

**SOUTHERN AFRICAN REGIONAL  
POVERTY NETWORK**

**REGIONAL CONFLICT AND POVERTY  
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA**

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## **Introduction**

Contrary to popular belief, Africa's conflicts do not primarily stem from ethnic diversity, despite the horrific levels of ethnic violence and genocide as witnessed in Rwanda and Burundi. In fact, comparative experience teaches that multi-ethnic societies are often more prosperous than the opposite. Rather, in a pattern found around the world, conflicts are driven by poverty, under-development, a lack of economic diversification, and by political systems that marginalise large parts of the population. These are often the real causes that lie behind social turbulence and allow the mobilisation of ethnic and religious differences for political gain by political elites.

The causes of conflict are also not always structural in nature. Much international development assistance has been based on the assumption that since economic, social or political exclusions are "root causes" of conflict, efforts to address these would lessen the impetus of the conflict, or the momentum towards violence. However, recent evidence would suggest that the focus within development co-operation on poverty alleviation and the reduction of intergroup disparities, although important in the long run, is not likely to be effective in the avoidance of violent conflict as would be more immediate efforts that addressed dynamic and/or strategic causes. In this manner the root causes are brought into focus through "aggravating factors" – which do not as such directly cause violent conflict, although they are likely to contribute further to a climate conducive to violent conflict or to the escalation of an existing conflict. In a recent study the European Union identified the following list of typical aggravating factors:

- Manipulated elections;
- Inflow of arms;
- Excessive and increasing military spending;
- Rise in political agitation, military training and criminality in refugee camps;
- Migration flows into neighbouring provinces or countries;
- Increase in intimidation, illegal arrests and disappearances;
- Exploitation of political distrust by political entrepreneurs;
- Generalisation of negative stereotypes;
- Sudden deterioration of the capacity of public services to provide basic needs;
- Transformation of civil society organisations into mobilising agents for violent activity;
- Calls for the extermination of politicians and whole segments of the population by hate media; and
- Large-scale disinvestments and capital flight.

Subsequent "triggering events" set off and escalate violent conflicts or perpetuate them. These are typically single key acts and events – or their anticipation – which happen relatively quickly and may provoke the use of violence or armed forces. Running as a common thread through all of this are leaders with organisational ability and elites that seek political or other profit.

International assistance cannot by itself prevent or end conflict, nor can it make peace. This is, ultimately, the responsibility of nationals themselves. Correctly, international donors regularly engage in policy discussions such as these to understand how best to prevent or mitigate conflict and poverty. As a contribution to this debate as it affects Southern Africa, this paper will explore poverty and regional trends and responses to conflict.

## **From Conflict to Insecurity in Southern Africa**

One in five Africans lives in a country severely disrupted by conflict. According to the World Bank, countries formally at war or severely disrupted on average grow by at least 2% less for every year that the conflict persists. The direct annual costs of conflict in Central Africa has

been estimated at US\$1billion to which can be added another US\$500million, being the costs associated with refugees and displaced persons. These costs exclude indirect costs to neighbours and the ineffective economic management of the economy of conflict-ridden countries. The associated destruction and degradation of Africa's infrastructure has raised transaction costs to three times the global average, has emerged as a critical barrier to growth and contributes to the low levels of intra-regional trade that characterises all African regional groupings, with the limited exception of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU). Widespread civil conflict therefore imposes enormous costs. Farmers in predominantly agrarian economies cannot cultivate and harvest in bandit-infested regions. Vendors cannot operate beyond limited hours because of security risks. Factories cannot operate more than one shift because employees cannot commute safely to work. None can transport their produce safely and efficiently to nearby markets.

Less dramatic but also significant in many countries has been an increase in violence and crime. High and sometimes growing criminal violence has many causes, including unemployment, high inequality and the limited legitimacy and responsiveness of police agencies and public security structures.

At the global level there appears to be support for the hypothesis of a linkage between poverty and a lack of opportunities on the one hand, and crime on the other. While reported crime appears to have decreased in Western Europe and North America, it has tended to increase elsewhere. This has widened the "security gap" between the developed and developing world.

Organised crime is particularly prevalent where there is a so-called "culture of lawlessness", evident in many African countries, including a number of Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states. Characteristics of such a culture include the public perception that the judiciary is not independent, the police not able to perform their job effectively and that corruption is widespread. In addition there appears to be a negative correlation between organised crime and economic growth: where organised crime is widespread, the prospects for economic growth are poor.

This paper will first point to the inevitable political nature of poverty in Southern Africa, often the result of inappropriate national policy and bad governance, before moving to a discussion on the emerging threats that regional instability poses for those countries at relative peace within the region. This will allow a categorisation and presentation of donor responses to conflict with a focus on regional projects.

## **Poverty in Southern Africa**

African poverty is not only an economic matter, but also an intensely political issue. While the debate on the balance between external (endogenous) and internal (indigenous) factors responsible for Africa's lack of development continues to rage unabated, there is common acceptance that inappropriate policy choices by domestic political leaders have played – and continue to play – an important role in the deprivation and suffering of a region such as Southern Africa. This is underscored by the different trajectory that economic development and democratisation have followed in Asia and Central and South Africa, regions equally affected by the skewed global economy in favour of the developed world.<sup>1</sup>

After independence most African countries adopted import substitution policies in an effort to spur industry and economic growth while penalising the agricultural sector upon which the majority of citizens depended for their livelihood. The results were disastrous with the distortion of the economy to the benefit of small groups while constraining agricultural

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the annual US\$300bn subsidies to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) agriculture equal Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

growth and economic diversification. The initial growth of post-colonial African economies by more than 5% per annum between 1965 and 1973 soon proved unsustainable as the industrialisation of the continent failed to replace the income previously derived from agricultural produce. These developments, together with the shocks of the 1973 oil crisis and the large number of military coups that started at the end of the sixties and thereafter, laid the foundation for what was to follow. By 1990, half of Africa's states had military or quasi-military governments. In parallel with authoritarian military governments came a trend toward single-party rule under autocratic civilian leaders, largely pursuing interventionist economic policies.

