Southern Africa's Conflict & Governance Template

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COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Southern African Consultation
Intercontinental Lusaka, Zambia
13-14 December 2004

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Introduction

The regional setting

On the one hand, southern Africa is one of the least violent regions in Africa from the standpoint of inter-state and intra-state war. On the other, southern Africa faces major human security and governance challenges that are eroding the region's hard-won governance and stability gains. The region faces major human security threats; inequality and poverty are on the rise, and these factors make for prospects for serious social dislocation and conflict. Former OAU Secretary-General, Salim Ahmed Salim said about southern Africa '...the region has experienced large-scale insecurity...This insecurity persists because the region has not yet managed effectively, human security challenges such as threats to civilians' livelihoods, pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, natural disasters, conflict in the DRC and Angola, trafficking of drugs and arms, and cross-border crime'[1]. Human security threats such as drug and arms, the flows of refugees and migrants, have indeed been regionalized in southern Africa[2].

Southern Africa's political, development and security realities remain at once intertwined, contradictory and in a state of flux[3]; its politics is unstable and development is under severe stress. Democratization in the region is inconsistent and fragile. While more of the region's states than ever before can be classified as formal democracies – in the sense that they adhere to the minimum requirement of democracy such as holding elections – the substance of democracy is far more unsteady. Typically, southern Africa states fair well on the minimum threshold of formal or procedural democracy – elections on time, distinction between three spheres of government, the separation of powers (between the legislature, judiciary and government), and opposition parties. But the region is fairing poorly when it comes to the strengthening of substantive democracy – the ability of states to be responsive to the needs of the citizenry, eradicate poverty, ensure the effective participation of the citizenry in decision-making and governance, tackling social injustice challenges such land dispossession and economic injustice'[4].

The gender relations of power typically receive scant attention in southern Africa; yet it is a key governance question in the sub-continent. The sub-region has a long way to go in introducing genuine empowerment of women; this is typically a male-dominated environment. The vexed question of youth and youth participation in politics in the region needs to receive similar attention. Youth are increasingly being alienated and marginalized from mainstream African politics. The issues just do not speak to them. For example, the issues of activism and cross-border youth political organization would help to shed light on the challenges of democratization and political governance in southern Africa.

Threats to democratic governance

SADC and the southern African region has achieved a lot at the formal, procedural level, and at the realm of creating a regional institution and community in defence of peace, security, democracy and democratic governance. Norms, values and standards to regulate the behaviour of states have been introduced, even though there is a serious problem with enforcing such norms and values.

However, at substantive level, democratic governance stresses, threats and obstacles have been most pronounced. This has been exacerbated by divisions amongst states and the debilitating conflicts throughout the region that have set back the consolidation and advancement of democratic governance.

Southern Africa boasts fragile states. Obstacles facing the region include lack of consensus on the rules for stabilizing democratic governance within core democratic institutions; chaotic and fractious politics within and between parties; ineffective legislative policy making; lack of civil society capacity; inadequate implementation of the rule of law, particularly with respect to limiting corruption; slow progress in implementing gender equity; insufficient implementation of constitutionally guaranteed human rights; inadequate governmental policy implementation capacity, particularly with respect to agricultural and other dimensions of economic development; emasculation of provincial and local governmental autonomy; and insufficient care and nurturing of human resources through education, health care, and measures to counter HIV/AIDS.

A major threat to governance and democratization is that posed by HIV/AIDS, and southern Africa is by far the region most affected by the pandemic. Prega Ramsamy, Executive Secretary of the SADC, stressed that 'the pandemic continues to escalate in our Community. Available statistics indicate that the rates of infected people in the region could be as high as one in five in some member states. At least four member states have rates higher than 400 per 100, 000 population, indicating the magnitude of the problem[v]. It is estimated that without HIV/AIDS, life expectancy would be around 59 years in southern Africa, 16 years more than at present[vi]. Some southern African statistics estimate that as much as 25% of the age cohort 15-49 – the productive and skilled age group – is infected in 12 African Countries. Seven out of these twelve countries are in southern Africa[vii]. This makes southern Africa the most HIV/AIDS affected sub-region in the world. Fifty five percent of all the infected people in southern Africa are women.

