements and have only recently transformed into modern parties (and ruling parties). The implications of this situation for a democratic dispensation are hugely immense. Be that as it may, this observation does not, in any way, mean that a dominant party syndrome and liberation politics, per se, are inimical to democratic multi-party systems. It simply means that these two elements place some limits to the extent of liberal democracy as it is known and practised in advanced democracies in Western Europe and North America.

The other four SADC countries namely Lesotho, Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia have all undergone a democratic transition from military rule (Lesotho) and de jure one-party regimes (Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia) to multi-party political dispensation since the early 1990s. This situation has allowed multi-party politics to germinate and take root in these countries, although the kind of political transition under way in these states has been of such a nature that largely formal rather than substantive democracy seems to exist, and in this scheme of things, democracy is seen and defined as though it is synonymous with mere multi-party election per se. We classify these countries as electoral democratic regimes.

The varying trajectories of democratic transition in southern Africa and the varying degrees or 'democraticness' of the countries notwithstanding, at least in a majority of states, a multiplicity of parties exist and are able to operate. This is testimony to the stark reality that political parties play a critical role in the democratisation process in Southern Africa today. But the mere existence of a multiplicity of parties is one thing while the leveling of the playing field to ensure that parties contribute to democratisation freely and fairly is quite another. This observation speaks, in particular, to the often tense relationships between ruling and opposition parties and the use/abuse of state resources by ruling parties at the expense of opposition parties – both common features of the Southern African political landscape. We have also discovered that while democratisation in many countries is fairly advanced at the macro-level of the nation-state, internal democracy within parties remains a major challenge. In other words, many SADC countries have made considerable strides in advancing democracy, while the key actors in the democracy process, the political parties, have lagged behind in inculcating internal democratic ethos, practices and procedures. This, in part, explains the declining public trust towards political parties in most SADC countries. The declining public trust towards political parties could also be linked to the nature of environment (external) that they find themselves operating under as well as the nature of their internal functioning.

It is pretty evident from the brief exposé above that, indeed, political parties play an important role in the current democratisation process under way in Africa (see Olukoshi, 1998; Salih, 2003) in general and the SADC region in particular (Matlosa, 2005a). As Webb reminds us, 'political parties are universally regarded as essential components of democratic regimes and key vehicles in the process of securing effective political representation, mobilising voters, organising government and shaping public policy' (2005:631). If, in fact, political parties are the key agents of democratisation at the national level in southern Africa, they are supposed to play an equally important role too in the pursuit of both economic and political integration at the regional level through RISDP and SIPO respectively.

It is only fair to observe that while ruling parties have contributed in RISDP by virtue of constituting SADC governments, opposition parties have had little, if any, contribution both in the conceptualisation and implementation of RISDP. This

situation is further aggravated by the fact that the SADC National Committees (SNCs) are virtually non-existent in many SADC countries. Even where they are functional, they are dominated by government departments and hardly ever involve ruling parties and other non-state actors such as civil society organisations and opposition political parties.

As with RISDP, SIPO is primarily driven by state elites with minimal, if any, involvement of other non-state actors including opposition political parties. The lack of involvement of opposition parties, in particular, in the formulation and implementation of RISDP and SIPO is not a factor of actions on the part of the ruling parties, but it also has to do with the way they are organised and the way in which they take regional issues seriously within the programming and policy development strategies. Almost all opposition parties in southern Africa rarely raise issues around regional integration in their programmes and election manifestos. Most of the opposition parties confine their programming and election manifestos to national issues and hardly ever think beyond the bounds of their respective nation-states except when it comes to articulating foreign policy issues. It is quite clear then that the direct role of parties in the regional integration process is constrained by both the state's strategies aimed at sidelining opposition influence, but also by lack of serious engagement of these issues by opposition parties themselves through their own programmes and election manifestos. Additionally, the indirect role of parties in regional integration ought to be ensured through their involvement in parliaments at the national level and the SADC Parliamentary Forum at the regional level. It is to this that we now turn.