The resulting economic decline and politisation of the bureaucracy eroded much of what was left of institutional governance capacity and assisted in the weakening of governance outside urban areas. Urban enclave economies developed, often based on the parallel (informal and often illegal) market, as distinct from the rural-based subsistence economy characterised by poverty, low education levels and large families often headed by women. An extreme case would be that of Angola where the parallel informal economy, the *candonga*, consists of two main types: the normally rural-based subsistence production, and the principally urban-based parallel market. Although these provide sustenance to the majority of Angolans, the link between the two has been severely disrupted by the war. Rural produce does not reach the urban markets, which have largely come to rely on expensive imported goods, stolen supplies and items illegally entering the country, mostly from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Already in 1989, the Angolan Ministry of Planning estimated that the value of goods circulating in Angola's parallel markets was two-and-a-half times more than the GDP, and that it involved around 300,000 people of whom the majority were women.

While external factors such as changes in the global economy played no small part in this state of affairs, Africa's place in the international economy was eroded in the process, with declining export shares in traditional primary products, little diversification into new lines of business, massive capital flight and loss of skills to other regions.

Despite the gains made in the second half of the 1990s, Sub-Saharan Africa entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century with many of its constituent states among the world's poorest countries. While the rest of the world has moved on, the economic structure of Africa is little changed from the pre-independence period, particularly with regard to the continued domination of primary production, agriculture and mining. Average income per capita is lower than at the end of the 1960s. Income, assets and access to essential services are unequally distributed. The region contains a growing share of the world's absolute poor, who have little power to influence the allocation of resources.

The agricultural sector remains at the heart of most African economies, and despite its weakness it is generally the most important sector in GDP. Excluding South Africa, agricultural GDP per capita has been declining since the mid-1970s while per capita food production has also fallen. Most of the labour force is engaged in agricultural work and, in general, private consumers devote over 50% of their total expenditure to food. Because women farmers are the primary producers of food in most African countries, agricultural policies have a large impact upon the welfare of women and children.

Poverty in Africa, including Southern Africa, is therefore predominantly a rural phenomenon, with urban poverty less severe, although burgeoning. Concomitant with the economic decline of Africa, the rural subsistence-based economy in much of Africa outside of countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Botswana generally has little linkage to the urban economy, although this obviously differs from country to country and according to the extent of conflict evident in each country. Collectively many African countries, including a number in SADC, are run to the virtual exclusive interests of small urban elites – those with access to foreign exchange, close to political power and with the interest and means to protect their

livelihood. Given the undifferentiated nature of African society, political and economic elites are often the same, and the end-result is a choice of policies that benefit small groupings. Poverty – and the choices to be made to alleviate poverty – is therefore very much a domestic political issue as much as it reflects the historical legacies that impact upon the continent. Alleviating poverty is also an issue of democratisation, since it is evident internationally that countries that have made the greatest gains in political participation are also those with better economic management. Conversely, states that successfully manage and develop their economies are likely to strengthen their political legitimacy.

## **Southern Africa's future in the balance**

For the purposes of this paper Southern Africa is assumed to consist of the SADC grouping of states<sup>2</sup>, which includes a number of success stories and apparently stable developing democracies such as Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique and possibly Tanzania. It also includes two countries, the DRC and Angola, which are at war. Between these two categories are a large number of SADC member states that could be considered “at risk”, such as Malawi, Swaziland, Lesotho, Zambia and most important of all, Zimbabwe. Due to geographical proximity and common political interests, developments in one country are affected by what happens elsewhere. This paper argues that Southern Africa is at a crucial junction, finely balanced between future prosperity and instability or decline. The future will largely depend on the impact that war, instability and organised crime is having on a sub-region already suffering from widespread poverty and poor governance.

The conflicts in South-Central Africa have become increasingly regional in character, in part due to the growth in the informal economy – itself a reflection on the limited extent of governance in the region. In both Angola and the DRC these increasingly regional conflicts are centred on collapsed or extremely fragile states. Deeply embedded in the informal economy are the means through which opposing factions pursue these conflicts and political elites profit from the same. The more informal the nature of local political and economic transactions, the easier they can be used for “other” activities. Resource accumulation, the desire for profit and a murky distinction between what is considered legal and illegal by state actors, have ensured that protagonists of conflicts are vulnerable to international arms merchants wanting to profit from arms sales, or business corporations seeking to acquire mining or other concessions to exploit natural resources and the smuggling of diamonds and other precious commodities. The result is often complex payoffs, protection fees and an overlap between legal and illegal activities. Items brought illegally into Angola, mainly from the DRC, serve as a major source feeding the parallel market. As much as 50% of goods in a port like Luanda “disappear”, while industrial companies estimate that 30% to 50% of their production ends up in the parallel market. Recently food and other supplies distributed by emergency relief agencies have become another important source of vitals feeding the war, through the instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid, although this is nowhere near the levels previously evident in Sudan and Somalia.