The HIV/AIDS prevalence in the seven Southern African Countries in descending order is as follows[viii]: Botswana (38.8%), Zimbabwe (33.7%), Swaziland (33.4), Lesotho (31%), Namibia (22.5%) Zambia (21.5%). These percentages are expected to rise as it has increasingly become evident that HIV/AIDS has no natural limit.

Historical injustices will continue to surface and create the conditions for conflict, and even war. The heated land debate in Zimbabwe has called into question the country's political settlement, which brought liberation more than twenty-four years ago. But the question of whether political settlements constrain the freedom of action of governments after peace and liberation has dawned, affects more than just Zimbabwe; it is a vexed question faced by most states in the region. During the early 2004, the government in Windhoek, and also newly

elected president of Namibia, Ifikipunye Puhamba, gave notice that the Namibian government intends to accelerate its land restitution and reform processes.

In countries that have recently gone through war, such as the DRC and Angola, there is a problem of former child soldiers, many who are associated with incredible levels of violence, that have left them severely traumatized[ix]. There is further, the challenge of having to reintegrate regular soldiers; securing livelihoods for demobilized soldiers; accommodating economic and political migrants, and the like.

Pressures for internal democratic governance constantly jostle with tensions among states. Inter-state and intra-state conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the recently ended war in Angola, civil conflict in Zimbabwe, tensions between Namibia and Botswana over the Caprivi, are examples. The region has seen a fragile peace processes in the DRC and the calm in Angola could easily come apart. Post-conflict peace-building challenges suggest that unless democratic governance processes and institutions and the legacies of war are addressed, war could easily return.

Major economic stresses

Democratisation tensions play themselves out against the backdrop of continued economic difficulty; this has impacted negatively on prospects for democratic governance. The development trajectory for the region does not look good and the region faces a poverty complex that is spiraling downwards[x].

Southern Africa clearly faces a plethora of development challenges. While in recent years economic growth rates have reached the 2-8 percent levels, the promise of economic prospects in the region have been clearly overstated. Many states have been compelled to support 'donor democracy' and pursue neo-classical economic policies that have not result in sustainable growth paths. Even in countries where growth has been high, economic growth typically happens from a low base; poor economic performance exacerbates poverty and compounds the development challenges.

Income poverty is painfully slow[xi], and there has been a net reduction in the region's GDP per capita[xii]. The national average life expectancy rate of birth for southern Africa's 200 million inhabitants is a paltry 42 years. Some 15 million southern Africans require food aid.

Southern Africa faces a major problem with small arms and light weapons; these are typically used in organized crime operations by gangs in drug trafficking, car hijackings and diamond smuggling. Weapons are also typically used as `convertible currency' by these criminals[xiii]. Light weapons are typically leftovers from southern Africa's past civil, inter-state and liberation wars.

Incongruous politics and conflict

<u>**Regional Overview**</u>

Formal democracy has been introduced in most of the region's states – Swaziland, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are now the only two countries which are not ruled by governments chosen in multi-party elections. Indeed, in 2004 and 2005, ten southern African countries would have gone to the polls. In 2004, South Africa, Malawi, Botswana, Namibia and Mozambique, and in 2005, we are likely to see Zimbabwe, maybe Angola, maybe the DRC, Mauritius and Tanzania. So, if the minimalist definition of democracy is used – elections on time – than most southern African countries can claim to be democracies.

However, if substantive democracy is used as a barometer, than democratisation experiments in southern Africa are highly fragile, and the formal facade conceals more deep-seated governance challenges faced by the region.

Botswana

The multi-ethnic Botswana has not seen a change of government since 1965[xiv]. The BDP just won the elections...again. And the opposition remains severely weakened and splintered. While the BDP remains strong in the main because of its image as an effective manager of the economy and a consolidator of democracy, increasingly intra-party weakness and tensions have began to weaken it[xv]. Botswana is a highly unequal society and it faces a severe HIV-AIDS crisis.

