



POLITICAL ECONOMY DYNAMICS OF REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN AFRICA

PEDRO

The Southern African Development Community: Peace and security - how to fight old and new demons?¹

This paper sets out to better understand why the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and its national level stakeholders operate as they do in the policy area of peace and security. It concludes with implications for support.²

Political traction, member states interests and potential

Peace and security were foundational in the establishment of regional cooperation in Southern Africa, the last region to decolonise and liberate itself. Security and political survival were at the core of the establishment of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) in 1980, a regional organisation with a mission to resist destabilisation and reduce dependency on apartheid South Africa. With the prospect of democratisation in apartheid South Africa, SADCC was replaced in 1992 with the Southern African Development Community (SADC). After the democratic elections and the accession of South Africa to SADC two years later, an elaborate and hybrid peace and security architecture developed to help prevent violent conflicts or manage peace operations. Both SADCC and SADC were profoundly affected by South Africa's dominant position in the region: SADCC fighting the old demon of apartheid dominance and destabilisation, and SADC dealing with the new fault lines created by South Africa as a powerful swing state in the region.

All fifteen member states subscribed to the political agenda and common values of good governance, democracy and peace as laid out in the SADC Treaty. They established a peace architecture that includes a regional training centre, an early warning centre, a 'Panel of the Wise', a regional standby force, a mechanism to politically steer these institutions through the SADC Summit, and a dedicated Organ for Politics, Defense and Security. Yet, a number of actors and factors constrain this architecture in effectively addressing peace and security challenges in the region. First, without a common interpretation of the Treaty's principles, member states have been wary to empower the regional peace and security institutions. Secondly, most members continue to distrust the combined military, diplomatic, economic and institutional capabilities of powerhouse South Africa. Hence, SADC takes a joint position and action only in extreme cases, when a conflict threatens to spill across borders.

¹ Based on a March 2017 background paper by ECDPM, available at www.ecdpm.org/pedro/backgroundpapers. The Policy Brief and background paper were prepared under the BMZ-financed project on the *Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations (PEDRO)*. Author: Sophie Desmidt (sd@ecdpm.org). Project team leader: Bruce Byiers (bby@ecdpm.org).

² Other SADC papers under PEDRO deal with industrialisation and energy, trade and transport, and the regional water agenda.

South Africa clearly also plays a central role in the region. South Africa works through SADC when it suits its objectives and when it can. But South Africa also goes it alone or pursues other avenues - such as continental peace and security structures - when it sees fit, or when it cannot obtain support from SADC. This reduces the incentives and prospects for SADC member states to further strengthen the SADC peace and security architecture and capabilities.

South Africa's initial post-apartheid voluntarist peace diplomacy on the continent - as illustrated mainly in Burundi, but also during the wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo - has become more pragmatic and self-centered. SADC mandated South Africa's President Mbeki to mediate an agreement in the case of political and violent instability in Zimbabwe. In spite of calls by Botswana for sanctions against Zimbabwe, other member states - including South Africa - managed to hold off this stronger SADC position. In another case, Botswana and South Africa cooperated through a joint military intervention in Lesotho. Both countries' interests in stability in neighbouring Lesotho - as well as a shared interest in Lesotho's water riches - were aligned and resulted in diplomatic efforts by both countries to obtain a mandate from SADC to legitimise the military operations that were already underway. Unlike Zimbabwe, Lesotho's small size and limited political and diplomatic influence in the region help explain the differences in the SADC approach in Lesotho and in Zimbabwe.

SADC continues to operate as a strictly intergovernmental regional organisation on a *regime* of strict respect of non-interference and sovereignty, including on matters of peace, security, democracy and good governance. Despite the rhetorical commitment to good governance and democratic values in SADC treaties and protocols, no effective sanctions have been used in response to flagrant non-implementation. Lesotho was not suspended despite the threat to do so by the SADC Summit.

South Africa has also exercised its influence beyond the SADC peace architecture. It has tried to shape the continental peace and security agenda and institutions, notably in support of an African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC). This voluntary initiative with like-minded African countries is stuck at a continental level due to lack of internal and external backing, and has also hampered progress on a regional standby force in SADC.

Despite the strong dependence of SADC on external support, relations with the donors in the area of peace and security are also characterised by mistrust, with poor levels of information sharing and dialogue, including on the types and volumes of donor support. While most observers seem to agree that inter- and intra-state conflicts in Southern Africa might have been more pervasive in the absence of the SADC peace and security architecture, they disagree about the extent to which SADC interventions in peace and security have contributed to maintaining or reestablishing peace and security.

Implications for support

1. External support to the regional peace and security architecture needs to be adapted to context in terms of level of ambition, timeline, choice of aid modalities and the combination of partnerships

- SADC member states have low levels of trust in some donor agendas in the area of peace and security.
- The differences in political regimes and in levels of economic and institutional development between SADC member states - with the shared and enduring mistrust for 'swing state' South Africa - hampers the institutional development of the peace architecture and implementation of agreed policies.

2. Despite the obstacles, there are opportunities for SADC to facilitate sub-regional or regional cooperation in conflicts where the negative regional spillovers of conflicts threaten the interests of influential member states

- Situations of violent conflict or political threats to instability with harmful impacts in the region create stronger incentives for multi-stakeholder cooperation and opportunities for member states to rely on the SADC peace architecture.

- This may require calibrated external assistance from flexible and trusted partners that have been engaged in the area of peace and security over a longer period.
- There are emerging opportunities for well-connected donors to broker, facilitate or support otherwise trust and relationship building, including the opening of a UN Regional Office (to work specifically on preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution with the SADC Secretariat).

3. Donors are well placed to facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue and problem solving that help strengthen trust in SADC institutions by involving them

- As many conflicts spill over in other regions, donors that are well connected with other regional, continental and international players are also well placed to facilitate multi-stakeholder problem solving and dialogue.

Behind the formal structures of regional organisations is a messy world of regional power and politics. This messiness is often difficult to capture in the language of development cooperation and institutional development. Working with regional organisations and their programmes therefore implies engaging with complex, multi-level power and interest dynamics.

PEDRO, the Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations, is an ECDPM project that looks at the politics behind regional organisations, and the structural factors, institutions and incentives that ultimately define the way in which countries and different stakeholders engage at a regional level. PEDRO covers 17 African regional organisations and 11 policy areas. For each of these, ECDPM has applied a political economy approach to help understand the dynamics and their effects in different regions and policy areas.

The studies are framed around three key questions: the first relates to the political traction of the regional organisation as this helps assess whether the regional organisation has enabled regional decision making and if it has contributed to implementation. The second focuses on the member state interests in engaging with the regional organisation, especially the more resourceful and powerful ones (the so-called 'swing states'). The third looks at the areas with most traction where regional and national level interests seem to be most aligned for regional outcomes.

The reports aim to present information and insights that can help regional stakeholders navigate the obstacles and better respond to reform opportunities. Rather than providing specific operational recommendations, the political economy approach encourages more reality-based discussions among practitioners and reformers about feasible ways to address regional challenges. It is hoped that this may help tailor the ambitions and approaches of donors and reformers and help identify ways to support national or regional champions or coalitions to take regional cooperation and integration forward.