Conflict presents an opportunity for instability and crime at every level. The end of the war in Mozambique found Southern Africa flooded with firearms that moved through Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe and into South Africa, although there has also been a dramatic upswing in the movement of firearms from the legal to illegal markets in the recent past. In 1994, 15,309 legal firearms had been lost or stolen in South Africa, with the number doubling by 1998 to 30,220. Many of these weapons were used to commit robberies, only one of several factors that have given upsurge in the rise of violent crime in that country. In 1994,

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<sup>2</sup> SADC includes countries such as the DRC and Angola that are geographically, politically, economically and socially part of Central rather than Southern Africa, and others such as Tanzania that is part of East Africa.

42% of all reported murders were committed with a firearm. By 1998 this figure had risen to 50%. Firearms in South Africa are now responsible for 26% of all non-natural deaths – approximately 15,600 people a year – equalling traffic-related deaths. The availability of firearms has also had a dramatic impact on violent property crimes such as armed robbery. Indeed, firearms have increased the level of violence while reducing the skills required to carry out property crimes.<sup>3</sup> It is ironic, therefore, that an end to open conflict within SADC will inevitably place other countries at risk through, among others, the proliferation of small arms.

Recent studies on the political economy of disorder and the manner in which armed groups manage to instrumentalise conflict and extract economic benefits point to the fact that disorder offers opportunities for certain leaders and their followers. Elites may have a vested interest in continued war and disorder since it allows them additional opportunities to extract and conceal rewards. In this manner disorder becomes a necessary resource and opportunity for profit, while there is little incentive to work for a more institutionalised ordering of society. The result is a downward spiral of increased conflict and exploitation of available resources. This situation is most apparent in Angola and the DRC, both resource-rich countries within which the majority of people suffer the effects of war.

Without an end to these wars, stability in the neighbouring Congo-Brazzaville will be difficult to achieve, while state collapse in Angola and the DRC is gathering speed and refugees continue to be forced into neighbouring countries such as Namibia, Zambia and Tanzania. Despite its status as an important oil exporting country, Angola may soon resemble an enclave, offshore economy divorced from the rest of the region, but providing room for considerable on-shore instability.

A recent trend in Southern and Central Africa is the use of armed forces in adjacent countries for both national strategic and commercial exploitative purposes and an increased complex system of proxy forces engaged in the wars. This trend is particularly evident in the DRC, where the armed forces of Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda, in association with their rebel partners, and to a lesser extent Namibia and Zimbabwe in conjunction with local and international businessmen, are all actively engaged in resource exploitation as part of their official duties, only in part to offset the costs of intervention to the national fiscus. While this is an established trend in West Africa, its prevalence in Southern and Central Africa is more recent. In the process the instruments of sovereignty are employed for personal/private ends as well as in support of national objectives, where life-long presidents and military leaders appropriate state instruments for economic and personal agendas. “Military commercialisation” has rendered the military apparatus of many countries a “private” asset in the interests of the governing elite. It is in this vein that the recent Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo concluded that:

*“The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has become mainly about access, control and trade of five key mineral resources: coltan, diamonds, copper, cobalt and gold. The wealth of the country is appealing and hard to resist in the context of lawlessness and the weakness of the central authority.*

*Exploitation of the natural resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo by foreign armies has become systematic and systemic. Plundering, looting and racketeering and the constitution of criminal cartels are becoming commonplace in occupied territories. These criminal cartels have ramifications and connections worldwide, and they represent the next serious security problem in the region.*

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<sup>3</sup> In 1998, 85% of all serious robberies were committed with firearms, increasing from 76% in 1996. Measured as a ratio, cases of robbery where a firearm was used increased from 126.4 per 100,000 of the population in 1996 to 177.7 per 100,000 of the population in 1998.

*The role of the private sector in the exploitation of natural resources and the continuation of the war has been vital. A number of companies have been involved and have fuelled the war directly, trading arms for natural resources. Others have facilitated access to financial resources, which are used to purchase weapons. Companies trading minerals, which the Panel considered to be ‘the engine of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’, have prepared the field for illegal mining activities in the country.*

*Bilateral and multilateral donors have sent mixed signals to Governments with armies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.*

*Top military commanders from various countries, for different reasons, needed and continue to need this conflict for its lucrative nature and for temporarily solving some internal problems in those countries as well as allowing access to wealth. They have realised that the war has the capacity to sustain itself, and therefore have created or protected criminal networks that are likely to take over fully if all foreign armies decide to leave the Democratic Republic of the Congo.*

*The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, because of its lucrative nature, has created a ‘win-win’ situation for all belligerents. Adversaries and enemies are at times partners in business (Maï-Maï and Rwandans and Congolese rebels), prisoners of Hutu origin are mine workers of RPA, enemies get weapons from the same dealers and use the same intermediaries. Business has superseded security concerns. The only loser in this huge business venture is the Congolese people.”*

Bayart, Ellis and Hibou<sup>4</sup> have proposed six indicators of the criminalisation of politics, some of which are in increased evidence in a number of Southern African countries. They are:

- The use for private purposes of the legitimate organs of state violence by those in authority, and the function of such violence as an instrument in the service of their strategies of accumulation of wealth.
- The existence of a hidden, collective structure of power which surrounds and even controls the official occupant of the most powerful political office, and which benefits from the privatisation of the legitimate means of coercion, or is able with impunity to have recourse to a private and illegitimate apparatus of violence, notably in the form of organised gangs.
- The participation of this collective and clandestine power structure in economic activities considered to be criminal in international law, or which are so classified by international organisations or in terms of moral codes which enjoy wide international currency.
- The insertion of such economic activities in international networks of crime.
- An osmosis between a historically constituted culture which is specific to the conduct of such activities in any given society and the transnational cultural repertoires which serve as vehicles for processes of globalisation.
- The macroeconomic and macropolitical importance, as distinct from the occasional or marginal role, of such practices on the part of power-holders and of these activities of accumulation in the overall architecture of a given society.

