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**Southern Africa, Ten Years after Apartheid**  
**The Quest for Democratic Governance**

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Compiled and written by Nomboniso Gasa.

This report records the main issues discussed at the conference  
'Southern Africa, Ten Years after Apartheid: The Quest for Democratic  
Governance'.

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## Foreword

The demise of apartheid was a new beginning for the southern African region. But all beginnings embrace potential opportunities and pitfalls, difficulties and dangers.

Despite successfully defeating their own colonialisms, the sovereignty and freedom of these peoples became hostage to apartheid aggression. It impacted on every sphere of life and, to this day, there are large areas of Angola and Mozambique that cannot be farmed because of the placing of landmines by apartheid agents. This legacy will be with them for a long time to come. In varying ways, the apartheid legacy is the legacy of the whole region.

The democratisation project of any one country in the region remains tied in some respects to the efforts and obstacles experienced by every other member state.

This conference celebrated ten years of post-apartheid political development, but also subjected this period to a critical but constructive gaze. It is the conclusion of the conference that the southern Africa of 2003 has made major strides in its democratisation efforts. The participants noted the challenges and the daunting task of democratisation, nation-building and regional integration.

As people who have been in solidarity with the southern African struggles, and who are partners in democratisation in this region and in our part of the world, we are proud to be associated with this conference. It contains lessons that are relevant not only for southern Africans, but also for those involved in the struggle for a better world.

Ed Van Thijn  
Senator, Netherlands Parliament

## Preface

Southern Africa has undergone a very significant process of transformation, which is partly encapsulated in the idea of democratisation. As was evident at the conference, certain ideas have become part of our consensus in this region: multiparty democracy or at least the idea of freedom of association, popular sovereignty, constitutionalism and human rights. These ideas cut across the political spectrum.

The process of building and consolidating democracy in the region has not been linear. There continue to be problems with the refusal to acknowledge the outcomes of electoral processes. In some countries we have also witnessed an element of political degeneration.

To my mind, democracy has always been at the centre of any worthwhile project of social and political emancipation, going back to the great transformations in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and anti-colonial liberation struggles in our own continent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, it is necessary to problematise what we mean by democracy. It may well be that there is some consensus on the basic formal characteristics. It is very important in our region and continent that we think about the concept of democracy.

This conference occurred at a time when we confront a number of questions regarding the form, content and institutions of democratic governance in the region:

The first question is about **forms and design of political institutions**. It is wrong to assume that democracy requires the same political institutions in all countries, without any regard to context. Democracy, I think, can assume and should assume different forms in different countries, in different epochs, within certain parameters.

One of the impacts of the colonial legacy is that we simply borrowed the Westminster system, without thinking about how this institution should be organised, resourced and capacitated to achieve the objectives that may be salient in a society at any particular point in time. Not all parliaments have the same efficacy; this depends on how they are organised and what they prioritise. Some parliaments have very limited roles, while others have more expanded roles. It is important to think about the relationship with the executive and the legislative branches of government if we are serious about addressing issues of accountability and development in our region.

One of the problems we confront in the region is that we have parliaments that do not have the capacity to look after the welfare of the population by being set up in such a way that they are able to hold the executive accountable. The institutional question on the relationship between the executive and legislature is a design question. It is also a form question. The question takes many forms and is a complex one. It is not answered by simply having parliamentary democracy.

The question of the **tension in democracy between form and content**, between the promise of formal equality and substantive equality has been discussed by people such as Anatole France. How are we to have a fair political and electoral process if we do not address questions of systemic poverty? Social inequalities render the promise of political

equality limited. Questions of depth of the democratic institutions, as well as design and form, are crucial. **The relationship between the state and the market** is another issue that must be considered in the debate. If we are to address the social challenge of our times, going back more than a century, we must recognise that we do not have to choose between the state and the market.

How do we establish the democratic state that has the capacity to achieve not only economic efficiency, but also address issues of social justice and regulate the market in order to correct ‘market failure’? **The impact of globalisation on the nation state** is another important question. The capacity of the nation states, not only the weak ones, has been eroded, and their capacity to address questions of social justice is at times undermined. The question of our region is that we are not only a geopolitical space but there is also a social justice imperative. Therefore, we must consider the issue of social justice as transcending the nation state. **The capacity of the state** is a question that confronts us in the region. How do we achieve regional integration and democratic governance without examining the issues of capacity? The question of capacity is crucial because we need to go beyond the promise in our constitutions and look at increasing the capacity of the state to meet social and political challenges.

This conference presents an opportune moment to examine these issues as we move into the next decade and consolidate our democracies in the region. Issues of resources and capacity-building must be integrated in these discussions, so that we can come up with a better appreciation not only of the state of democracy in the region, but also practical means of addressing some of the challenges.