The role of parliaments

(a) National parliaments

Another institution that plays an important role in the process of institutionalising democratic governance in Africa in general and southern African in particular is the parliament (see Salih, 2005: 13). Salih identifies six main functions of parliaments in a multiparty democracy:

- legislation, where proposals and programmes emanate from the executive;
- representation by providing the link between government and the people;
- scrutiny of the executive to ensure that government is accountable, including the power to remove it;
- political recruitment of a pool of talent, some of which is expected to find its way to leading political and decision-making positions;
- legitimacy through representative legislation, debating public affairs and government performance openly; and
- conflict management.

Additionally, national parliaments in the SADC region are supposed to play an active role and make meaningful contributions to foreign policy broadly, and specifically regional cooperation and integration pursued through both RISDP and SIPO. However, in many cases, parliaments are marginalised in the process of regional integration as this process tends to be centralised in the powerful hands of the political executive in the form of national cabinets that take the regional form of the annual SADC Summits.

Consequently, parliaments hardly influence the integration process currently being pursued by SADC at the national level given that they never get involved in the activities of the SNCs where they are operational. Additionally, in some instances, SADC declarations/protocols do not even require approval or endorsement of national parliaments. It is also worth noting that not only are parliaments in the SADC region dominated by executives to the extent that they are unable to play their rightful role of ensuring accountability and constructive criticism of governments, they are also overwhelmingly dominated by ruling parties as the table below clearly illustrates.

Table 1: Size and composition of the legislature in the SADC region

Country	Last Election Year	Ruling Party	Size of Legislature	No. of Ruling Party Seats	No. of Opposition Seats	% Ruling Party Seats	Appointed Seats
Angola	1992	Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola	220	129	98	53.7	0
Botswana	2004	Botswana Democratic Party	57	45	12	78.9	7
DRC	2006	Transitional Government	500	111	389	22.2	-
Lesotho	2002	Lesotho Congress for Democracy	120	79*	41	65.8	0
Malawi	2004	United Democratic Front**	192	49	143	25.5	0
Mauritius	2005	Alliance Sociale	66	54	8	51.7	4
Mozambique	2004	Movement for the Liberation of Mozambique	250	133	117	48.5	0
Namibia	2004	South West Africa People's Organisation	104	55	17	76.1	6
South Africa	2004	African National Congress	400	279	121	69.7	0
Swaziland	2003	Executive Monarchy	85	-	-	-	30
Tanzania	2005	Chama Cha Mapinduzi	272	206	26	75.7	40
Zambia	2006	Movement for Multiparty Democracy	158	73	77	46.2	8
Zimbabwe	2005	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front	150	78	42	65.0	30

Source: EISA Database, 2006

* On 13 October 2006, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) experienced a split which resulted in the formation of a new party known as the All Basotho Convention (ABC) led by Former Minister of Communications, Science and Technology, Mr Tom Thabane. This new development led to 18 Members of Parliament, including Thabane, crossing the floor in the National Assembly and taking seats of this new opposition party. This development reduced the parliamentary seats of the ruling party to 61.

** Following intense in-fighting within the UDF following the 2004 election, especially between former President Bakili Muluzi and Bingu Wa Mutharika (current president), the UDF experienced a split resulting in the resignation of Mutharika from the party. He subsequently established his own Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) whose members crossed the floor in parliament resulting the DPP becoming a ruling party and the UDF relegated to an opposition party without recourse to a fresh election.

At the regional level, all things being equal, parties could make a meaningful contribution to regional cooperation and integration through the SADC Parliamentary Forum.

(b) SADC Parliamentary Forum

SADC-PF is one of the most important regional structures in the region that brings national parliaments together across political lines. But the regional body is crucial too in that it is the only regional forum that also brings political parties together across national boundaries. Its vision is to accelerate and promote parliamentary participation in regional decision-making for the benefit of all the citizens of SADC. In its strategic plan for 2006–2010, the SADC-PF, in line with the above vision, identified four strategic intervention areas in terms of its regional programming:

- Strengthened institutions of democratic governance in the SADC Region;
- Effective implementation of regional integration programmes;
- Improved professional development capacity for parliaments; and
- Establishment of strategic partnerships and alliances for parliamentary cooperation (SADC-PF, 2006).

