Rethinking Developmental States in Southern Africa

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# Regional Integration and the challenges of Poverty Reduction in Africa: The Case of Southern African Development Community

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Abstract

Poverty and Inequality remain the two most endemic socio-economic problems faced by African countries today. Although Africa has recently occupied a global spotlight as a region with the fastest economic growth rate, various strategies devised by countries at the national levels have done little to alleviate poverty or reduce inequality. It is therefore both circumspect and imperative to adopt another approach in form of a regional strategy to tackle the twin problems of poverty and inequality at the regional level. The basis of this argument is that poverty, like any other social problem has neither colour nor nationality. It is a common human problem. Consequently, an integrated approach to addressing poverty will ensure that human and material resources from richer countries are pooled to mitigate the impact of poverty in other parts of the sub-region. An integrated approach to fighting poverty could obviate the weaknesses in the capacity of the many states in southern African sub-region to address the twin-problems of poverty and inequality through pooling of resources, technical capacity and infrastructures.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is made up of countries with divergent and disparate capacity and resources for development. Indeed, as part of its Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan, SADC has developed a Regional Poverty Reduction Framework as a way of implementing the strategic development plan. However, the result has not been impressive. What are the challenges to the implementation of this poverty reduction framework in terms of inclusiveness, approach, political commitment and general buy-in from the citizens? This paper examines these issues and make case for an actionable regional approach to addressing poverty in the sub-region and the continent as a whole.

## Introduction

Poverty and inequality remain major challenges that virtually all the States in Southern Africa and Africa as a whole are confronted with. Studies by international development organisations such as the World Bank and the United Nations Human Development Programme shows that region is home to many of the countries with the highest rates of inequality and poverty. They also occupy low development in terms of social indicators such as access to health, education and water (UNDP, 2014, World Bank 2014). The capacity of the States in Southern Africa to drive inclusive development has been circumscribed due to many factors, not least the nature and character of the States, the history of their formation, the racial character of economies such as that of South Africa, the internal dynamics of their political economies and the manner of their incorporation into the global capitalist system.

With the exception of South Africa, most of the 14 countries that make up the Southern Africa Economic Development Community (SADC) are dependent on export of commodities and minerals, whose fortune are perennially tied to the vagaries of the global commodity markets. Consequently, their capacity to have long term development plans have been negatively affected. The micro nature of these States, their weaknesses in terms of limited capacity for resource mobilisation, inability to formulate and implement developmental policies have rendered efforts toward reduction of poverty grossly ineffective. Given the limitations that the States in the sub-region are faced with in addressing its challenges, an integrated approach to socio-economic development presents some distinct possibilities, especially in the light of the historical ties that bind the peoples of the sub-region, their commonalities, cultural and linguistic affiliations as well as mutual dependence.

The patterns of relationship among the peoples in the sub-region have been reinforced by migration flows of migrant workers for centuries. Indeed, scholars have argued that countries in Southern Africa have related on the basis of cyclical inward and outward movements of people to where there are economic opportunities, especially in the mining sectors for centuries ((Nshimbi and Fioramonti, 2014). People have also been forced to move from one part of the region to the other due to economic hardship, political oppression, wars and conflicts. Indeed, as past and recent experiences of xenophobism in South Africa eloquently show, it is difficult for any country in the sub-region to be regarded as an island of opulence in the midst of poor neighbours ( Nyamjoh, 2004).

Indeed, in what may be regarded as a cost saving measure by the colonial administration, three of the current member countries of SADC, namely Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe were centrally administered as Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland or Central African Federation between 1953 and 1963. As Adedeji (2012) argues, this centralised approach to governance was also adopted in both British and French controlled territories in West Africa.

This paper is based on the assumption that an integrated approach to fighting poverty could obviate the weaknesses in the capacity of the many States in Southern African sub-region to address the twin-problems of poverty and inequality through pooling of resources, alignment of technical capacity and sharing of infrastructures as well as consciously enacting social regional social policies that can assure social security and protection for the vulnerable segments of the population. The assumption that a regionally integrated approach to poverty reduction could be a worthwhile strategy is premised on the understanding that the complex and multi-faceted nature of poverty requires that strategies which point the way out of poverty must be comprehensive and multi-pronged (Kessy and Tostensen, 2008).