Although the conference could not exhaust all these issues, it is important that these are noted as part of the backdrop to the debate and assessment of challenges and achievements of democratic governance in our region.

It is hoped that various practitioners and scholars in the continuing debate on the quest for democratic governance in the region will find this report useful.

Firoz Cachalia  
Speaker, Gauteng legislature

## Part One: Introduction

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*... The democratic ideal is universal and an indivisible one with attributes that are also universally applicable to all contexts ... Although a case can be made for greater attention to be paid to local peculiarities, this still cannot detract from the essential universality of the democratic experience. That experience is itself the product, at any given conjuncture, of the totality of the struggle of all peoples from all parts of the world.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

During the last decade, southern Africa has witnessed a number of developments and transitions that have dramatically changed the political landscape in the region. Although the changes have been uneven and complex, overall, the developments have been largely characterised by the opening up of political space, the introduction of multiparty politics and regular elections.

Apartheid held the region hostage; aggression was directed at many states and destabilised the region. Using the demise of apartheid as a starting point to locate the political and socio-economic developments in the region, the conference ‘Southern Africa, Ten Years after Apartheid: The Quest for Democratic Governance’ was organised to:

- mark the tenth anniversary of the fall of apartheid in South Africa and its implications for the region;
- reflect on the state of democratisation and developments in individual countries;
- share common experiences on the challenges, strengths and weaknesses of democracy – building in the region;
- share experiences of the challenges and opportunities in the development of political parties in the region;
- reflect on regional integration efforts;
- take stock of the processes of integrating gender equality issues in the democratic agenda; and
- share experiences of the developmental and economic state of the region, ten years after apartheid.

The conference acknowledged some of the watershed developments that have taken place in the region. These include:

- Namibian independence in 1990;
- the 1991 elections that transformed Zambia into a multiparty democracy;
- Mozambique’s peace accord, which began in earnest in 1992;
- the first democratic elections held in South Africa in 1994;
- in 2002, following a number of peace accords and agreements, the consolidation of the peace process in Angola; and

- the Democratic Republic of the Congo's peace process in 2002/2003, although it is yet to hold democratic elections.

Contrary to these trends, Swaziland remained a monarchy without democratic rights. In 2002, although political contestation, dispute and repression continue, Zimbabwe held its presidential elections.

Outlining these developments, the conference cautioned against a minimalist interpretation of the democratic process. A close study of the above examples reveals the limitations of using general, presidential elections and multipartyism as the qualitative measures for democratisation.

The participants accepted elections and the principle of pluralism and multiparty politics as core features of democracy. However, the debates centred on issues of substance, depth, commitment and redefinition of the political space in a way that gives concrete meaning to liberty and freedom in the lives of the peoples of southern Africa.

In many countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) – except Swaziland and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – minimum standards have been met. However, the question is whether the democracies in the region are alive, sustainable and dynamic, and have effected changes in the quality of people's lives?

The connection between formal and substantive meanings of democracy was at the centre of the debate during the conference. Indeed, this connection has preoccupied a number of African scholars for decades. The conference tried to go beyond the instrumentalist and non-instrumentalist dichotomy, and argued that southern Africa needs an approach that strikes a balance between substantive and formal liberties.

At the conference, there was real tension between the challenges of poverty and other social phenomenon. How can substance be given to democracy in a region addressing a number of social, political, developmental and spatial challenges?

Some of the issues articulated by the participants are summarised in the following sections.

### The SADC and regional integration

Given the tumultuous political developments and democratisation processes that have unfolded during the past decade, the SADC has realigned itself to be better placed to play a meaningful role in the process. It is clear from the developments in the region that the SADC cannot stand detached from the real democratisation and nation-building challenges. In the Common Agenda of 1992, the SADC committed its member states to, amongst other things, common political values, systems and institutions. In the 1996 SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security, the SADC is even more forthright on democratic governance. It calls for preventative diplomacy to pre-empt conflict in the region; the promotion, enhancement and development of democratic institutions and practices within member states; the observance of universal human rights codes; the promotion of political co-operation among member states; and the evolution of common political systems and institutions. To a

large extent, the SADC has tried to meet its goals and commitments by marshalling its member states in the cause of democracy-building and consolidation.

### **Institutional and political challenges facing the SADC**

The SADC faces challenges on the issue of sovereignty, which are manifested in terms of its constituency. The institution relates on a state-to-state basis. This results in problems in its involvement in intra-country dynamics and problems. In the case of Lesotho, South African and Botswanan intervention on the mandate of the SADC provides an interesting dimension to this problem. The state-to-state basis of relationships also raises a number of issues in terms of opposition party involvement in the SADC. What provisions are entailed for opposition parties' involvement in SADC processes? To what extent is the SADC forum able to facilitate conflict resolution within countries? There are, of course, numerous examples pointing to the SADC's constructive involvement, including the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, although even there, individual countries rather than the SADC played the major role. Zimbabwe remains a thorny and complex case for the SADC. The conference also noted a policy and implementation gap within the SADC. Participants further pointed to the weakness of the SADC's institutional governance capacities. The SADC is also faced with financial and human resources constraints.