Mauritius

Mauritius remains one of Africa's strongest democracies, but it too has its challenges. It boasts one of the highest GDP per capita's, and is ranked a middle-income country. Its citizens enjoy a relatively high standard of living, and primary and secondary education is free and compulsory. Mauritius' politics constantly reveal both stability and combativeness. There are clear rules of the game; political parties accept the rules of political contestation and regular election, and the right of the people to subject political parties and politicians to accountability. But day-to-day interactions between political parties remain aggressive and cutthroat, and are often fractious and divisive.

Mauritius is a diverse but politically unified country, in spite of social cleavages and inequalities. But there is a general absence of violent conflict in the country.

Tanzania

Tanzania is attempting to consolidate democratization against the backdrop of significant social and economic stresses; it remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with per capita income at a mere US $168 per year. The economy remains heavily dependent on agriculture, which accounts for 50% of GDP. The Mkapa government has sought to be more responsive to citizen demands by addressing the issues of entrenched corruption in the public sector. The opposition feels that the ruling party is increasingly behaving in an arrogant and heavy-handed fashion.

DRC

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) faces enormous post-conflict peace-building governance challenges. In April 2003, the Joseph Kabila government and rebel opposition forces signed an historic pact to bring about a government of national unity in that country. Forty-four groups, including armed factions, exiled political parties, and civil society groups, signed the 'The Final Act' at Sun City, South Africa. The signing of the peace deal heralded the end of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue[xvi]. But major challenges still lay ahead. The war has resulted in weak institutions in Congo, with government's reach stretching no further than the outskirts of Kinshasa. State-society relations are poor to the extent of being almost non-existent.

There are no legitimate political institutions, and certainly no democratically rooted constitutional process[xvii]. Indeed, the incumbent leader has considerable emergency powers at his disposal. The country has a recent history of warlordism, and even after any election that might take place, the problem of rebels, spoilers and warlords will continue to haunt the country for a considerable period into the future. Indeed, there is an ongoing militarisation of society in spite of the peace process that is underway.

The collapse of the economy has had a direct effect on the quality of life of the people, and the Congolese are today some of the poorest people in the world. This poverty and underdevelopment contain the seeds for possible future conflict.

Mozambique

Relations between the dominant parties in Mozambique are strained and there is a high degree of mistrust between Renamo and Frelimo; Renamo has even disputed the outcome of the first two elections in peacetime, the 1994 and 1999 elections [xviii]. Renamo has often threatened with violence and to go back to the bush, and post-election disputes could follow the election in December.

Even though economic growth stood at an impressive 8-9% over the past five years, making Mozambique one of the fastest growing economies in the world, such growth has occurred from a very low base. The country remains one of the poorest in the world. Like in other southern African states, poverty and inequality could threaten what is an already fragile democracy.

Swaziland

In Swaziland there continues to be a serious standoff between the monarchy and civil society movements, notably labour, which is seeking to democratize the country and replace monarchical rule with democratic governance. Political parties are banned in the country and civil society (especially of the opposition variety) are not only excluded from governance processes but are also harassed; many are driven into exile. So at a time when much attention is focused on Zimbabwe, Swaziland is a political powder keg, and there is not a great deal needed to ignite it. All the evidence points to a combustionable situation. In April 2003, the Swazi chief justice resigned because of what he saw as a crisis between the modern court system in Swaziland and the country's absolute monarchy[xix]. Pressures for and tensions over democratization could spill into violence in the years to come.

Angola

Until the death of UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi in 2002, the government and opposition in Angola had long interacted with each other through a drawn out war. The two sides were locked in a major civil war for twenty-seven years. Angola has not had an election since 1992. Savimbi's death lead to the start of the formal peace process. But now that formal attempts at peace-making are underway the gains of the past two years could be reversed unless the legacy of war is addressed through democratic peace-building. Democratic peace-building involves the strengthening of democratic institutions and culture. Unless this form of peace-building is addressed, peace could prove short lived.

Angolans remain some of the world's poorest people, despite the fact that the country is endowed with an abundance of diamonds and oil. The threat of military conflict will continue to loom for many years. Several million people have been uprooted by the war and some 10 million landmines are buried in the country's former war zones.