While all these are noble initiatives on the part of the SADC-PF, it is also fair to observe that although the Forum is based in Windhoek, Namibia tends to play a marginal role in the formal integration agenda of SADC as encapsulated in both RISDP and SIPO, essentially dominated by powerful political executives. SADC-PF's regional work is pertinent to the achievement of SADC integration agenda, particularly the basic tenets of SIPO. A good illustration of this point is in relation to the SADC-PF efforts towards political integration especially through harmonisation of electoral practices, systems and institutional frameworks, particularly through election observation, with a view to nurturing and consolidating democracy at both national and regional levels. We will discuss this in detail, highlighting the essence of the norms and standards developed by the SADC-PF and the manner in which these relate to the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections within the context of the regional quest for political integration as enshrined in SIPO.

The SADC-Parliamentary Forum has developed Norms and Standards for Elections in the SADC Region since 2001 and has used these guidelines to observe all elections in the region since that time. The SADC-PF (SADC-PF, 2001) norms and standards for elections cover the following areas: (a) elections and the individual rights; (b) elections and the government; (c) and fostering transparency and integrity in the electoral process. The first section on elections and individual rights covers rights of citizens in electing their government of choice; voting and secrecy and freedom of association and expression. The second section on elections and government covers the following areas:

- i. Commitment to pluralism and multiparty democracy
- ii. Date of elections
- iii. Misuse of public resources and funding of political activities
- iv. Government, political parties, NGOs and the Media. And
- v. Electoral Commissions.

A much more extensive coverage is devoted to the third section on fostering transparency and integrity of the electoral process and the section (SADC-PF, 2001) covers the following areas:

- i. Registration of voters
- ii. Voter education
- iii. Boundary delimitation commissions
- iv. Nomination process
- v. Election campaign
- vi. Funding of political campaign
- vii. Role of the courts
- viii. The Electoral Commissions and the Media
- ix. Polling Stations
- x. Ballot Boxes
- xi. Counting of Votes
- xii. Acceptance of Election Results
- xiii. Managing Post Election Conflicts
- xiv. Role of observers

- xv. Role of the SADC Parliamentary Forum in Election Observation
- xvi. Code of Conduct for the Forum's Regional observers
- xvii. Reform of Electoral Laws

The SADC-PF (SADC-PF, 2001) has also developed a separate comprehensive guide for election observation by its own observers consisting primarily of members of parliament covering (a) the Political Context; (b) the Observation Framework; (c) Mission Preparation; (d) In-Country Orientation; (e) the Pre-Election Period; (f) the Voting and the Count; and (g) the Post-Election Period. Evidently, the SADC-PF guide on election observation is more comprehensive than its election norms and standards and in fact is by far the most detailed guideline on election observation in the whole region – from which other institutions could learn important lessons on monitoring and observation of elections. SADC-PF has used its norms and standards and election observation guide in all elections held in the SADC region since 1999. The forum recognises the significance of election observation in the promotion and institutionalisation of multi-party democracy in the region. Thus far, the Forum has observed almost all general elections in SADC member states since the 1999 election in Namibia to the 2006 election in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

(c) Interface between the SADC principles and the SADC-PF norms and standards

The SADC principles and guidelines have five main components:

- I. Principles for Conducting Democratic Elections
- II. Mandate and Constitution of SADC Observers Mission (SEOMs)
- III. Guidelines for the Observation of Elections
- IV. Rights and responsibilities of SADC Election Observers
- V. Responsibilities of the Member States holding Elections.

The Principles and Guidelines (SADC, 2004) commit SADC member states to the following best practices:

- 1. Full participation of the citizens in the political process

2. Freedom of association
3. Political tolerance
4. Regular intervals for elections as provided for by the respective National Constitutions
5. Equal opportunity for all political parties to access the state media
6. Equal opportunity to exercise the right to vote and be voted for
7. Independence of the judiciary and impartiality of the electoral institutions
8. Voter education
9. Acceptance and respect of the election results by political parties proclaimed to have been free and fair by competent National Authorities in accordance with the law of the land. And
10. Challenge of the election results as provided for in the law of the land.