### **Positive developments in the SADC**

It must be emphasised that some SADC organs have had a measure of success, including the SADC Parliamentary Forum, which was formed in 1997. The forum is a consultative body without legislative powers. It seeks to strengthen the SADC's implementation capacity by involving parliamentarians in SADC activities, and facilitating the implementation of its policies and projects. The Parliamentary Forum has been successful in its efforts to establish rules and procedures for regional parliamentary democracy, the role of parliamentarians in strengthening democracy, and the promotion of parliamentary democracy. Another important consultative body, the SADC Electoral Commissions Forum, was created in 1998 – also without executive powers – to effect electoral processes in the sub-region. The Electoral Commissions Forum's brief is to strengthen co-operation and support among regional electoral forums, and to foster competent electoral management in the SADC member states, with the aim of enhancing electoral processes and democratic governance. This structure has made major inroads in the establishment of electoral norms and values.

The SADC has also made strides in the area of gender equality and integrating gender equality issues into the democratisation agenda and processes in the region. The Gender Desk has been instrumental in developing the region's normative tools in the area of gender equality.

However, like other regional, continental and international bodies, the SADC faces a number of institutional challenges. In the first instance, there is the question of sovereignty and non-interference in internal country processes and regional commitment to democrati-

sation. While member states of the SADC are signatories to its protocols, there are challenges on enforcement. It was argued that there seems to be a general trend towards commitments and agreements that are not necessarily honoured in any real sense within the countries. However, this is not only a problem of this region, but also a universal phenomenon, whereby states make commitments to protocols and do not adhere to the provisions.

### The global context: Implications for the region

During the last decade, the world has witnessed a shift in global conditions and relations between developing and developed states, all of which operate to the disadvantage of most of the poorer countries. With a few exceptions, African countries' economies are almost entirely non-industrialised. Many African countries rely on exports of raw materials or other primary products. While this has always been a disadvantage, it has been exacerbated by the mobility of capital in the context of globalisation. The export of raw materials has been further hampered by the development of synthetic products as substitutes for raw materials. In the conditions of a unipolar world and the development of multinationals, which are highly technologically advanced, it is hard for Africa to find an entry point into this 'globalised' context. Castells has written of Africa in this context as the 'fourth world'. The conference examined the implications of the globalisation context for the prosperity of the region's economic structure and the implications for the consolidation of democracy. The question of how the international world relates to and indeed is responsible for some of the problems was also deliberated at the conference. While the consensus was on Africans and, in this case, southern Africans taking responsibility for their own welfare and problems, the conference acknowledged the interconnectivity among local, regional, continental and international economies. Indeed, some of the economic problems of the countries in the region can be traced back to their relationships with former colonial masters. More recently, the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s continue to affect the economic stability of SADC countries. African states became hugely indebted to international funding agencies. Later, provisional relief of debt has been linked to certain conditions, including political conditionality, which is basically a commitment to a narrow form of democracy, and economic policies, which have created deeper disempowerment. Some African scholars have dubbed this phenomenon 'choiceless democracies'.<sup>2</sup>

The link between globalisation and democratisation was further debated in the economic session of the conference. Suffice to say, democracy is threatened when a state cannot determine its own budget. The conditionality cripples the development of a socially transformative democracy. A number of the debt rescheduling agreements have fostered cutbacks on social spending, and have created conditions of further economic marginalisation and social exclusion of the poor. In the long term, the consolidation of democracy is threatened because the conditions have the effect of fostering social unrest.

The experience of many countries in southern Africa during the last decade has been complex. In some countries, such as Zambia, the new political parties that emerged and

took power as part of ‘regime change’ rode in on the crest of a wave of popular opposition to structural adjustment programmes – only for the new rulers to implement the same policies as their predecessors, if not worse.

Participants tabled this issue for the consideration of political parties in the region. How can the populace in the region ensure that the platforms and programmes on which the parties fight elections and win the support of the citizens are not abandoned once they come to power? This question has many dimensions. In the case of liberation movements, it was argued that, once liberation movements come to power, their liberation agenda is abandoned. There was much contestation of this point, and some participants argued that, in the specific conditions of their countries, the liberation agenda has not been abandoned. Further elaboration on this subject can be found in later sections of the report, where political parties and liberation movements are dealt with in detail. The issues of social inequality and poverty were underlined as important themes of the conference.

### The role of the state in democratisation

Democratic governance speaks primarily to the ability of the state to govern according to democratic norms and values, which encourage civil liberties of citizens. It speaks to the ability of the state to redress the grievances of citizens, responding to their needs and creating avenues for them to participate in governance matters.

