

GOOD GOVERNANCE IN THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

Paper 14

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I am pleased to make a brief statement on the occasion of the award of certificates at the end of the course on good governance here at the University of Pretoria.

Issues of good governance are increasingly taking the centre stage in development discourse, and are now seen as important prerequisites for the progress of all societies.

The concept of good governance has come to be understood to cover a very broad field. Although sometimes used interchangeably with democracy, good governance goes beyond traditional conceptions of democracy, and includes social, political and economic aspects. Some of the key elements of good governance therefore include the observance of the rule of law, human rights, transparent economic and corporate governance, as well as the active participation of civil society and other non-state actors in national affairs.

The SADC Regional Human Development Report identifies five dimensions which underpin good governance and sustainable development. These are political, institutional, economic, social and gender.

The political dimension is the sense in which the term good governance is most commonly used, which implies the existence of a multi-party system, and the holding of periodic elections.

SADC has come a long way towards achieving good governance in this sense. Most SADC countries have since the mid-1990s adopted multi-party systems, and held periodic elections.

Since 1999, no fewer than ten SADC member states held parliamentary, presidential and local government elections in an atmosphere that has been judged to be generally free and fair. A number of challenges, however, remain, which include increasing popular participation by the electorate, and agreement on minimum regional electoral standards. I also believe that a healthy political opposition combined with media freedom are necessary balances against government excesses.

A related challenge is the prevention and management of conflict, which is also an essential prerequisite for good governance. In recent years, the conflicts in Angola and the DRC have been a cause of concern to SADC. However, the situation in Angola is returning to normal following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government Armed Forces and UNITA on 4 April 2002.

It is our sincere hope that the situation in the DRC will also change for the better in the near future, through the complementary efforts of the SADC, the UN, the African Union and the facilitator of the Congolese dialogue.

As earlier indicated, the absence of conflict and the holding of elections are only some of the elements of good governance. There is a need to develop and strengthen democratic

institutions such as the ombudsman or public protector, parliament, the courts and civil society organisations. These are institutions which play an overseeing and monitoring role over the executive, to ensure transparency and accountability in the use of public resources, as well as to guard against corruption.

I am pleased to note that a number of such institutions have taken root in many SADC member states, and that governments are increasingly consulting them in the process of decision making and formulating policies.

Good political governance is of little use if it is not accompanied by progress on the economic side. Although some SADC economies experienced modest levels of growth in the past few years, major challenges confront the region in this regard. These include high levels of poverty, unemployment, the burden of external debt, high budget deficits and the region's heavy dependence on the export of primary commodities.

The small size of the economies and markets of SADC countries makes it difficult to address the challenge of globalisation. Thus the SADC was created to make it possible for member states to reap the static and dynamic gains of regional integration in order to foster economic growth, eradicate poverty, enhance the standards of living of the people of Southern Africa, support the disadvantaged and achieve a sustainable development pattern.

Linked to the economic is the social and human dimension of good governance. Good governance can only thrive in an atmosphere of positive human development. Human development refers to development that results in enhancing the capacity of people to live long healthy lives, acquire relevant skills and knowledge that will enable them to access employment, earn higher incomes, increase their productivity and raise their quality of life.

Measurements of human development have, of late, indicated a decline in the status of human life in the region. The Human Development Index (HDI) – which contains measures of GDP per capita, life expectancy and adult literacy – in the SADC sub-region declined by 5.3% between 1995 and 1998. The reasons for this state of affairs are directly related to the socio-economic and human conditions prevailing in the region, which, in turn, are determined by forces internal and external to the region.

A major cause of decline in human development is the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has eroded some of the socio-economic gains the region had made in recent years. Some of our SADC member states have the highest infection rates in the world, and our region has been said to be the epicentre of the pandemic.

In response to this, SADC has developed a regional Strategic Framework and Plan of Action to co-ordinate and complement the efforts of member states in dealing with the HIV/AIDS scourge.

The fifth dimension of good governance relates to the achievement of gender equality. Equality between women and men has come to be recognised as a human right, a democratic and economic imperative.

However, while modest progress has been MADE in some SADC countries, women in most SADC countries continue to constitute the bulk of the poorest households, have limited

access to productive resources, power and decision making, education and training as well as adequate health services.

This is why SADC Heads of State adopted a Declaration on Gender and Development in 1997, which commits the region to addressing the inequalities referred to above. Gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment have also been identified as the key strategies for achieving greater equality between women and men in SADC.