There is a proven relationship between the criminalisation of a state and its participation in practices such as drug trafficking, diamond smuggling and money laundering, as will be briefly discussed below. Obviously a criminalised state cannot take effective steps against transnational organised crime of which it is part.

According to the South African Government, there are approximately 800 criminal groups operating in the country involving just under 12,000 primary suspects. Slightly less than 300 of the syndicates are believed to operate either on the African continent or internationally. What was once hardly regarded as a problem – the South African Police Service did not have

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<sup>4</sup> J-F Bayart, S Ellis and B Hibou *The Criminalisation of the State in Africa* (1999) Indiana 25-6.

an organised crime unit until 1995 – has now become a challenge of significant proportions. The country had entered a political transition, and state structures (including the police) were being transformed and therefore weakened. Border controls were relaxed and international tourism was expanded. South Africa became more accessible to the international community, including criminals.

The most rapid expansion of foreigners involved in crime in South Africa, however, has been the dramatic growth in a short period of time of Nigerian organised crime groups that now dominate the illicit trade in cocaine in South Africa and are involved in sophisticated fraud scams.

Of late the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Co-operation Organisation (SARPCCO) has been reporting an increase in the smuggling of stolen motor vehicles into Angola and the DRC because the conflicts there give criminals the opportunity to move in and out undetected. The focus and attention of the authorities in these countries are on the war and suppressing political opposition to the government and not on crime. Due to the poor infrastructure in the region, vehicle theft has emerged as a common denominator in most forms of crime since items such as drugs, firearms and exotic species all require a means of transport.<sup>5</sup> Stolen vehicles have also emerged as an important means of payment for illicit diamonds and for hard currency (mostly US dollars).

The increase in hard drugs that come from South America (mostly Brazil) and Asia into Southern Africa (heroin, hashish and mandrax from the East and cocaine from the West), mostly through South Africa, is another strong indicator of a large base of organised crime in the region. Many of these drugs enter through Luanda and Dar-es-Salaam, but also through other countries such as Namibia and Swaziland before being re-routed to South Africa and then on to Europe. The expansion of syndicate activities regarding drug matters is also evident in the exposure of drug manufacturing laboratories in South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia in recent years, apart from the commercial cultivation of cannabis in Lesotho, Malawi and Swaziland.<sup>6</sup>

Strong evidence has recently emerged internationally of the links between various businesses, including air cargo companies, and conflict. In the process criminals and their associated political and business partners have entrenched themselves to an extent that would be difficult to dislodge in the event of peace while the instruments to combat crime, corruption and bad governance are simultaneously weakened.

In a number of SADC countries the police structures have been co-opted into the ruling party; in others the judiciary is being cowed into subservience as is evident in Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Zambia. The inevitable subversion of the rule of law manifests itself in inconsistent or erratic enforcement of the law, as law enforcement dances to the tune of transient political interests. Inevitably public confidence in the system of justice is eroded. Civil society becomes reluctant to entrust greater powers to the government or its agencies, and governance becomes a façade, losing legitimacy in the eyes of nationals. In the absence of reliable safeguards against abuse, civil society resists any effort that could extend the powers of law enforcement authorities, evident in Malawi, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. In the process effective law enforcement is further undermined.

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<sup>5</sup> While South Africa loses around 100,000 vehicles to theft per annum, the rest of the region collectively loses less than 5% of this number.

<sup>6</sup> Many families in Malawi have switched from growing food crops such as maize to cultivating cannabis because of its lucrative and ready market. Malawian cannabis, dubbed “Malawi gold”, is prized in the region, although growing, smoking or selling it is illegal. Last year Malawi signed an accord with two specialised UN agencies to deal with the problem of cannabis production and trafficking. Malawian legislators last year caused a stir in parliament when they suggested legalising cannabis growing as an alternative to tobacco, the country’s main source of foreign exchange, which is threatened by the international anti-smoking campaign.



Although developments in Zimbabwe are of most immediate concern, developments there are not isolated. In neighbouring Zambia, a country identified as the regional hub for money laundering, the President is intent on rewriting the constitution in the interests of the retention of political power during the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for November 2001. Home to more than 250,000 refugees, the country's ambitious privatisation programme has produced little benefit while Zambia continues to be drawn into the wars on its borders with Angola and the DRC.

Although comparisons between regions should always be done with caution, there are a number of disturbing parallels evident in the picture described above between West and Southern Africa, not least of which is the rise in the extent of state penetration of corruption and organised crime. One of the more prominent is the use of armed forces for military commercial purposes in neighbouring countries, evident in the case of Rwanda, Uganda and to a lesser extent, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola in the DRC. Nigerian troops were well known for illicit activity in Sierra Leone, leading to the adaptation of the acronym Ecomog (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) to mean "Every Car Or Moving Object Gone". This is a dangerous road that has been travelled by many Latin American countries before, for once armed forces and politicians obtain alternative sources of revenue that are hidden from public disclosure, their requirement to look for legitimacy from the electorate or the legislature is invariably reduced.