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is made up of countries with divergent and disparate capacity and resources for development. Indeed, as part of its Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan, SADC has developed a Regional Poverty Reduction Framework as a way of implementing the strategic development plan. This Regional Poverty Reduction Framework recognises that:

> Regional integration and cooperation accelerates economic growth by creating larger markets, enabling economies of scale and scope, and through specialisation and division of labour. Regional integration and cooperation is especially useful for small countries with limited options. Economic development opportunities increase when countries actively pursue regional integration and cooperation. Regional integration and cooperation can also spur private sector development, promote peace and stability, and provide greater economic opportunities to people living close to the borders who are often among the poorest in many (SADC, 2008)

However, the results of this strategy in terms of poverty reduction have not been impressive. One of the major cause of the lack of success in this endeavour is that the regional integration approach has been extensively based on creating market access rather than focusing on an inclusive and all encompassing approach, which incorporate economic and non-economic issues. What are the challenges to the implementation of this poverty reduction framework in terms of inclusiveness, approach, political commitment and general buy-in from the citizens? This paper examines these issues and makes case for an actionable regional approach to addressing poverty in the sub-region and the continent as a whole. This introductory section is followed by the political economy analysis of Southern African in terms of the composition of the State, the structure of the economy and the menace of poverty. Section three discusses regional integration both in its theoretical and empirical essence as a possible political-economic arrangement for tackling poverty in the sub-region. In section four, the visions, strategies and challenges of the Southern Africa Development Community in addressing poverty in the sub-region was put in analytical context. While five concludes with policy recommendations.

**The Political Economy of Southern Africa**

The political economy of the fourteen countries that constitute the Southern Africa Development Community have been defined and shaped by their historical experiences of slavery, colonialism and post-colonial engagement with the global capitalist system. Like most countries in Africa, the economies of the region are heavily dependent on exports of minerals and agricultural products. The discovery of minerals in the Southern cone of Africa made this area an attractive location for investors from different parts of Europe. Unlike most parts of Africa where former colonial government was established in the 1900s, colonialism in SADC countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, (formerly Rhodesia) had a settler form of colonialism which lasted for centuries. With regard to South Africa, Terranblanche (2002) narrates the historical trajectories of over 300 years of colonial control of political, social and economic lives of South Africa. Mamdani ( 1996) explicates on how the political economy system that the colonial government put in place in countries that have late legacies of colonialism continue to affect contemporary experiences of these countries.

The development challenges of most countries in the SADC region have been aggravated by civil conflicts and wars. Countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola and Mozambique have had their post-independence hopes of fostering inclusive development shattered by internecine conflicts. The dependence of these countries on revenue from minerals and metals for their economic survival have predisposed them to the resource curse thesis. As scholars have argued, dependence on rents collection by resource rich countries in Africa generally leads to bitter contestation by political elites and entrenched interests within such countries (Collier, 2007, Ross, 2013). As several cases in Africa and in the SADC sub-region have shown, contest for political power has engendered authoritarianism, despotism and caricature of democratic governance, in which power holders are reluctant to relinquish such in the spirit of constitutional provisions. Zimbabwe and DRC are two classic examples of countries where post-independence political leaders like late Mobutu Seseko and Robert Mugabe held tenaciously to power through the use of oppression, subterfuge and forced submission. In the ensuing struggle for power, majority of the population are neglected, disregarded and excluded from the distribution of resources. The relationship between resource abundance and conflict has been an issue of serious scholarly debate. Anyanwu and Ejijakpor (2013) ask if oil wealth affects democracy? They found that indeed, in many African countries, contestation for the distribution of oil wealth among political elites affect the quality of democracy that is practiced in Africa. Ross (2013 ) establishes that oil and gas wealth undermines democracy, slows (with some exception) economic growth and increase the risks of civil wars. Although Botswana appear to present a contrasting picture to what is generally known on the link between resources availability, distribution and democracy, a critical study of democracy in that country has shown some deviation from conventional idea of participatory democracy. Apart from the fact that only one political party has been ruling since independence, the voices of minority groups have been silenced to a great significant extent.

