NAMIBIA: IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY (SADC)

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Namibia is one of the 53 sovereign African countries. The important word here is “countries” for there is a tendency among many Americans to think that Africa is one country. In the language of political science Africa comprises 53 states. But this language is misleading because some people might think that these states are like the states that comprise the United States of America. The states that constitute the United States do not have sovereignty, though they have degrees of autonomy. They do not, for instance have power to defend the United States. Defense is in the Federal government. African countries, considered as states, have all the powers of that are reserved to the Federal Government in United States. African countries attained sovereignty after protracted conflicts and wars with their former colonizers notably the British, French, Germans (who lost their possessions such as Namibia that was then called “South West Africa” after they were defeated during the First World War), and the Portuguese. These colonizers ruled most of Africa for a period of less than a hundred years, i.e. from the Berlin Conference of 1884-5 to 1960s. Namibia, which was formerly colonized by Germany, was given to South Africa as a trusteeship when Germany was defeated during the First World War (1914-1918), and had to fight with the apartheid South Africa to eventually attain its independence in 1990.

Namibia’s independence was part of the achievement of Pan-Africanism, a movement which was started by people of African descent outside Africa. Pan-Africanism aimed at the liberation of the entire continent of Africa from colonialism. The first meeting of Pan-Africanism was held in London in the year 1900 and was convened by Henry Sylvester Williams, a barrister from West Indies. The African American Dr. W.E.B. DuBois organized five PanAfrican conferences in Europe from 1919 to 1945, all dedicated to the ideal of African liberation and political independence.

Pan-African thought was polarized after the attainment of independence. Some African leaders, such as Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, wanted African countries to form one United States of Africa. He represented the Casablanca group of African leaders who met in Casablanca, Morocco. Other African leaders met at Brazzaville, Congo, and argued that African need not unite as one country but rather African countries should establish diplomatic connections to solve their problems. Other African leaders, such as Tafawa Balewa, the first Prime Minister of Nigeria, took what we may call the mid-point and wanted Africa to form regional groupings before uniting

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them into one country. The Tafawa Balewa group was called the Monrovia Group for they met in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia.²

The idea of Tafawa Balewa’s group was endorsed by Pan-Africanists. As a result, after independence the Africans divided Africa into a number of major regions, namely, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, 1975); the Union of the Arab Maghreb (UAM in North Africa, 1989); the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS, 1983); the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADDD in Northeast Africa, 1986); the Southern African Development Community (SADC, 1980).³

Namibia is within the cluster of 14 countries that constitute the South African Development Community (SADC), namely, Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

At this juncture we need to delve into a brief historical account of the origins of SADC. The forerunner of SADC was called the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) which was established in 1980 by Governments of the nine Southern African countries of Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. At this time Namibia could not have become a member of SADCC because it was still colonized by the then apartheid South Africa. However, it is worth pointing that Namibia (then know as South West Africa) was in the minds of the founders of SADCC. In fact one of the reasons that SADCC was formed was to liberate Namibia and South Africa from apartheid. These nine states constituted the “frontline states” during the struggle for the liberation of Namibia. They were described as “frontline” because they were the leading group in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, which had extended its apartheid to Namibia.

The formation of SADC was the culmination of a long process of consultations among the leaders of Southern Africa. Towards the end of the 1970’s, it became clear to the leaders of the region that just having a national flag and a national anthem would not meet the needs of the people for improved living conditions. The leaders of Southern Africa upheld the view that the positive experiences gained in working together in the group of Frontline States, to advance the political struggle for the liberation of Namibia and South Africa, had to be translated into broader cooperation in pursuit of social and economic development.

The first step in the pursuit of the SADC ideal was the establishment of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) in 1980 after the May 1979 meeting of Front line States ministers responsible for economic development. The SADCC was formed to reduce Member States dependence, particularly, but not only, on apartheid South Africa, to implement programs and projects with national and regional impact, to mobilize Member States resources, in the quest for collective self-reliance, and finally, to secure international understanding and support. Through SADCC the founding fathers sought first to demonstrate the tangible benefits of working together, and to cultivate a climate of confidence and trust among Member States.

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³ Ibid.
The second step in the pursuit of the SADC ideal was to transform the SADCC, which was a Conference, to a Community. This transformation occurred in August 1992, when the Heads of State and Government met in Windhoek, Namibia, to sign a Declaration and Treaty establishing the new SADC – the Southern African Development Community. By this time Namibia had attained her independence from South Africa. It is worth noting that SADC now counts South Africa among its members, and is seeking to enhance traditional cooperation in a variety of functional realms, most notably transportation.4

The new SADC stands poised at the “threshold of a new era”, according to a report recently published by the African Development Bank in conjunction with the World Bank and the Development Bank of South Africa.5 “Although its effects and the inequities it has embedded will linger for a long time to come, the demise of apartheid opens up prospects unimaginable even a few years ago,” explains the reporter. “New opportunities have emerged in every sector of economic activity for expanded trade and mutually beneficial exchanges of all kinds among the countries of Southern Africa.”6

Four factors are essential to understanding the optimism surrounding SADC’s newfound status as a model for economic cooperation in Africa, particularly in terms of reducing Southern Africa’s dependence on foreign economic interests and creating the basis for self-sustaining development in the post-Cold War era:7

First, the inclusion of a highly industrialized South Africa provides SADC with an engine for economic growth that will potentially reinvigorate the entire region including Namibia. In this regard South Africa may play a leadership role similar to that enjoyed by Germany in the European Union, the United States in NAFTA, and, to a lesser degree, Nigeria in ECOWAS.

Second, the vast majority of the 14 SADC members share a common British colonial heritage. Although a shared colonial past is not a precondition for effective regional cooperation, it nonetheless facilitates such technical matters as which language should serve as the official language of communications (in the case of SADC, English).