Underpinning all of this is the steady weakening of state structure, the rise of parallel economies and the importance of informal economic and political relations above the formal. This is the great danger evident in developments in Zimbabwe. Using the state as a private resource instead of for the public good in the second largest industrial economy in SADC is inflicting damage that will remain for years to come, effectively weakening state control and undermining governance to the extent where ordinary people are forced to resort to the black and informal, often illegal, markets to survive.

## **Policy Responses**

There are no countries in the Southern African region that are not threatened by the regionalisation of conflict, the continued and increasing weakness of the state and the subsequent rise in organised and random violent crime. Strategically the impact of the analysis in the preceding sections is worrying. It implies that the continued consolidation of democracy and good governance as prerequisites for economic growth and development in countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Mozambique cannot be taken for granted. These countries, as much as others that are "at risk", require continued vigilance and support to extend democracy, respect for human rights and good governance. Such support should specifically include the development of oversight and counterbalancing mechanisms in civil society, the courts, the press, the capabilities and oversight of parliament, anti-corruption measures, investigative capabilities and engagement with international institutions that support the same.

## **At the Regional Level – the SADC Organ and SARPCCO**

Problems that threaten peace and security cannot be solved overnight, and in cases where violence has passed a certain threshold, the range of policy options available to reverse the situation is sharply reduced, often extremely costly and therefore generally beyond the capacity of African sub-regional organisations and even of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

Where countries are at war, donors often seek to ameliorate the effects of conflict through the provision of emergency and humanitarian relief – leaving development efforts to a stage when conflict resolution allows a more sustainable strategy. This is in itself a difficult task,

since the provision of assistance during a conflict may alter existing power relationships and in effect serve as a source for competition depending on how, to whom and when it is provided.

A large volume of international literature has developed around the provision of emergency assistance, humanitarian aid and development co-operation during conflict. Suffice to mention here that when international assistance is provided to groups where conflict exists, it should ideally feed into and reinforce that which connects rather than divides people. For example, markets, infrastructure, common histories, shared values, language, etc. are all important in the constructive management of conflict. Typically international humanitarian assistance is provided directly to the area in conflict in adherence to the basic principle of “do no harm”. What has not been tried is an approach to the provision of assistance during conflict that acts in direct support to mediation efforts and/or is provided through a neutral intermediary such as national religious institutions that could simultaneously serve as a common “value denominator” in the conflict.

Internationally the deployment of traditional policy instruments, such as preventive diplomacy, various levels of sanctions, peacekeeping operations and humanitarian assistance/emergency relief assistance has often proven to be frustratingly ineffective, particularly in a world where immediate results, entry and exit criteria and the attention span of a CNN news bulletin predominate. Over time the international community has developed what some term a “ladder of prevention”, predicated on early engagement of regional actors, those purportedly with a direct stake in preventing conflict. As the intensity of a crisis increases, more actors with larger resources are brought into play, eventually culminating in action by the United Nations (UN) Security Council. Recently, following developments in West Africa where Ecomog for a time assumed the task of regional military intervention force, and in Europe, where the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) has much greater access to resources than the UN, the Permanent Members of the Security Council are seeking to devolve more responsibilities for conflict prevention and management to sub-regional organisations. This followed a period of international enthusiasm at the end of the Cold War where seemingly intractable conflicts were apparently more amenable to resolution with the end of superpower rivalry – expectations that were dashed in by events in Somalia, by the increased marginalisation of Africa in global political and economic terms and the nature of the crises themselves.

In some areas, affected regions and larger countries have themselves sought to move responsibility lower down the prevention ladder for a variety of national and more dispassionate motivations. In some instances this acceptance has been to protect own interests from exposure to less partisan and less self-serving intervention. This was arguably the case with much of Nigeria’s former enthusiasm for Ecomog intervention in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Elsewhere the obvious lack of serious attention to the structural problems affecting the continent has driven Africans to the belief that somehow “African solutions to African problems” also provided the means to resolve problems, but without access to the development and humanitarian aid budgets that are available to the larger economies. Globally a new security paradigm seems to be emerging. This consists of regions accepting co-responsibility and sharing the burden to police themselves and a dilution of the central role that many had hoped the UN would play in this regard. A number of substantive donor-supported peacekeeping capacity building programmes followed in Africa, each seeking to create the ability to police a region where the national ability to police the nation is often lacking.

While Africa needs to accept co-responsibility for its own problems, it has limited means to impact upon the amelioration or resolution thereof. In fact, every African intervention by neighbouring countries (some 13 sanctioned by the OAU since 1963) has fallen foul of the

international dictum not to resort to “backyard peacekeeping” and had to pay the price for a belief in the folly that African regional peacekeeping forces could be neutral when operating in their area of national interest. These same interventions, but particularly that in Chad (in 1983) and the more recent OAU observer missions in Rwanda, Burundi, the Comoros, the DRC and Ethiopia/Eritrea have all underlined the inability of the continent to embark upon even symbolic peacekeeping missions.