Another salient point on the political economy of the SADC region is the position of South Africa as the regional hegemon. As the economic power-house, the country has served as destination for migrant workers for centuries (Nshimbi and Fioramonti, 2014). Within the context of the discriminatory apartheid regime, these workers were treated as mere chattels whose value is the labour that they render. Thus, little thought was given to welfare or empowerment. Also, in the context of the struggle against apartheid, some countries in the sub-region such as Zambia, Mozambique and Angola worked in partnership with the liberation movements such as the African National Congress and Pan-African Movement to dismantle the oppressive regime. Although a Custom Union exits among some member countries of the SADC since 1902, the hegemonic position of South Africa in this union of unequals have ensured that the country derives most of the benefits (Alden and Soko, 2005) Although the return to democracy in South Africa has seen the country making greater inroads into the subregion in terms of investments and trade, there have been concerns that the poorer and smaller countries have not derived the expected benefits. One of the contributory factors to this abnormality is the racial character of the businesses in South Africa where the minority white population continue to hold the lever of the economy. It would appear that the racial character in the ownership structure of the businesses dictates relations of production and exchange that is informed solely by accumulation without distribution. Although these companies are engaged in one form of corporate social responsibility or other, the expected benefits to host countries in terms of technology transfer, labour-intensive operations that can absorb high number of the unemployed in these countries and deliberate involvement in social services such as provision of scholarships have not been given due attention.

It is also important to highlight how the global political economy affects the capacity of the countries in Southern Africa to work in addressing poverty. Gabriel (2003:10) argues that

> Democratic development for poverty reduction in the region requires attention to be given both to local contextual factors and the global socio-economic development policy regime. A social development paradigm in Southern Africa that focuses on local and national institutional development towards achieving the MDGs without a corresponding focus on transforming the framework of the global economic policy regime will be ineffective

The influence of the dominant neoliberal economic regimes on poverty reduction in the subregion manifest in trade and financial liberalisation regimes that were imposed on these countries in the wake of the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 1990s. The fluctuation in the global commodity prices and the liberalisation of capital accounts allow for incessant shocks and distortions to macroeconomic variables like balance of payment, interest rates, purchasing power and exchange rates. These factors inevitably lead to economic crisis which exacerbates the poverty conditions of majority of the population. As Gabriel (2003:11) further notes,

> Southern Africa's poverty complex is inextricably linked to problems in global trade, finance, and governance. So too is its ability to meet the MDGs. These problems limit the region from developing effective systems of democratic participation for poverty reduction in the region, resulting in democratic structures without the ability to freely determine appropriate policy frameworks.

This is because 'cutbacks in social service expenditures arising from structural adjustment programmes, as well as the 'user-should-pay' principle, have been identified as a significant factor in the deterioration of the well -being of vulnerable and poor groups in several developing countries' (p,11). Coupled with the aforementioned forces are domestic contradictions in which only a tiny fraction, at just about 20% of the population are employed in the formal sector. Majority of the citizens are either unemployed or underemployed. According to a report by Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA n.d:1),

> more than 60% of the population in SADC lacks access to an adequate supply of safe water, a third of the SADC population lives in abject poverty and about 40% of the labour force is unemployed or underemployed. Poverty levels have not only increased, but have also become more in urban areas and amongst female-headed households and the youth in particular.

In a country like South Africa, poverty is racially defined as the minority white population of 5% control over 80% of the resources (OSISA, n.d). The privileged position of the minority has an historical basis on the separatist apartheid regime. Although significant efforts have been made by the post-apartheid governments since 1994 to empower the previously disadvantaged group through such programmes as the Black Economic Empowerment, creation of greater access to higher education, the ownership structure of the economy remain skewed in favour of the white minority (Seekings and Nattras, 2006). The Social security benefits that the government pays to the people has not been sufficient in alleviating poverty as this could not substitute for productive engagement, especially for the youth.

## Regional Integration in Southern Africa

The literature on regional integration both in Africa as a whole and Southern Africa has been dominated by concerns over the feasibility of a South-South integration. They have also been preoccupied with the issue of creation of market access through removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers (Draper, 2013, 2010, Gibb, 2009, Collier and Venables 2008). Scholars like Collier and Venables argue that due to the small markets of many states in Africa, the relatively short time of gaining political independence, the dominance of raw material exports and low levels of manufacturing, there is little benefits in integrating their economies. In particular, the New Economic Geography thesis is based on the logic of argument that small developing countries have little to gain through integration. This is because of the comparative disadvantage that they have in terms of manufacturing. Such disadvantage, they argue, will create a regional growth pole of stronger countries with propensity to drive benefits that exclude the poorer ones. The consequence of such exclusion is hostility and possible conflict. Consequently, these scholars recommend North-South integration in the short to medium term (Draper, 2013, Collier and Venable, 2008).

