



**Realising effective and sustainable
democratic governance in Southern
Africa and beyond.**

**Democratisation, Dominant
Parties, and Weak Opposition:
The Southern African Project**

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Introduction

While the question of political democratisation is firmly on the agenda in South Africa, the issue of political parties, and in particular intra-party democracy typically receive scant attention by scholars, analysts and observers.

In terms of broader democratisation, we have seen a number of momentous political developments in Southern Africa in recent years that have prompted many political commentators to assert that a political renaissance is underway in the region. Such developments include South Africa's 1994 negotiated settlement; Mozambique's peace process that reached its first decade in 2002; the transformation of Zambia from a one-party state to a multi-party democracy, and the installation of its first non-liberation movement government, followed by President Chiluba's failed attempt to attain a third term in 2001; Namibia's independence process and three successful elections that returned SWAPO to power; the state of the Angolan peace process in the aftermath of the death of UNITA's Jonas Savimbi in 2002; and Malawian democracy ten years after the defeat of Kamuzu Banda and the forced retirement of Banda's successor Bakili Muluzi's after his failure to secure a third presidential term. Thus, the region is today relatively more democratic in comparison to the rest of the continent.

Since 1994, over 86 percent of SADC countries re-adopted multi-party political systems and are governed through a popularly elected government. Also, the region has made significant achievements on the formal inter-regional level, the issues of democratisation and political governance has been put firmly on the agenda. The 1992 Windhoek Treaty, that established the Southern African Development Community, seeks to promote a Common Agenda; this agenda commits SADC member states to, amongst others, common political values, systems, and institutions¹. The SADC

¹ Christopher Landsberg and Mwesiga Baregu, 'Introduction, in Mwesiga Baregu and

Treaty clearly appreciates the link between stability, governance, democracy and security². The 1996 SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security calls for preventive diplomacy to pre-empt conflict in the region; the promotion and 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 values systems and institutions.

The SADC Electoral Commissions Forum was created in 1998—albeit without executive powers—to affect electoral processes in the sub-region. The idea behind the electoral forum is to strengthen co-operation among the bodies managing elections in member nations, with a view to enhancing democratic electoral processes and a democratic culture, as well as developing standard electoral practices³. So, there is little disputing that there has been major progress as far as governance is concerned.

However, all these developments beg the question whether there is a democratisation renaissance underway in the region. More recently, there have been disturbing signs of backsliding in a number of countries. While popular support for democracy is widespread throughout the region, the single dominant-party system is a key feature of most of their political systems. This has resulted in low levels of legislative authority and pervasive dominance by the executive branch of government. As Matlosa and Mbaya have argued, ruling parties dominate not only in the legislature but more importantly, in the executive organ as well, which in turn provides undue influence and control over the judiciary as well.⁴ In another scholarly contribution, Matlosa asserts that ‘the dominant party system in Southern Africa is also symptomatic of the weaknesses,

fragmentation and disorganisation of opposition parties’.⁵ Indeed, the region is characterised by the dominance of the executive branches, and by heads of state and heads of governments personally. One of the ways in which to address is the problem is that several institutions, notably the African Union (AU), have argued for the adoption of norms and instruments to limit terms in government and office. In many instances there is poor separation between party and government, and in fact the lines between where the party ends and where government begins, are very blurred. This facilitates dominance of political government by heads of s parties and heads of state. Parties, notably opposition parties, are typically poorly institutionalised, have poor rules of procedure, weak institutions, and the like.

In order to grapple with these issues, this paper will probe the state of the region’s party-political systems, and consider the effects of dominant parties, the nature and state of opposition, and their implications for the democratisation project. The paper argues that while there is an important political and democratisation renewal process underway in the region, this very process has significant weaknesses and pitfalls embedded in it. The paper argues that Southern Africa’s democratisation process is in a constant state of restlessness and incongruity.

Uneven Democratisation?

The process of democratisation in Southern Africa is uneven, often varying from country to country, but at times also showing major common trends. To be sure, during the 1990s, Southern African witnessed a dramatic transition from one-party, autocratic, and apartheid regimes to a pluralistic and multi-racial system. That transition, however, has proved that the political and multi-party systems in the region are typically fragile and poorly developed, and a common feature of the region is that of weak states and weak institutions of governance. More recently there have been disturbing signs of

Christopher Landsberg, *From Cape to Congo*, op. cit. pp. 2-3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Quoted in Shambane Karume, *Party systems in the SADC region: in defence of the dominant party system*, EISA Occasional Paper number 16, January 2004, p. 4.

⁵ Khabele Matlosa, *Interrogating challenges for intra-party democracy in Southern Africa*, Paper presented at the Third Assembly of the World Movement for Democracy, Durban, 1-4 February 2004.

backsliding in a number of countries. While popular support for democracy is widespread, the single dominant-party system is a key feature of most political systems in the region. This has resulted in low levels of legislative authority and pervasive dominance by the executive branch of government.

At the formal and political levels there has been an increase in commitment to democratic governance values and principles, but that rhetorical commitment does not filter down to implementation on the ground. While most of the first post-transition elections held in the region are largely on time, there have been major problems with the acceptance of the results. Both incumbent governing and opposition parties have emerged as poor losers.