While the changing nature of peacekeeping required in Africa means that larger scale and more rapidly deployable forces will be required, much of which can ultimately only be provided with the support of the international community, the sharing of responsibility for action will require that African forces maintain and increase their current capacity to participate in peacekeeping operations, and develop the capacity to work effectively and jointly with other forces. Effective peacekeeping capacity is ultimately predicated on accountable and well-trained national forces. The international community can assist by: co-ordinating their efforts to build African peacekeeping capacity; supporting the development of effective regional political and military crisis management centres; recognising the links between effective African peacekeeping capacity and security sector reform; recognising the need for joint responsibility for African peacekeeping and mechanisms to support force projection and deployment, including through European or international partnership arrangements/facilities; and supporting regional peacekeeping institutions and training such as that of the **RPTC** in Zimbabwe.

But a word of caution is appropriate. Generally the international community does not yet have an appropriate politically acceptable and affordable response to the challenge of failed states or even of dealing with so-called “complex emergencies” apart from the provision of humanitarian assistance. As a result, peacekeeping in Africa is only applicable to a limited number of contingencies and ignores the challenge of restoring stability in situations characterised by a power vacuum, massive internal social dislocation and competing warlords rather than opposing political movements and associated armed forces. There is some danger that the enthusiasm for sub-regional peacekeeping capacity building may become the new dogma, replacing state-reconstruction and the expected role of the Security Council and the UN. As the Brahimi Report highlights, there are severe limits to what can be achieved through peacekeeping.

Similarly, the numerous studies towards effective preventive action have pointed to the obvious – conflict prevention is neither cheap nor easy. There are no short-term solutions to the problems of instability that afflict Africa. Donors have found that an effective policy of peace building and conflict prevention is a long-term developmental goal that necessitates that the causes of conflict be addressed in a targeted and systematic manner with little guarantee of any return on investment. These include a focus on the imbalance of political, socio-economic or cultural opportunities among different identity groups; a lack of democratic legitimacy and effectiveness of governance; the absence of opportunities for the peaceful conciliation of group interests and for bridging dividing lines between different identity groups; and a lack of an active and organised civil society. These are all areas that have benefited from targeted development assistance over several decades with mixed results, although more focused attention on security sector reform, good governance and combating corruption is more recent.

Somewhere in between the extremes of peacekeeping and longer-term preventive action lie a host of other measures, including the use of eminent persons (or elders), diplomatic intervention and sanctions – all dependent upon neighbouring countries for their efficacy. Again, similar to West Africa, regional leaders often find it easy to agree to measures that affect smaller member countries or non-members, but wars within larger countries or involving neighbours invariably divide rather than unite a region. This has been demonstrated

in Southern Africa where neither the OAU nor SADC have been able to pursue a common approach to the wars in Angola and the DRC. Apart from rhetorical statements condemning Savimbi as a war criminal, SADC and the OAU have been more noted for their absence in any coherent role *vis a vis* the conflict in Angola, and the region is similarly divided when it comes to the DRC.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps more than any other single issue these disagreements reflect the lack of a common regionalism and approach to conflict resolution within what is still a highly fractured, divided and weak region.

Where countries are weak, sub-regional organisations are also weak and an approach in SADC or elsewhere on the continent that is predicated on a primary role for sub-regional organisations in dealing with conflict within that region has little chance of success. Sub-regional organisations can, of course, contribute to conflict prevention and mediation, including election observance, diplomacy and the provision of conduits for emergency relief assistance and humanitarian aid. In terms of conflict management measures, resource-poor regional clubs can also adopt fire-fighting strategies. They can rush from one area to another, beating down some flames (not the larger infernos) and then rush off to try and save another house under threat. This at least is the model that has emerged in West Africa, dependent, in the past, upon Nigeria under military rule for most of its resources and drive. Time will tell if South Africa is prepared to accept this role. Despite its 1998 intervention in Lesotho, its stated preference is a foreign policy predicated on its internal legacy of negotiations and compromise.

Institutionally Southern Africa has two mechanisms that can assist with regional responses to crises or avoid their further development. The first is the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security that, following the recent Summit in Namibia, is on the verge of institutionalisation. The second, although nominally linked to the former, is the Harare-based Interpol Sub-Regional Bureau for Southern Africa<sup>8</sup> that also doubles as the Secretariat for SARPCCO. The trend towards greater formalisation and therefore for greater structure is an irresistible one, even in the most informal of processes, and the institutional development of both deserves donor support. Given the nature of the Organ (a state structure) and the poor record in the region in conflict prevention, however, the approach with regard to the support of the Organ and SARPCCO/Interpol should differ, as will be outlined below.

While there is great anticipation among donor countries about the potential role of the SADC Organ as a vehicle to institutionalise early warning, early action (such as preventive diplomacy) and conflict resolution, the reality will inevitably be disappointing. But this should not detract from the fact that with a clear legal base, structures and procedures, there will also be less opportunity to abuse a purported regional mandate (as South Africa did in the case of Lesotho, and Zimbabwe/Namibia/Angola did in the case of the DRC) and move towards a more coherent approach to conflict prevention. This being said, structure will not compensate for the long road ahead in building a regional security community that is unified in its approach to political developments in one country that impact upon others. The Protocol that establishes the Organ provides for no standing mechanism or institution to serve the role of early warning, mediation and conflict prevention. Nor are regional leaders willing to pay more than lip service to the institutionalisation of reportage or monitoring of human rights standards and democracy in their respective national territories.

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<sup>7</sup> Even its most modest attempt, the Ad Hoc Committee on Cross Border Crime that was established under the auspices of the SADC Inter State Defence and Security Committee and sought to end support of Unita in 1997, ended ignominiously.

<sup>8</sup> The Southern African Sub-Regional Bureau covers 12 countries, all of them members of SADC, namely Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The only two SADC countries not directly linked to the Sub-Regional Bureau are the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Seychelles.