The role of citizens in democratic governance is not a passive one. They play roles that are much deeper and more complex than simply turning up for elections. Therefore, the relationship between the state’s role and the agency of citizens is an important balance that has to be struck in democratic governance. In the context of globalisation and the increasing challenges that face the state’s ability to make economic decisions, the role of the state must be emphasised. In many African countries, the state is the only equalising power in society. It is the only institution with the capacity to provide for the needs of all citizens, and takes equality among citizens as a given according to the prevailing democratic norms.

It is therefore important that the state should not retreat from its social obligations to the citizens, but rather deepen its commitment to social spending and development. The state has to be capacitated and strengthened to meet these challenges and obligations through its organs and institutions.

### Southern Africa and the scourge of HIV and Aids

*... Given the mobility of the disease across borders, we have to cooperate, plan and respond to HIV/ Aids together.<sup>3</sup>*

It is reported that the prevalence of HIV and Aids is highest in the southern Africa region. Some southern Africa statistics estimate that as much as 25 per cent of the age cohorts 15-49 (the productive and skilled group) are infected in 12 African countries. Seven of these countries are in southern Africa. Some 50 per cent of all infected people are

women.<sup>4</sup> The prevalence of HIV and Aids in southern African countries, in descending order, is: Botswana (38.8 per cent), Zimbabwe (33.7 per cent) Swaziland (33.4 per cent), Lesotho (31 per cent), Namibia (22.5 per cent) and Zambia (21.5 per cent). These numbers are expected to rise as it has increasingly become evident that HIV and Aids has no natural limit.

As an epidemic, HIV and Aids is primarily a health issue, but it has far-reaching implications for democratic governance. In the first place, it is a disease that is closely associated with issues of poverty and economic development. Given the prevalence of the disease in the region and its infection rate patterns, HIV and Aids present a number of challenges for governance. Because of the age group of those most affected, and the mortality rate as a result of the disease, it has overwhelming implications for social mobilisation, be it at the level of trade unions, professional bodies and other organs of civil society. For governance in the region, this has implications for the role of citizens in decision-making, including electoral processes. The historically porous nature of southern African borders means cross-border strategies must be urgently developed in the region.

## Part Two: Political Governance

*Democratic consolidation involves behavioural and institutional changes that normalise democratic politics and narrow its uncertainty. This normalisation requires the expansion of citizen access, development of democratic citizenship and culture, broadening of leadership retirement and training, and other functions that civil society performs. But most of all, and most urgently, it requires political institutionalisation.<sup>5</sup>*

One of the key features of democratic political governance is the extent to which legal and political systems are in place and function well in any given country. To what extent are the civil rights and liberties of citizens protected and inalienable in the countries of southern Africa? What does the political environment, including the presence or absence of a pluralist press and public opinion, tell us about the democratic conditions of the countries in southern Africa? Building on the earlier discussion of democratic governance and its meaning in the region, the conference discussed some features of the state of democracy in the region. Three categories that illustrate the breakdown of countries' internal transition and democratic consolidation were considered.

**Table 1: Country classification regarding progress on democratic transition and consolidation<sup>6</sup>**

Blocked transition	Conflict-ridden transition	Embryonic and relatively stable transition	Relatively stable and mature transition
Angola	Zimbabwe	Namibia	Mauritius
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Tanzania	Mozambique	South Africa
Swaziland	Zambia	Lesotho	Botswana
		Malawi	

In three countries listed in Table 1 – Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Swaziland – democratic transition is yet to occur. It can be discerned from this presentation that elections in these countries will be considered an important step towards democratisation. However, in the case of Swaziland, it was noted that elections were held within that country's political framework as a reflection of its status as an absolute monarchy.

Countries whose transitions are conflict-ridden are Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Zambia. Although transition has indeed occurred and elections have been held, this is fraught with violent conflict, especially election-related conflict. It was argued that the conflict in these countries adversely affects the consolidation process, for it brings about the contestation of the legitimacy and credibility of the state, and of the rules of the game. The third category is that of countries whose transition is embryonic yet stable. Namibia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Malawi fall into this category. It could be argued that the early stages of consolidation are fraught with enormous challenges in this group of countries.<sup>7</sup>

According to this analysis, South Africa, Mauritius and Botswana are considered mature transitions. These countries have had successful transitions and are, arguably, in the early stages of consolidation. Given the stability, the maturity of political institutions and a conducive political culture, prospects for a path of sustainable consolidation are brighter in these countries. Despite the continuing challenges and complex political questions that confront a number of SADC countries, the region has made tremendous strides towards embracing and institutionalising multiparty democratic governance. The sustainability of democratic institutions and, ultimately, democracy itself, was the focus of the debate in this session of the conference.