Third, there has been decline in ideological differences between SADC member states that accompanies the end of the Cold War. Whereas Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe have discarded in varying degrees their adherence to Marxist principles of development, South Africa has officially renounced its apartheid system and Tanzania and Zambia have dismantled significant portions of their formerly socialist economies. In essence, there exists a growing consensus among SADC member states, including Namibia, that effective regional cooperation must be based on a shared commitment to some variant of the liberal capitalist model of development.

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6 Ibid.

Fourth, SADC’s greatest strength is a regional commitment to conflict resolution and to the promotion of shared democratic values. The Cold War’s end and the rise of democratization movements have led to the end of civil wars and the holding of democratic elections throughout the SADC countries of Southern Africa. One of the most important lessons of regional integration theory, which draws upon the success of the European Union, is that the existence of elites with a shared commitment to democracy is the foundation of a long-term economic cooperation and development. It is for this reason that the 1992 Windhoek Treaty (named after the capital of Namibia), which consecrated the launching of SADC, underscored the political dimension of regional relationships and its critical role in the continued expansion of economic cooperation. The treaty states that Southern African leaders “must find a more abiding basis for continuing political solidarity and cooperation, in order to guarantee mutual peace and security in the region; and to free resources from military to productive development activities.”

The leaderships of SADC member states recognize that the fruits of pan-Africanism can only be achieved by the settlement of civil wars, such as the war that has ravaged Angola, a member state of SADC, and the promotion of democracy in Angola and other countries throughout the African continent. It is for this reason that Schrader notes that as a result of these SADC commitments, “conflict resolution remains an important cornerstone of the pan-African ideal at the beginning of the twenty-first century.”

As a member state of SADC Namibia views with satisfaction the fact that the SADCC that eventually became SADC, was an instrument for the liberation of Namibia and other oppressed peoples within the Southern African region. Furthermore, Namibia appreciates being a member of SADC since the Windhoek Treaty of 1992 and cherishes the development that has taken place since the signing of the Treaty. The President of Namibia, Sam Nujoma, reflecting on nearly a decade of the operation of SADC after the Treaty asserted that the Southern African Development Community has grown into a strong, vibrant and economically viable regional entity in that the organizational and the administrative framework for SADC has been put in place and more importantly issues of trade, commerce, regional security and socio-economic development have been addressed in accordance with the regional mandate. The Namibian President further points out that member states are gradually beginning to coordinate their activities and act together as one region in many international forums as demonstrated by the SADC Pavilion at the Expo 2000 in Hanover, Germany, and the holding of the SADC Women in Business Trade Fair at Ongwediva in Namibia 2000.

Within the SADC different member states are made the centers of various sectors of the economy. Namibia has been allocated the Legal Sector as well as Marine Fisheries and Resources Sector. The SADC expects Namibia to propose sector policies, strategies

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9 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
and priorities, and processing projects for inclusion in the sectoral program, monitoring progress and reporting to the Council of Ministers of the member states.

Namibia joined the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in 1990, about two years before the 1992 Windhoek Treaty, which consecrated the launching of SADC as we noted above. Since then Namibia, as H. Hamutenya, Namibian Minister of Trade and Industry, argues, has “remained steadfast” in its “commitment to the regional co-operational integration objectives”\textsuperscript{13} The Minister further points out that Namibia was among the first countries to implement the SADC Free Trade Area (FTA), and that Namibia does not see the elimination of trade barriers with other SADC member States as a threat to Namibian economy. According to the Minister, Namibia views the elimination of trade barriers as an enormous opportunity of an expanded economic space for Namibia to exploit by increasing the competitiveness of Namibian products. “This is being done through a focused and connected industrial development programme.”\textsuperscript{14} The Minister also asserts that other countries within SADC are involved in economic reform and what he calls “the imperative of industrialization”. He argues that to secure Namibia’s rightful place within SADC and the global community of nations, Namibia is also forging ahead with the implementation of programs to further expand Namibian infrastructure and enhance the attractiveness of the Namibian investment climate. Among the concrete measures that are being taken to this end aim at improving the national communications network. Indeed with the recent application of synchronous digital hierarchy (SDH) technology, Namibia is consolidating its world-class national fiber optic network. Through this system, all Namibians, even those in remote areas, will have extensive access to modern voice and data transmission services. Furthermore, as the Minister states, “the productive application of this technology should help to fast track the country’s industrial transformation process, increase productivity and enhance the competitiveness of Namibian products within the regional and global economy.”\textsuperscript{15}

The mentioned constructive developments in Namibia reflect what is taking place throughout SADC where member States are instituting mechanisms to expand their information and communications technologies. Because of these initiatives and the considerable investment in physical infrastructure, the region is increasingly being recognized as an emerging economic force.

The SADC region has been globally described as the next frontier of economic growth, and indeed the SADC Trade Protocol reinforces the global view of the SADC region as an ideal place for business and investment. Indeed a publication of the Corporate Council on Africa,\textit{Africa 2002}, points out that in Namibia there is an investment center within the Ministry of Trade and Industry that assists investors.\textsuperscript{16} The Council further points out that in Namibia “investment and tax incentives are available for new and existing manufacturing firms, and an Export Processing Zone (EPZ) has been set up at the port of Walvis Bay.”\textsuperscript{17} The Corporate Council on Africa observes that in Namibia there is a “well-developed infrastructure” which is a “good

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}
asset for prospective foreign investors looking at Namibia as a gateway to the Southern African region.”

Furthermore the Corporate Council on Africa maintains that in Namibia “the fishing, tourism, manufacturing, mining, water and energy sectors offer prospects for development and expansion by foreign entrepreneurs.”

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.