This admittedly brief review of the SADC Organ implies a three-pronged approach by donors focusing on the Organ itself, on regional confidence-building projects and on civil society. The first, and obvious, area for support is assistance with the institutionalisation of the Organ itself and support for its activities. Sub-regional and regional organisations cannot replace state reconstruction or national actors, but can serve as an important complement through which countries can work through the provision of peer pressure, advice and sometimes oversight. Regional and sub-regional organisations are necessarily state-centred, a “club of states”. As a result, these organisations reflect the weaknesses apparent nationally in respect of limited resources and capacity, and vested interests abound. The creation of a permanent executive secretariat for the SADC Organ is an inevitable next step for the region and inevitably, one that will excite donors, as did the establishment of the Conflict Management Division within the OAU. Similar to the situation there, the development of an operating shell will, however, take several years to achieve.

A second, state-centred approach would be to support multilateral confidence-building projects with a focus on joint training, the conversion of existing training establishments into regional institutions and the development of a functional allocation of responsibilities to institutions of excellence within the region.

Equally important is support to civil society watchdogs, think tanks and policy institutes with the capacity to engage governments on a professional basis in the region. Africa has many academic networks and a rich tradition of conflict resolution, even if these practices and methodologies are unfamiliar to most Western analysts. What the sub-region lacks, with scant exception, is a critical, effective mass of serious, applied policy work in the field of conflict management that can open up the debate and competently and professionally interact with governments and regional organisations, as well as serve as an effective civil society counterbalance to state institutions. Furthermore, while the developed world does not lack organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group to monitor and pronounce upon human rights abuses and poor governance in Africa, none of these organisations are indigenously based and those that are, are often incapable of attracting the services of scholars and analysts of international repute.

Turning now from SADC to SARPCCO, there are many advantages to an approach that seeks to criminalise rather than politicise issues, particularly in an environment characterised by competition rather than co-operation, as within much of SADC. Moving an issue such as support and contact with Unita from the political/military to the policing domain has a number of obvious advantages, of which the activation of the normal state mechanisms for dealing with crime is only one. Perhaps the most important reason for the failure of the 1998 ban on the production, import and export of small arms in West Africa, and the associated programme set up in 1999 to help and encourage the states of the region to implement that moratorium (PCASED), was its high political profile and its urge to militarise issues that were essentially of a non-military, more mundane nature.<sup>9</sup> But the most important consideration is that the crime and justice sector is an integral part of government – the essence of the system responsible for the delivery of security within the state and along its borders. Support for the criminal justice system is therefore support for state-restitution. Support to SARPCCO and regional co-operation among the various components of the criminal justice systems of various SADC member countries in many ways offer substantive opportunities to long-term conflict prevention. These can again be divided into support for SARPCCO itself, and support for multilateral and bilateral co-operation projects.

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<sup>9</sup> Donor nations gave up to US\$9m in financing, and pledged more towards a total budget requirement approaching US\$20m. A recent independent evaluation found that the UN Development Programme (UNDP) project had done little or nothing to fulfill its mandate. “Very few results that could be described as tangible have been identified as a result of (the project’s) activities.”

Much less well known than the SADC Organ, the objectives of SARPCCO include the following:

- To promote, strengthen and perpetuate co-operation and foster joint strategies for the management of all forms of cross-border and related crimes with regional implications.
- To prepare and disseminate relevant information on criminal activities as may be necessary to benefit members to contain crime in the region.
- To carry out regular reviews of joint crime management strategies in view of changing national and regional needs and priorities.
- To ensure efficient operation and management of criminal records and efficient joint monitoring of cross-border crime, taking full advantage of the relevant facilities available through Interpol.
- To make relevant recommendations to governments of member countries in relation to matters affecting effective policing in the Southern Africa region.
- To formulate systematic regional police training policies and strategies, taking into account the needs and performance requirements of the regional police services/forces.
- To carry out any such relevant and appropriate acts and strategies for purposes of promoting regional police co-operation and collaboration as regional circumstances dictate.

Regional capacity is largely a function of national consolidation, and the following section discusses priorities at that level.

Democratic theory presupposes a proper unit of democracy: sovereign states, territorially defined, with a monopoly of force, and allowing no alternatives. The Jacobins in France could therefore proceed to make citizens out of a population of which, at the time of the French Revolution, only about half spoke French, and only about 12% spoke it competently. The state remains the primary object of reference in the provision of security and the organised pursuit of prosperity for its peoples. This remains as true in Africa as it is elsewhere, although the extent of state capacity to provide security differs widely between countries. While African states are notoriously weak, they are not uniformly so. In much of Angola, Western Zambia and the DRC, governance is limited in geographical spread and depth. Sometimes it is completely absent, and the state corrupt and inefficient. By comparison, South Africa, Botswana and Namibia have relatively sophisticated systems of local government, taxes are collected effectively and government is able to pursue its policies in a relatively orthodox and structured manner.

Internationally effective public institutions share a number of common features. The first is the capacity to maintain nation-wide peace, law and order, without which other government functions are compromised or impossible. Secondly, states must secure individual liberty and equality before the law, including property rights. Thirdly, the state needs workable checks and balances on the arbitrary exercise of power. Oversight mechanisms should guard against arbitrariness and ensure accountability in the use of public resources, but need not eliminate the flexibility and delegation needed to respond quickly to changing circumstances.