Governments in the region however, are lagging, particularly in their progress towards democracy and accountability. Neither the constitution nor the electoral systems and practices of most institutions in Southern Africa have been aligned with the new multi-party democratic culture. Overall, the tolerance levels of contesting views are very low. Lots of work needs to be done to improve the political environment in which elections are conducted and to ensure that the existing legal and institutional frameworks work independently and impartially. Issues relating to leveling the playing field for all players contesting elections, inequality in the funding of political parties, inadequate access to state-owned media, and election related violence needs urgent addressing. In terms of gender, much work remains to be done. Women constitute only 5-25 percent of the Members of Parliament. On average, ruling parties control about 80 percent of the seats in Parliament across the region.

SADC, the region's premier Pan-African and integration agency has been caught in the grip of a complex restructuring process for more than a decade to date. This means that it is unable to effectively promote governance and democratisation. While SADC leaders show rhetorical and even real commitment to regional integration, SADC itself has been poor at implementing decisions, and closing the gap between formulating and adopting norms and values, and realising them in

practice.⁶ There is a policy and implementation gap, and the regional organisation has poor institutional governance capacities. While SADC's Organ for Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation (OPDSC) now has a protocol, the protocol and the OPDSC structures have not been properly set up. This structure, like many others, has many financial and human resource constraints, and these capacity shortfalls detract from the region's abilities to maintain peace and security, and promote democratic governance and democratisation throughout the region.⁷

The heated land debate in Zimbabwe, and the raising of the vexing land question in Namibia in recent months, shows that issues of social justice, unless properly and fully addressed, can raise serious questions about the sustainability of governance and democratisation. These could also be used by both governing and political parties in general for short term political gain. Indeed, the Zimbabwe experiment raises questions as to whether political settlements constrain the freedom of action of governments after the dawn of peace and liberation. It similarly shows that some liberation movements-turned-governments find it difficult to relinquish power once they have attained power, and almost develop a sense of entitlement to the presidency and being in government. It similarly shows just how governments can manipulate issues of social justice and use it for their own political ends. Social justice issues and those of past discrimination and impoverishment remain contentious questions in Southern Africa.

Formal Versus Substantive Democracy

SADC and the Southern African region have achieved much at the formal, procedural level, and at the realm creating a regional institution and community in the defence of peace, security, democracy and democratic governance. Norms, values and standards to regulate the behaviour of states have been introduced, despite the serious problem of their

⁶ Chris Landsberg, *Building a regional society in Southern Africa: the institutional governance dimension*, Centre for Policy Studies, Policy: Issues and Actors, vol. 15 no. 1, Introduction.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 6.

enforcement

At the substantive level however, democratic governance's stresses, threats and obstacles have been most pronounced. This has been exacerbated by divisions amongst states, as well as by the debilitating conflict throughout the region. These have had negative implications and impeded the advancement of democratic governance.

Some of the outstanding obstacles have included lack of consensus on the rules stabilising democratic internal governance within core democratic institutions; chaotic and fractious politics within and between parties; ineffective legislative policy making; lack of civil society capacity; inadequate implementation of the rule of law, particularly with respect to limiting corruption; slow progress in implementing gender equity; insufficient implementation of constitutionally guaranteed human rights; inadequate governmental policy implementation capacity, particularly with respect to agricultural and other dimensions of economic development; and weakening of provincial and local governmental autonomy. In the main, the region's political parties, both those inside and outside government, tend to be personality driven; in other words personalities drive political parties and governments.

Pressures for internal democratic governance constantly jostle with regional inter-state imperatives, and sometimes tensions and division among states; such tensions have undermined the progress towards democratisation. These have been coupled with inter-state and inter-intra state conflicts over the past four years. Examples of these are the inter-locking wars in the Great Lakes centering on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi and Rwanda. It has also conversely been coupled with fragile peace processes in all these states. While efforts to bring peace have been real, the post-conflict peace-building challenges in all suggest that, unless democratic governance processes, institutions and war's legacies are addressed, conflict and war could easily return.

Dominant Parties, Forceful Executives and Weak Opposition

Politically, the region continues to be marked by contrasting trends. There is on the one hand, increasing pressure for democratisation and democratic governance, notably by organised civil society forces. At the same time however, a lack of democratic consensus and the poor capacity of the state to govern effectively bedevils progress towards democratic governance. Coupled to this is the persistent development (read: underdevelopment) challenges faced by the region. In such an environment, the roles of political parties as democratisation agents are crucial.

Formal democracy has been introduced in most of the region's states – Swaziland and the Democratic Republic of the Congo remain the only two countries that are not ruled by governments chosen in multi-party elections. Because of formalism, and the idea of having elections on time, Angola, Lesotho, Zambia and Zimbabwe's can claim to be democratic. Indeed, in 2004 and 2005, some nine Southern African countries will go to the polls. In 2004, South Africa, Malawi, Botswana and Namibia will all go to the elections. In 2005, we are likely to see Zimbabwe, Angola, the DRC, Mauritius and Tanzania going to the polls. So, if the minimalist definition of democracy is used, than most Southern African countries can claim to be democracies.