In his theoretical metaphysical narratives of regional integration in Africa, Gibb chronicles the various theoretical approaches that have been used to explain the trajectories of regional integration in Africa. These include the market integration, neoliberal and development cooperation approaches. In his critique of these approaches, Oloruntoba (2015) notes that none of them have been able to correctly provide the basis of a regional integration approach that privileges the interest of the people in terms of poverty reduction and empowerment. Scholars like Hettne (2004) advance the New Regionalism Approach to explain the imperative of building regionalism from below. This approach to regionalism differs from the usual top down approach which has defined regionalism since the 1950s.

The practice of regional integration in Southern Africa has been bedevilled by various challenges such as overlapping membership, unequal level of resources of the various states, lack of well- developed regional institutions and infrastructures as well as lack of political will. These challenges are further compounded by lack of understanding of who we are as Africans-the absence of what Mandaza (2001:78) calls deep integration. Deep integration encompasses socio-cultural cooperation and healthy relationship of people of different nationalities. Prah (2006) notes that rather than relates together as one people, post-independent African countries have been at logger-head with one another as the political elites have engaged in fanning the ember of hatred and xenophobic attacks rather than fostering integration of the peoples of Africa. He laments that:

> Looking at the evidence of history, there is little to show that either during the pre-colonial period or during the period of Western tutelage were the sorts of anti-foreign reactions that we have seen on the continent in the post-colonial era frequent. Indeed, it is possible to say that these anti-African reactions amongst Africans seem to have greatly increased during post-colonial era (p32).

The ‘we’ versus ‘they’ sentiments which is fuelled largely by the African elites feed into the divide and rule strategy of the colonialists in the type of distorted education as well as the artificial borders that they bequeathed on the continent. Adedeji (2012) notes that whereas both French and British colonial powers maintained some form of political and economic integrations during their rule in Africa, they have continued to play various insidious and sinister roles in further keeping the various countries apart since granting flag independence to African countries. On the other hand, the ruling elites has turned the nation-spaces into arena of competition and contestation for power. This practice confirms Benedict Anderson's thesis which sees the nation as an imagined community where elites define who belongs and who does not (Anderson, 1991).

Although the Southern African Development Community has designed various programmes to foster integration, lack of political will in implementing the various treaties and protocols have limited their success. It goes without saying that despite the fact that the Southern African Customs Union is the oldest in the world, its contribution to economic development of the sub-region has been limited because it has not sufficiently incorporated deep integration. Although, SACU provides various frameworks through which weaker members of the union are compensated, there have been concerns that the hegemonic position of South Africa within the union has been used for sub-optimal purposes (Aldine and Soko, 2008).

A major hindrance, which could paradoxically be a facilitator to the pursuit of the agenda of regional integration in Southern African sub-region is that of governance deficit and lack of capability of the States to manage domestic challenges such as conflict, violence and economic problems. While political elites at the national levels have been playing lip-service to regional integration in a bid to satisfy domestic forces such as labour union and the majority of jobless youths who see no benefit from a more integrated sub-region or continent, the reality of fracturing States, failing institutions and the increasing need to curb incessant wars have necessitated a change from adherence to the idea of hard sovereignty to soft sovereignty. Hence, with the transformation of the Organisation of African Unity to African Union in 2002, the idea of non-interference in the domestic affairs of member states was changed to that of necessary interference. Although Scholars have expressed pessimism on the possibility of building regional integration in Africa on the basis of peace paradigm, which underpinned the European integration approach (see Clapman 2001 cited in Draper, 2013), both SADC and the African Union have in place structures which they have been using to restore peace in conflict ridden countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and Mozambique. In the wake of the political crisis in Lesotho in early 2015, South Africa has been playing a very active role in mediating peace and ensuring a successful election in the country.

Despite the importance of integration to peace efforts, it is in the economic front that regional integration becomes more imperative in Southern Africa. As argued elsewhere (Gumede and Oloruntoba, 2015), the boundaries of the States in Africa are artificial and arbitrary creations of the imperialist, the sole objective of which was extraction and domination. Despite attaining political independence, these States survive on rents. The neo-patrimonial nature of politics has seen the political class using the State as a means of primitive accumulation rather than fostering development. Lacking in autonomy, legitimacy and hegemony, these neo-partrimonial elites have remained disconnected from the society, the result of which is the use of force, violence and intimidation on the citizens, who are too poor to voice any strong dissent. It is in this context that a people-driven integration effort becomes important to arrest the waste in governance.