The central argument put forward by the conference at large (although with varying areas of emphasis) was the need to understand the connection between all the abovementioned aspects. The state is structured and operates within a political framework that is informed by the norms and values of society. In turn, these values are given concrete expression by the forms of institutions, organisations, political parties and social agencies that exist within society. In southern Africa, these institutions, including political parties, civil society and organs of state, are at different levels of maturity.

## Part Three: From Liberation Movements to Political Parties?

*... the idea of democracy has always been at the centre of any worthwhile project of social and political emancipation conceived from the perspective of the political left going back to the great transformations in Europe in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as well as anti-colonial liberation struggle in our own continent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup>*

Southern Africa is one of the regions of the world in which struggles against colonialism and oppression resulted in the formation of liberation movements that engaged in protracted struggles for freedom. Once the struggle was won, a new political dispensation emerged. To what extent have the liberation movements adjusted to the new conditions? The nature of many struggles in southern Africa necessitated the development of liberation movements, with some forced to develop military wings. In addition, the contestation to influence the population and international communities involved campaigns for the recognition of these liberation movements as the 'sole and authentic' representatives of the people. 'It was because of this support, both diplomatic and material, that these movements became generally recognised in the United Nations (United Nations Decolonisation Committee) as the sole and authentic representatives of their people. In southern Africa, these included the ANC (South Africa), FRELIMO (Mozambique), MPLA (Angola), ZANU and ZAPU (Zimbabwe) and SWAPO (Namibia).'<sup>9</sup> According to this view, although the recognition of these liberation movements was perhaps advantageous in the short term, it may have been the source of some of the problems that have arisen in the post-liberation or democratisation period, particularly in terms of intolerance of dissent, and reluctance to promote inclusive political participation and contestation. Looking at the historical development of liberation as a product of concrete historical conditions, the conference deliberated on the dynamics of changing societies and their implications for the organisational forms that emerge.

At the heart of the discussion was the role of liberation movements and their desirability in post-liberation periods. Some participants argued that the transformation of liberation movements into political parties is inevitable and, in fact, that this transformation is at the centre of intra-party democracy.

A question was posed: Are political parties inherently democratic? A number of contemporary examples were cited, including the extent to which the Labour Party may have been consulted before Britain decided to attack Iraq.

There was consensus on the need for pluralism, on the opening of political space for new actors, and for liberation movements to reach beyond their traditional allies. The conference agreed that internal democracy is not only an issue of liberation movements, but also that, at times, even in traditional political parties, internal democracy may be limited.

The issue of changing roles and approaches is a real challenge in the post-liberation context in the region. The state has a responsibility that extends far beyond its organisational base and traditional support. It has to address the concerns of all citizens and often has to make decisions that may not satisfy its traditional allies. To what extent have the ruling parties, especially those who were liberation movements, been able to meet these new challenges in the region? To what extent has pluralism been put on the agenda and adopted by all parties and organisations? How comfortable are established parties and liberation movements with new political parties or those who were their traditional opponents? Looking at the declarations of the liberation movements in the region, to what extent have the goals of the liberation struggle been met? This in the sense of substantive democracy and social equality issues, as well as issues of liberty, such as the right to congregate and freedom of expression. It was argued that a close study of developments in the region reveals an uneven picture.

The participants debated at length the notion of the 'dominant party syndrome' and the narrowing of the political space that prejudices the opposition. In many instances, people argued that although multipartyism has been adopted as part of the electoral laws of the countries, in practice, the ruling parties have unfair advantages and the power relations favour those in office. It was also argued that multipartyism does not necessarily guarantee pluralism. Therefore, it is important to put mechanisms in place that provide for a range of different actors to enter the political scene. The discussion on liberation movements and political parties overlapped with the earlier discussion on political governance and other sessions of the conference. The central theme of this session, as for other sessions, relates to the notion of structural and institutional mechanisms that will assist in the consolidation of democracy. Political parties and organisations are an important aspect of these institutions.

Throughout this discussion, the conference cautioned against dogma. It was agreed that the organisational forms that predominate in a country are also informed by the history of that country.

## Opposition parties

*...there are several factors which would appear to act together to weaken and, in some cases, discredit the opposition in much of Africa's ongoing experience with multiparty politics. In several countries, the opposition was faced with recalcitrant incumbents who only very reluctantly conceded a multiparty framework, but stopped at nothing to obstruct, weaken, harass and divide the opposition.<sup>10</sup>*

One of the central challenges facing the quest for the consolidation of democracy in southern Africa is the relationship between political parties and the broader social forces that were at the forefront of the liberation struggle. This challenge is experienced at varying levels and takes different forms in the region. What is the role of the populace in the

governing of a country? Who are the other actors, besides those in power, who play an important role in creating an atmosphere conducive to sustainable democracy and development? While there are broad social forces, some outside of the political class, political parties play an important role. The conference did not disagree on the need for multiple players and pluralism on the political stage. However, there was some disagreement on the issue of measuring an effective and desirable system.