Careful reading of the document reveals that with regard to above principles, there are no fundamental differences introduced by SADC to what the SADC-PF norms and others such as EISA/ECF Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in SADC (PEMMO) have proposed as best election practices. This situation has ignited calls from some observers of the region's political scene for a merger of the three instruments into one unified regional instrument. The problem with these calls is that they fail to appreciate that these three instruments come from diverse and also divergent political forces with often contradictory interests and perspectives in relation to democracy and governance. The main problem here is simply this: SADC in essence represents the executive organs of the member states while SADC-PF represents the legislative organs of the member states. Thus, for sheer purposes of the latter holding the former accountable in the regional governance arena, it may not be prudent, in fact, to have the two instruments merged. In any case, SADC does not want to be placed under a watchful eye of a regional parliamentary body in order to account for its activities in pursuit of the regional integration project. This explains, in part, why SADC has rejected requests from the SADC-PF to transform the Forum into a fully-fledged regional parliament with full legislative powers.

Rather paradoxically, the larger chunk of the SADC document is then devoted to election observation, thus the document is top-heavy towards election observation

and rather weak in respect of election management. Ironically, this is exactly the area in which the SADC-PF has not only developed a fairly comprehensive set of guidelines on best practices, but an area in which the Forum has in fact accumulated an enormous amount of experience between 1999 and 2006, through observation of elections including the DRC elections of 2006. Thus, in terms of the form and content of the SADC principles, there is nothing new in comparison to what already exists on the ground regarding desirable best election practices in the region. However, the major areas of possible complementarity and synergy between the two regional documents are here:

- SADC-PF norms and standards which are more comprehensive and elaborate on election observation still remains the most dependable regional guide in this area
- The SADC principles represent a political commitment by heads of state and government to credible and legitimate elections in conformity with the AU principles.

These are two main areas where we can clearly identify possible ways in which the two institutions could deliberately harmonise their efforts and coordinate their election observation activities more closely. What should be emphasised are areas for mutual reinforcement of these initiatives if they are to be used effectively in the process of consolidating current democratic gains in a majority of SADC states and steering others towards democratic transition.

Conclusion

Since the transformation of the Southern African Development Coordinating Conference (SADCC) into the Southern African Development Community (SADC) through the adoption of the new treaty in 1992, in Windhoek, Namibia, a new impetus towards regional integration has been under way. Southern African states have deliberately moved away from mere sectoral (functional) integration to pursuing deeper (development) integration, not supranationalism as in the case of the European Union. The new impetus has brought about a paradigmatic shift towards pursuit of both economic and political integration in tandem. This is a positive development because for a long time, SADCC focused primarily on functional

integration (defined purely in economic terms) while, more by default than by design, disregarding developmental integration (broadly embracing both economic and political dimensions of integration).

We note that while the pursuit of economic and political cooperation simultaneously is a welcome development, the integration project in Southern Africa is predominantly state-centric and driven principally by the ruling elite. This has dire consequences for inclusiveness, ownership and impact of the process including the fact that non-state actors at both national and regional level tend to be marginalised. We have noted that non-state actors, including political parties, are largely excluded in the regional integration project as pursued through both the RISDP and SIPO. The integration project tends to be hegemonised by the state and ruling parties as other actors, including opposition parties, play second fiddle. While all political parties seem to play a marginal, if any, role in regional integration, this situation is more so in the case of opposition parties (often confronted with survival or existential challenges) than that of the ruling parties that enjoy proximity to state institutions and resources (see also Matlosa, 2006). Parties on their own are unable to play a direct role in advancing integration due in part to the deliberate strategies by the state, but also due to their own internal failures including the fact that they hardly take up regional integration issues seriously in their programming and electioneering processes. The parties are also unable to get indirectly involved in the regional integration process given that national parliaments play a minimal, if any, role in advancing the regional programmes (i.e. RISDP and SIPO) and also due to the fact that the SADC is reluctant to transform the SADC-PF into a proper regional parliament with requisite powers to hold the SADC Summit to account. The point is: southern Africa is still very far from supranational political integration. The consistent references to 'sovereignty' in all SADC policy documents neutralises any notion of political integration at this stage. Political parties are even further removed, because they hardly, if ever, participate in the processes that define these visions.

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