These are some of the challenges confronting SADC and its member states as they pursue the ideals and principles of good governance. SADC is ready to meet these challenges head on, as reflected in the recent restructuring of the organisation, which incorporates the following in its common agenda:

- the promotion of sustainable and equitable economic growth and socio-economic development that will ensure poverty alleviation with the ultimate objective of its eradication;
- the promotion of common political values, systems and other shared values which are transmitted through institutions which are democratic, legitimate and effective; and
- The consolidation and maintenance of democracy, peace and security.

SADC recognises that these noble objectives cannot be achieved by governments alone. There is need to involve other stakeholders such as the private sector and civil society organisations.

The new inclusive structure of SADC, adopted by the Heads of State and Government in March 2001 and currently being implemented, has a two-fold approach to the issue of regional cooperation and integration. While the major emphasis is on increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of SADC policies and programmes to implement more coherent and better coordinated strategies for sustainable growth and development and poverty eradication, the issue of peace, security and stability is also given prominence to be dealt by a redefined Organ on Politics, Defence and Security. The success of the new SADC will depend, to a large extent, on how the twin objectives of economic and political governance are addressed in a manner that will provide opportunities to all its people, on the basis of equity and mutual benefits.

There is reason to believe that on the economic front, SADC will continue to implement fundamental economic reforms aimed at enhancing macroeconomic stability. Already a number of protocols have been negotiated, signed and ratified which indicates the desire of SADC member states to deepen their co-operation and cement the process of integration.

The SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security has now a well defined structure and reporting lines which will allow SADC to play an enhanced role in regional conflict management as well as to engage in joint military exercises to safeguard peace and security in the region. The Organ is serviced by the SADC Secretariat and can draw on, inter alia, the provisions of the Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation, the Protocol Against Corruption and the Protocol on the Control of Firearms to implement its programme of activities.

With the signature of the Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, SADC member states are now in a better position to adopt more advanced levels of co-operation in the areas of training for peace enforcement operations, policy planning and early warning. This will involve the risk mapping system to analyse social, economic and political situations that can degenerate into conflicts as well as coherent, comprehensive and integrated approaches that will address the root causes of conflicts. Coupled with joint military exercises, it would be essential for SADC to continue engaging in preventative diplomacy like fact-finding missions as those undertaken to Lesotho and confidence building activities with the involvement of all stakeholders such as the ongoing Inter-Congolese Dialogue. SADC will need to have experienced and skilful mediators/facilitators who can ensure that parties to conflict retain a sense of ownership of the peace process and feel confident that the post conflict phase is a win-win situation for all stakeholders during which peace and a sense of social safety and security will prevail and be sustained.

It is important, therefore, that appropriate measures are taken to ensure that all risk factors that can lead to renewed conflicts are eliminated in post-conflict situations.

Realising the risks posed by the existence of small arms and light weapons, SADC signed a Protocol on Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials which is intended to enhance member states' collaboration in the prevention, combating and control of the proliferation of and trafficking in small arms and light weapons. The Protocol also aims to prevent conflicts by providing a framework that will allow legislative measures to be enacted and appropriate mechanisms to be established by SADC member states to promote the effective implementation of the Protocol.

To accomplish the objectives provided in the Firearms Protocol, there must also be a culture of immaculate professionalism and objectivity on the part of both public and private sectors. Without such a culture, there is always the risk of corruption which is a crime parallel to the proliferation and trafficking of firearms.

Recognising that corrupt practices perpetuate armed conflicts, SADC signed a Protocol Against Corruption whose objectives are to promote, facilitate and regulate co-operation among member states to ensure the effectiveness of measures and actions to prevent, detect, punish and eradicate corruption in the public and private sectors.

The participation of civil society in the implementation of these protocols is paramount. Thus, SADC is networking with specialised civil institutions within and beyond the region to ensure the effective implementation of the provisions of the protocols.

It is encouraging for us in SADC that the NEPAD programme of action, including the Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance and the Peer Review Mechanism, have been adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in Durban early this month. This will, no doubt, reinforce SADC's agenda on good economic and political governance which are anchored on the pillars of democratic regimes which are committed to the protection of human rights, people centered development and market oriented economies.

This is why it is pleasing to see institutions of higher learning in the region such as yourselves playing their part in the process. By conducting courses on good governance and human rights, the Centre for Human Rights of the University of Pretoria is making a major

contribution to the acquisition of knowledge, and facilitating healthy debate on these critical issues of development. For this I would like to congratulate you.

Last but not least, I wish to congratulate the participants in the course on good governance who will be receiving their certificates today. Successful completion of such a course requires commitment and hard work, and I sincerely hope that you will put what you have learnt to good use in your respective countries. We must never forget that peace, security, democracy, good governance, human rights and sound economic and social management are essential conditions for sustainable development.

I wish you all the best in your endeavours, and that the University of Pretoria continues to offer this invaluable service to the SADC region.