Lesotho

Lesotho is a young, fragile and impoverished democracy. The kingdom has never been in a position to provide employment to the bulk of its population. Because of poverty and underdevelopment, political contestation is highly combative and the stakes are typically high. Like in Malawi, for example, a seat in parliament is often seen as a source of income, and a job. The stakes are, therefore, very high in a poor democracy such as Lesotho, and over the past several years a proliferation of parties has occurred, resulting in the present complement of 19 parties - all vying for seats in parliament. Because of the state's inability to make funding available for political parties, this remains a contentious issue in Lesotho's polity.

Lesotho has, especially around the time of elections, a history of instability and violence. HIV/AIDS is on the increase. While the election of May 2002 was largely violence-free and even credible, because of the high stakes, politics in Lesotho remain frail and breakable. The fragile democracy needs to be rebuilt through the strengthening of democratic institutions, building of consensus, fostering of cooperation and coexistence, and just generally political reconciliation, notably between the ruling LCD party and the BNP, as well as other parties like the LPC.

Zambia

There has, for a long time, been a stalling of the democratisation process in Zambia – especially after the 1991 elections. Institutional failure has occurred in the country, resulting in the executive and the ruling party becoming the dominant forces in the country. The ruling MMD has gone out of its way to entrench its dominance; this was done mainly through removing the instruments of transparency and accountability. The power of the executive remains firmly entrenched. This lack of political accountability and executive dominance has ben accompanied by systemic corruption. Corruption in Zambia is probably the worst in the region. In one of the most pronounced attempts to solidify MMD dominance, President Fredrick Chiluba planned to change the constitution in order to allow him to stand for a third term. But this move was met with fierce

opposition, even from within the ranks of the ruling party; some even moved to form their own opposition parties. Other opposition parties such as the Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD), UNIP, and the United Party for National Development (UPND) all opposed the move. Church and student movements were in the vanguard of anti-third term campaigns. In the end, Chiluba was defeated at the hands of a vibrant civil society, led by the churches, labour and the students movement. The economy remains highly dependent on revenues from copper, corruption eats away at an un-diversified economy, and government lacks the revenue to sustain expenditure and, sometimes, salaries.

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe meanwhile, tensions between government and opposition forces over the state of democracy means that this erstwhile icon of stability is now one of the region's most unstable states. Zanu-Pf has - for more than half a decade now - behaved like a disguised monarchy, and has also turned the country into a de facto one party state. It have come to increasingly rely on violence and intimidation to sustain its rule, and has now been turned into a virtual neo-authoritarian regime[xx].

Zimbabwe has also experienced one of the worst economic meltdowns in recent memory. By 2001, unemployment stood at 60%[xxi]. Over the last several years since then this rate has worsened while the economy has contracted. The GDP per capita, which was US$471 in 2000, worsened over the next three years. Total foreign debt was estimated at US$4 billion. Many parts of rural Zimbabwe, notably Matabele land and Masivingo, are experiencing serious food shortages.

While president Robert Mugabe has laid a stress on the social justice issue of land possession, dispossession and restitution, the opposition has squared with the state over the lack of democratic governance. Some examples of this lack of democratic governance is the repeated detention of journalists whose reports were unfavourable to the military establishment and the government. Even if the power political question can be addressed, one lesson from Zimbabwe is that the land question has emerged as one of the most pressing governance challenges facing southern Africa.

Malawi

Malawi, one of the poorest countries in Africa, is attempting to instill democracy against the backdrop of indebtedness, poverty, a vulnerable agricultural sector, and heavy dependence on foreign aid. Chronic malnutrition is a problem and HIV/AIDS affects some 25% of the sexually active population. Life expectancy, which now stands at 44 years of age, could drop even further because of the pandemic. Democratisation and governance thus occur in rather adverse conditions. These unsympathetic conditions could easily lead to conflict.

Namibia

In Namibia formal democracy remains robust - as evidenced by the recent elections. Swapo remains one of the region's most dominant political parties and the recent results were largely accepted without question; the Electoral Commission got a clean bill of health in the November 2004 poll. But threats to its democracy are not likely to come from political contestation: they are more likely to come from socio-economic stresses. Like South Africa, Namibia is one of

the world's most unequal societies. Nowhere is this inequality better illustrated than in the land question. The Namibian government, frustrated by its own slow pace of land reform, announced during early 2004 that it would accelerate the slow pace of expropriation of white farms[xxii]. It made clear its intentions to do away with the 'willing seller-willing buyer' policy and replace it with the expropriation policy[xxiii]. Government blamed this shift on white farmers, who have 'unfairly inflated the prices of farmland and become obdurate'[xxiv]. The statistics tell it all; white farmers, who makes up just 5% of the population, own sme 95,6% of all agricultural land.