Unlike the prevailing approach to integration either on the basis of supranationality or inter-governmentalism, this paper argues for a people-driven integration, whose agenda cross the boundaries of economic formalization, transcend artificial State boundaries and escape the political manipulations of the political elites whose survival and sustenance depends on the continuity of the current order. In other words, in order to ensure that regional integration leads to poverty reduction in the Southern African sub-region, it must be organised in a creative and innovative manner in such a way that it transcends the conventional idea of measuring integration on the basis of level of formal trade, investment or other standard economic measures. As a development-oriented project, it must not only incorporate building of infrastructures (which SADC member countries have agreed to), but it must include regionalisation of citizenship in terms of mobility, social security policies, pension administration and a holistic adoption of the second or shadow economy. I elaborate on these in the conclusion.

Poverty Reduction Strategies in Southern African Development Community

The Regional Indicative Poverty Reduction Framework of the Southern African Community, which was adopted in 2008 flows from the Strategic Plan of the African Union and the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Framework. The Indicative Framework was aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goals of halving the number of people who lives on less than $1a day in 2015. The RISDP identifies two main groups, which are cross-cutting and sectoral areas of intervention. According to the SADC Secretariat, the RISDP states that SADC regards combating poverty as the overarching priority in its regional integration initiative. It also notes that the ultimate objective of RISDP is to deepen regional integration with a view to accelerate poverty eradication and achieve other MDGs. In the estimation of the political leaders in the sub-region, regional integration can contribute to poverty reduction when Governments adopt pro-poor regional integration policies within the context of the following measures:

Promote the positive impact of regional trade on the poor especially activities dominated by the poor (small scale and informal cross border trade, micro and informal finance; craft and related industries);

Invest in regional infrastructure that open opportunities for the poor (access roads to areas occupied by the poor; access to affordable energy by the poor; ICT connectivity for the poor; water and sanitation for the poor);

Build institutional capacity for development and coordination of regional programmes that benefit the poor (integrating and mainstreaming pro poor interventions in all regional programmes);

Invest in human capital (education and training as well as skills development at artisan level) and

Promote regional cooperation in the provision of regional public goods that benefit the poor (SADC, 2008)

As part of the strategies, the sub-region also identified the need to have a regional development bank which will help in providing finance for development. The imperative of building cross-national infrastructures such as roads, rail lines and electricity supplies hubs was not lost on the political leaders.

Although some milestones have been reached in terms of signing more agreements such as the recently concluded Tripartite Free Trade Zones, the lofty objective of poverty eradication in the SADC sub-region has not been achieved. On the contrary, with the exception of Botswana and to a certain extent, Zambia, poverty and inequality have continued to increase in the subregion. Despite the regional commitment to fighting poverty, the region looked on while Zimbabwean economies went into almost complete ruins in 2008. Notwithstanding the relatively stronger economic position that South Africa occupies economically, the racial nature of its economy, lack of appropriate policies, over-extended power of labour and low level of productivity as well as well as absence of critical skills have led to a situation of high unemployment and inequality in the country. Lack of implementation of the various protocols and treaties agreed to by member-countries of the SADC has also hindered the achievement of reducing poverty.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the complexities involved in using regional integration to achieve poverty eradication in Southern Africa sub-region. I argue that various domestic and external factors have worked to hamper developmental regionalism in the sub-region. Although the political leaders have designed various programmes and set various agenda for the actualisation of poverty reduction, not much has been done with respect to implementation

The way forward in using regional integration to achieve poverty eradication within the context of developmental state narrative remains suspect at the best. While it is a desirable objective to ride on the back of the current state structure to advance regional integration and poverty reduction, it will require more than mere political slogans or rhetoric before this can be achieved. A bold and imaginative vision, which is underpinned by a clear understanding of the possibilities that a regionalised development plans holds for the sub-region is mandatory. The conceptualisation and crystalisation of such visions will necessarily involve visionary leaders at both domestic and regional levels both within and outside the government structures. If examples from other regions of the world are anything to go by, the need for a regional hegemon like South Africa to underwrite the cost of integration cannot be overemphasised. Given the penchant for a very restrictive immigration regime in South Africa, there is need for decolonisation of the minds of the political and intellectual elites in the country in order to recognise the commonality of Africans in terms of the ties that bind. The historical experiences of inward and outward flow to and from the various countries in the subregion over past centuries should provide a guide here (see Prah, 2006).

Lastly, as the Southern African Trust has identified, there is need for a regional approach to human and social security in the sub-region. This must be backed with programmes that recognise the worth of migrant workers and cater for their safety nets both as working or retired citizens.

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