The state of opposition and its place in democratic governance featured prominently in the deliberations. To what extent do ruling parties use state machinery and have an unfair advantage over other political parties? To what extent does the power of office and associated patronage weaken opposition?

The conference agreed that the opposition has a significant role to play to ensure effective democracy. Those who asserted this position argued that, without a strong opposition, the future of democracy is threatened.

However, others argued that the strength or weakness of opposition alone cannot determine the state of democracy in a country; other institutional structures and factors are equally important. Essentially, the issue is whether there are sufficient mechanisms and legal provisions to ensure that the basic rights of citizens are protected. To what extent is pluralism as a principle respected? In this regard, the opposition is important. But it is equally important to note that there are social forces, such as organs of civil society, including trade unions, professional bodies, women's organisations and other social movements, that play an important role in democratic politics.

While it is true that the opposition is confronted with a number of challenges, the opposition parties themselves must take some of the responsibility. Many opposition parties do not build strong alliances with other social forces and have a limited platform on which they contest political power. Some have become increasingly alienated from the social forces that are their allies. Political elitism has also become a factor in some opposition parties.

The issue of the role and status of opposition parties was also debated in relation to the need for responsible opposition. Many parties focus on campaigning against the ruling party and do not develop strategies that can provide compromises. A working relationship between opposition parties and ruling parties is important in order for democracy to develop in the region.

Several institutional challenges facing both ruling and opposition parties were highlighted. These include:

*Capacity of parties:* Many political parties depend on external funding, which does not bode well for the future of democracy in the region. Although international support is an important aspect, providing a lifeline for some parties, this must be balanced with capacity-building to ensure self-reliance. 'Donorisation' of political parties may also lead to client relationships with international funding agencies and concern was expressed about the policy implications of these relationships.

The second aspect of capacity challenges relates to personnel and human resources.

Many professionals do not see political parties as a viable option and there is the challenge of a brain drain from political parties to the private sector.

*Personalisation of political parties:* Several political parties have been initiated by individuals and, in some instances, the cult of the individual supersedes the overall potential interest and democracy concerns of the populace.

*Funding of political parties:* In some countries there is a lack of clarity on the funding of political parties.

*Policy development:* In a number of cases, political parties (especially opposition parties) sound similar and have very little substance beyond slogans and stated commitments. This was identified as a major area of concern as issues of policy development are central in democratic governance. How can political parties move beyond the imagery and deal with concrete issues that will take their respective countries forward?

Although these are by no means the only challenges facing parties in the region, the conference debate emphasised those informed by the lived experiences of practitioners throughout the region.

## Part Four: Electoral Systems

*Our electoral system must be premised on certain fundamental values which are non-negotiable. These are democracy, human rights and liberties. We, as Africans should claim these values and not see them as neo-liberal concepts.<sup>11</sup>*

The choice of electoral system is of fundamental importance in the institutional design of any democracy. This choice is also informed by the historical development of a particular country. For instance, in many elections that mark the transition to democracy, the electoral system is closely linked to the political inheritance of the country and the nature of the foregoing struggles and transitions.

In southern Africa, a number of electoral systems are operated in different countries, which bear close relevance to their complex historical heritage. Although it can be argued that the historical factors inform the choice of an electoral system, this does not mean that such choices are fully deliberated upon. For example, the parliamentary system that is operated in post-colonial state is often inherited from the colonial era. The Westminster system is a case in point.

The choice of electoral system is therefore as important as the process through which the choice has been made. Has the process been an empowering one? Are the political actors and decision-makers well versed in this area? To what extent are technical experts used in the design and development of the system? How does this balance with the input by decision-makers who will be critical in the implementation of such a system? Are institutions in place that will oversee the objective and impartial implementation of the electoral laws and systems?

The political context in which these systems emerge is also of critical importance, since this becomes one of the major considerations on which the choices are based. Some of the issues are:

- the need to ensure the complete independence of electoral commissions;
- the development of norms and rules that equalise the political landscape in the individual countries;
- minimising electoral-related conflict by clarifying existing laws and rules and, where necessary, by developing laws and systems;
- minimising the dominance of elections by incumbent governments through the development of systems and processes;
- strengthening regional co-operation (which already is seen at the level of electoral commissions);
- strengthening structures and institutions that deal with electoral conflict;
- the acceptance of electoral defeat;
- strengthening the capacity of regional organisations to intervene in situations of electoral conflict.

The discussion interrogated elections as a contested space, within which many issues that are seen in a broader context in Africa are played out in microcosm within the electoral process.

To safeguard the process and to ensure that it is possible to resolve a number of the contradictory contestations, the conference argued for the need to expand the electoral systems in the region.