South Africa

South Africa, which in April 2004 witnessed its third democratic elections on time, is often seen as the strongest democracy in the region. But it has major problems. While it has the largest, and most diversified and advanced economy in the region – with a GDP which accounts for some 80 per cent of the region's economic output - and boasts an excellent infrastructure[xxv], it faces severe socio-economic problems. Its government presides over a deeply unequal society with acute poverty levels, unemployment rates of over 40%, poverty rates of some 48%, and what president Mbeki called 'two economies' and 'two nations'. All of which, in part, explains the levels of crime in the country. Government, particularly at provincial and local levels, has relatively weak state capacity.

Conclusion

The major challenges facing the region are the weakness of the state, coupled with poverty, inequality, underdevelopment and human security problems. Even the governance institutions put in place nationally and regionally (SADC) are weak. They typically fail to resolve differences within and amongst states. Also, states are jealous of their sovereignty, are reluctant to surrender some of it, and are even unwilling to pool some in favour of greater integration. Democratic governance in southern Africa is under stress and strain. The potential for conflict is, therefore, evident.

[1] Salim Ahmed Salim, Keynote, Southern Africa sub-regional seminar on 'Regional security co-operation in southern Africa: Threats, challenges and opportunities', 22-27 September 2002, Maputo, Mozambique.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Tandeka C. Nkiwane, 'The Quest for Good Governance', in Mwesiga Baregu and Christopher Landsberg (eds.), *From Cape to Co ngo, Southern Africa's Evolving Security Challenges*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder and London, 2003, p. 53.

[4] Mwesiga Baregu and Christopher Landsberg, 'Southern Africa's Security Architecture: Challenges and Projects', in Mwesiga Baregu and Christopher Landsberg, From Cape to Congo, op. cit., p. 346.

[v] Quoted in Mwesiga Baregu and Christopher Landsberg, From Cape to Congo, op. cit., p. 3.

[vi] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), African Economic Outlook, Paris, 2002, Overview.

[vii] OECD and African Development Bank Group, African Economic Outlook, 2001/2002, OECD, 2002, Overview.

[viii] Ibid.

[ix] Dr. Leonardo Simao, in Southern Africa sub-regional seminar on 'Regional security co-operation in southern Africa: Threats, challenges and opportunities, op. cit.

[x] Ibid.

[xi] Neville Gabriel, The Millennium Development Goals: Towards a civil society perspective on reframing poverty reduction strategies in southern Africa, Presented at the Southern Africa MDGs Forum, Johannesburg, 2-4 July 2003.

[xii] Ibid.

[xiii] Angela McIntyre and Taya Weiss, Exploring small arms demand, a youth perspective, ISS Paper 67, March 2003.

[xiv] Kenneth Good, 'Background to Botswana's forthcoming 2004 election', EISA, Election Talk, no. 8, February 2004.

[xv] Ibid, p. 13.

[xvi] 'Historic pact rings in new period for DRC', in *The Star*, 3 April 2003.

[xvii] Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, Prospects for sustained peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo, presentation at the Ford Special Initiative for Africa meeting, Dakar, Senegal, October 2003, p. 5.

[xviii] Luis de Brito, 'Prospects for more transparency in Mozambique's 2004 elections', in EISA Election Talk, no 8, February 2004.

[xix] http://www.mg.co.za/Content/13.asp?ao=12805.

[xx] Ibid, p. 5.

[xxi] See Stanbic Zimbabwe Group, State of the Zimbabwean Economy and Outlook, 6 November 2001.

[xxii] Tom Nevin, 'Land – A tale of two countries', in African Business, April 2004.

[xxiii] Ibid.

[xxiv] Ibid.

[xxv] Editors Inc., *South Africa 1997-98, South Africa at a glance*, 1998.