The preceding sections of this paper have argued that state reconstruction is the strategic challenge facing Africa. The security sector is a key component of government and security a prerequisite for development. While donor support often focuses on civil-military relations, it is the criminal justice system that is responsible for intra-state security, including individual security, and that should be the focus for activities within the broad rubric of security sector reform and internal stability. Security sector reform has become a favoured subject amongst donors. Ideally this entails the formation of a democratically controlled state security sector with sufficient size and resources and an appropriate composition to fulfil the requirements of legitimate national security requirements.

All countries, developing ones more than most, have legitimate internal and external security concerns. It is therefore not merely a question of reducing military expenditure and thereby increasing funds available for social investment, but of ensuring that the state uses those funds allocated to the security sector effectively and appropriately in the first instance. More often than not, this implies a dedicated focus on improving the police services. Most African police services are extremely poorly resourced, outdated, untrained and provide the bare minimum of service. Ironically, one of the donor obsessions in reducing the dominance of the military and military expenditure within developing societies could be facilitated by a specific focus on the entire range of government departments engaged in the criminal justice sector – also establishing it as a balancing force within society that serves to restrict military intervention in politics. Merely improving the ability of the police to investigate a crime and to arrest a suspect or to deter crime is of little use without an effective system that can process and bring the case to court, and a penal system that effectively puts offenders behind bars.

While the security sector refers largely to a state-centred function, there is an important role for civil society as watchdog, counterbalance and sometimes partner within the rubric of democracy and governance, and it should be afforded a place in development priorities as part of the system of checks and balances that are part of any society. The support of think tanks, activist groupings and even lobby groupings is therefore crucial and part of this development. Such a focus moves naturally into the domain of human rights. Almost by definition this should be the focus of the third component of a triangle between security, development and individual rights.

Two areas are worthy of specific reference: the media and the fight against corruption. Development assistance should exploit the potential of the media (written and electronic) as a means of promoting peace, curtailing violent conflict and serving as a counterbalance to the often dominant power of the executive. This is important for both countries at risk and those that are relatively stable. The media can play an equally decisive role in constructive conflict management. It can reinforce connections in societies, strengthen shared values, ensure common and accurate knowledge of events, provide transparency regarding political trends, support trust and understanding among groups, offer alternative viewpoints and broaden experience.

Corruption results in the misallocation of human and economic resources and the erosion of public administration. It hampers innovative investment and therefore development. In the context of political conflicts and situations of crisis, corruption acquires a further significance. It can magnify the basic causes of a conflict, bar the way to peaceful conflict-resolution and fund the continuation of violence. The political pressure exerted by civil society groups is an important instrument in the fight against corruption, as are projects that support the creation of independent anti-corruption bodies within the state structure itself.

Finally, if development co-operation is to contribute to containing or preventing the escalation of violence, it must be capable of recognising and assessing the first and early signs of potential crises. Further, it must be able to respond to changes quickly and locally. The main condition necessary for such capability is the existence of a system for gaining information on current, dynamic incidents relevant to heightening conflict.

## **Conclusion**

Preventing or pre-empting conflict comes at a much lower cost in human, political and financial terms than does reacting after a crisis breaks out. Peace-building and conflict prevention must therefore be on the agenda of every donor, organisation or individual that seeks to advance the cause of peace and development. There are no magic solutions that can stop the cycle of conflict. As wars become more entrenched, it becomes inevitable that they

become less amenable to external intervention. This only serves to emphasise the need for a long-term commitment to a broad and comprehensive framework that seeks to build upon African successes, re-establish the authority of the UN and build on international and bilateral actions.

The international community has long been unwilling to concede and discuss the extent of structural collapse in many African societies, and the fundamentals that underlie the trend. The whole structure of diplomacy, international recognition and, indeed, of peacekeeping rests on the state as the cornerstone and building block of international law and international relations. Heads of state, in little more than the titular meaning of the word, participate in and are accorded the same status, in practice and in law, as elected leaders of consolidated democracies. The result is a façade and a sense of inviolability in the nature of state borders, while leaders conceal or simply refuse to acknowledge the extent of state collapse.

But recent years have seen a clear trend away from the idea of unconditional sovereignty toward a concept that some term “responsible sovereignty”. Through aid dependency and the need to subscribe to structural adjustment programmes, African states have also had to trade sovereignty for assistance.

Increasingly today governmental legitimacy that validates the claim and use of sovereignty involves adherence to minimum human rights, norms and a capacity to act effectively to protect citizens from acute threats to their security and well-being. Today the concept of sovereignty therefore also confers responsibilities on governments to assist and protect all people residing in their territories. In turn national sovereignty increasingly requires a system of governance that is based on democratic popular citizen participation, constructive management of social diversities, respect for fundamental human rights and equitable distribution of national wealth and opportunities for development. A participatory civil society, free speech and an independent press that guard against abuse of power and reinforce checks and balances and effective service delivery have become acknowledged as indispensable additional elements.

At the regional level the strategic challenge facing Southern Africa is not deterrence but the development of a doctrine and practice of strategic reassurance, co-operation and collaboration, therefore of confidence-building, not of competition.

At the intra-state level the African security challenge is that of consolidation (or creation) of the state in its wider meaning. This should allow for the expansion and consolidation of effective state administration and provide for a criminal justice system that provides security to the individual.

At both levels the challenge is to build and extend those mechanisms within civil society, the media, an independent judiciary and competent legislature that serve as a check, watchdog, counterbalance and sometimes partner to the power of the executive.

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