Participants stressed the need to differentiate between elections and electoral systems. Electoral systems deal with the overall process, rules, options and normative aspects of elections, and a comparative analysis was seen as an important area of attention.

The conference further agreed that country-specific concerns and issues require a focused and comparative analysis of the electoral systems in the region. Much work has already been done by other institutions, but it appeared, given the elections that are taking place in the region, that another reflective exercise may be necessary to compare trends, similarities and differences.

The issue of gender-based violence and the use of violence as a political weapon during elections were highlighted as other important areas of attention.

## Part Five: Gender Equality and Democratisation

Globally, women's participation in national assemblies has increased by 11 per cent since the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing Conference) in 1995. In southern Africa, women's participation in political decision-making has increased from 17 per cent to 19.4 per cent in the last decade. To date, southern Africa ranks among the top regions as far as women's participation in parliament is concerned, coming second only to Scandinavian countries.

There is great unevenness among countries within the region: while some countries, such as Mozambique and South Africa, rank among the highest in the world on women's participation in decision-making, others, such as Lesotho are amongst the lowest.

However, the remarkable improvements and growth are not only at the level of numbers; there has also been a combination of conceptual, structural and institutional changes that have been put in place in the region.

Of note is the growing conceptual framework that looks at gender equality and women's emancipation as central to democratic development in the region. The Declaration on Gender and Development 1997 commits heads of states 'to ensure equal representation of women and men in the decision-making of member-state structures at all levels, and the achievement of at least thirty per cent target of women in political and decision-making structures by 2005.'<sup>12</sup>

Since 1997, when the Declaration on Gender and Development was signed, seven SADC members have held elections. In general, there has been upward movement in women's participation in political decision-making, with Botswana and Namibia registering the highest gains. In Zimbabwe there has been a decline.

By 2005, a number of countries will have held elections, with the exception of the Seychelles, Zambia and Swaziland (in these countries, elections will be held only after 2005). What gains will be made in the forthcoming elections in the region? Will the numbers of women in parliament increase? What will be implications of the election results on gender equality building and consolidation in the region? While there has been overall improvement in women's participation and institutional structures in the region, there a number of concerns.

### **The state of national gender machinery**

Since the Beijing Conference, several countries have instituted structures to address gender equality in the region. These range from ministries, departments, gender units and various combinations. Whereas these countries have taken major steps in creating these structures, a number of challenges have arisen.

The first challenge is the under-resourcing of the gender national machineries. In addition, the budget lines are complex and this has a negative impact on the functioning and

impact of gender machineries. The location and status of the structures is another area of great concern in the region. Political parties have not committed themselves to gender parity in their own structures and, consequently, the overall picture is skewed.

### Conceptual issues

In the region, as in other parts of the world, there has been a shift from ‘women’s issues’ to a ‘gender equality’ approach. This has emphasised the need to mainstream gender equality and to put the issue in the centre of the political agenda. However, the conference noted the limited nature of political parties’ commitment to gender equality in the region. Participants explored the extent to which political parties could be assisted to understand gender equality challenges in their own countries.

### Gender equality and political parties

While the conference did not fully deliberate on the issues, it was agreed that the international covenants that have been ratified within countries, such as the Beijing Platform of Action and the Declaration on Gender and Development, amongst others, must be integrated into the political platforms of political parties. In the region, Namibia is the only country in which international conventions are automatically domesticated.

In a number of southern African countries, the quota system is applied to increase women’s participation in the leadership of political parties. Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa have shown the positive impact of quotas in political parties. Tanzania is the only country that has legislated a quota.

The conference noted the challenges that confront the region, and it was agreed that there is a need to organise a conference to bring together political parties to discuss the issue of gender equality in the region. The relationship between customary law and certain government policies on gender equality was highlighted as an area that needs greater attention.

## Part Six: Economy and Democratisation

*After 40 years of independence the status of our people (the majority of our people) is still one of poverty, of marginalisation, of exclusion. And if we talk about democracy very substantively, I think we can admit that the state has been a failure . . . things could have been worse, they are certainly not better. . .*<sup>13</sup>

Looking at the state of economies in the region, two major objectives were examined:

- the diversification of the economy and the acquisition of international competitiveness in the global economy; and
- the formation of an inclusive development path that integrates the majority of people and improves the quality of their lives in social and development aspects.

To achieve these objectives, a number of issues dealing with the environment, economic capacity and decisions were highlighted as decisive considerations.

*Agenda-setting circumstances:* The context in which policy-making is developed and the environment that shapes such decisions and choices were highlighted as key elements in understanding policy development in the region.

*Capacity for economic policy formulation:* What capacity exists within the decision-making structures that may facilitate the development of relevant and accurate policies that may target the developmental challenges? Who drives and influences the policies?

*Capacity for economic policy implementation:* To what extent is there capacity to translate the policies into programmes that are implemented?

*Institutional and organisational structures and capacities:* How are government organs and institutions organised to meet the policy objectives? Are they relevant and in tune with the policies and developmental challenges within their countries?

This session explored the impact of the colonial legacy on policy development in the region. It was argued that the region's inherited 'enclave capitalism' does not integrate or consider developmental questions in a holistic manner. This enclave economy syndrome resulted in a number of biases that shape economic policies, such as capital-intensive biases towards low employment, the dichotomy between the formal and informal economy in terms of access to assets, missing value chains, high transaction costs, missing levels of social and economic infrastructure, and many others.<sup>14</sup>

It was suggested that one of the ways in which some of the dichotomies could be addressed is by expanding the formal economy and integrating the non-formal economy into the mainstream. The non-formal economy has to be seen as an integral part of the economic system.

It was argued that agenda-setting circumstances are such that the majority of the people are not given the priority they deserve. It was further argued that there is a misalignment

between the nature of the problems to be addressed and the institutional structures that have been put in place.<sup>15</sup>

The land question was interrogated as one example of the impact of history and the colonial legacy. The region continues to reflect a contestation of the land tenure system and distribution. It is a contest of property relations both as a legal form of property relations, including issues of tenure, title deeds, customary tenure and others. The contest, it was argued, is widespread. It is also a contest of social relations in terms of the distribution and the use of land relative to the different accumulation interests of various classes.<sup>16</sup>

Different countries have dealt with the issue in different ways, informed by their political histories and the nature of their transitions. Land reform is essential, not only to address historical political injustices and grievances, but also for efficient economic organisation and inclusive development in the region.

It was argued that, in developing a dynamic connection between these aspects and addressing the missing links and dichotomies, the region could move 'towards developmentalism'. The region must steer its economies towards particular outcomes that will improve the quality of life for the majority of citizens and meet the promise of freedom. A market-determined paradigm cannot meet these objectives.

## Part Seven: Towards the Future

This conference addressed a number of themes related to the consolidation and sustainability of democratic governance and human development in southern Africa. Ranging from academics, politicians and activists, the participants suggested that the achievement of sustainable democracy and human development in the region depends not only on the decision-makers, but also on the partnership between all actors, including civil society.

A number of challenges have been identified throughout this report, but the central message is that there is growing commitment to democratisation and development. There is, of course, the problem of the policy and implementation gap. This gap is manifested in many ways, ranging from the development of policies that are not consistent with the developmental challenges, structural and institutional weaknesses, and political will in some countries.

The conference argued that the three major issues on the agenda of the region are: development, democracy and stability. An understanding of the complex yet critical connection between these three elements was underlined as important in steering the countries towards sustainable development and democracy.

Democracy, the concept and its meaning, is where the conference began. The deliberations grounded these conceptual issues in practical, policy and implementation concerns. The structural and conceptual questions set out in the preface of this report were integrated into the conference, which sought to strike a balance between all of these components.

The relationship between formal and substantive equality and liberties, between the state-driven processes and citizens' participation, between political parties and agencies of citizens and many elements of the democratisation agenda, were subject to scrutiny. Participants highlighted areas that need further reflection and exploration:

*Gender equality in political parties:* A number of observations were made concerning the uneven participation of women in political parties. The region is fertile with comparative experience, ranging from political parties that have been successful in integrating gender equality principles into the overall political party platforms and structure, to political parties that have not managed to make this leap. Participants suggested that a forum could be organised that would bring together political parties in the region to discuss these issues.

*Political parties:* Although the conference deliberated on political parties and their role in democratisation, it was felt that this needs further discussion. A number of conceptual approaches were not fully elaborated at the conference, including the dominant political party syndrome, the rotation of political parties in power and other related issues. The conference proposed that, given the importance of political parties in democratisation, this is an area that needs ongoing reflection.

*Policy development capacity of political parties:* The capacity of political parties to formulate policies differs across the region. Whereas some parties have managed to develop such capacity, others still lag behind. It was suggested that this is an area requiring comparative

study, followed by training, in order to strengthen capacity for policy formulation in the region.

*Electoral systems:* The choice of an electoral system is informed by the concrete experience and history of a given country. Hence, different systems operate throughout the region. Participants suggested a follow-up conference to reflect on and develop a regional comparative capacity in order to harmonise these systems in the region.

This conference was organised as a space to reflect on and converse about the paths of many countries ten years after the demise of apartheid in the region. While participants noted the challenges and weaknesses, including upheavals in countries such as Zimbabwe, they also noted that, in many countries, the process is unfolding in a positive manner. The conference was mindful of the international climate in which the region is located. Noting the impact of globalisation on the region's economy, participants also argued that Africa must develop ways in which she consolidates her own economies and drives her own policies.

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