Progress has been achieved in terms of minimalist democracy – viz. elections on time. However, beyond this minimalist understanding of democracy, the state and nature of democratic governance in many countries raises concern and doubts. Democracy in Southern Africa could be said to be found wanting. Southern Africa mainly has weak states and the ruling parties dominate politics. Opposition parties are typically weak, fractured and splintered. While there is much emphasis on formal and procedural democracy, the level of substantive democracy is weak, in addressing people's concerns and anxieties, as well as questions such as poverty, inequality and participation.

Thus, the region has to grapple with a façade of formalism and formal democracy; but there is little substantive democratisation encompassing people's involvement and participation in governance processes. This formal frontage conceals more deep-seated governance challenges faced by the region.

In Botswana there has been no change of government since 1965, and all evidence is that the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), will again win the planned 2004 elections⁸. Indeed, the BDP is a real dominant party, helped by a weak and splintered opposition⁹. In a 44-seat Parliament, the opposition Botswana National Front enjoys five seats, and the Botswana Congress Party just one seat, while the ruling party enjoys a massive 38 seats¹⁰. In 40 years of post-independence rule, none of the opposition parties have come close to unseating the BDP. The leader of the BDP, President Festus Mogae, is both dominant as the executive President, and in the BDP party¹¹. This suggests a centralisation of decision-making around individuals. Thus, for as long as we are likely to have a dominant party situation in Botswana, more emphasis will have to be placed on intra-party democracy and on democratisation of political parties.

Because the BDP is so dominant, it is imperative that we look at the levels of democracy within the ruling party where there has been evidence of factionalism. This centered around the Vice President, who sees himself as a successor to Mogae, but some view him as a dictatorial figure. The issue of Mogae's successor could trigger major divisions in the BDP, and we could see greater intolerance to dissent and a crackdown on criticism. Moves are currently afoot to democratise the party internally and to make it more open and prone for debate.

Mauritius remains one of Africa's strongest democracies, but it too, has its challenges. It boasts one of the highest

GDP per capita's, and is ranked a middle-income country. Mauritius' politics constantly reveal both stability and combativeness. There are clear rules of the game; political parties accept the rules of political contestation and regular election, and the right of the people to subject political parties and politicians to accountability. The day-to-day interaction, however, between political parties remains aggressive and cut-throat, and are often fractious and divisive.

Mauritius is a diverse nation, but the compact nature and small size of its geography ensures that regular interaction takes place between its diverse races and ethnicities, constantly containing the potential for violence. By and large, the Mauritian body-politic is mature and more stable than combative.

Tanzania, with its Republican constitution, has to cater for a dualistic political system: one for the Union, and one for Zanzibar, and the introduction of market-led economic dimensions. There have been efforts under the Mkapa government to make the government more responsive to citizen demands by addressing the issues of entrenched corruption in the public sector. In line with the trend in Southern Africa, the opposition political parties in Tanzania remain weak in spite of the introduction of multi-party politics in 1992. They could be described as mere income-generating and rent-seeking organisations instead of genuine opposition parties capable of contesting political power and entrenching democracy. There is also a lot of infighting and factionalism in opposition circles, and they are also weak in financial and organisational terms. This oppositional weakness has allowed the CCM to consolidate its grip on power.

Relations between the Union and Zanzibar remain a complicating factor, and the potential for conflict and widespread instability in the island state remains real.

Elections in the DRC are planned for 2005; but in reality, the chances are that they will only take place in 2006, at the earliest. The DRC faces enormous post-conflict peace-building governance challenges. In April 2003, the Joseph Kabila government and rebel opposition forces signed an historic pact to bring

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

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

about a government of National Unity in that country. Forty-four groups, including armed factions, exiled political parties, and civil society groups, signed the 'The Final Act' at Sun City, South Africa. The signing of the peace deal heralded the end of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue¹². No sooner had participants signed the peace deal than the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan warned that a difficult path lay ahead with its implementation and operationalisation. Annan said 'No one must imagine that this deal will implement itself. The most difficult process still lies ahead'. The war has resulted in weak institutions in Congo, with government's reach stretching no further than the outskirts of Kinshasa. State society relations are poor to the extent of being almost non-existent. Parliament has to be revived, but will most certainly be weak. Government's legitimacy will have to be earned at a time when the centre of gravity is very weak and with the potential to collapse.

Mozambique too will go to the polls in 2004, and unlike the cases of South Africa, Namibia, and Tanzania for example, the ruling Frelimo is not a classical dominant party as it faces major and stiff opposition and competition from Renamo. There is a high degree of mistrust between Renamo and Frelimo, and Renamo has even disputed the outcome of the 1994 and 1999 peacetime elections.¹³

In Swaziland, political parties are banned meaning that the executive monarchy literally dominates the politics of that country. This undemocratic situation has triggered a serious stand-off between the monarchy and civil society movements, notably the labour aristocracy, who want to democratise their country and introduce democratic governance, not monarchical rule. Also, civil society opposition forces are not only excluded from governance processes, they are being harassed for their political beliefs and positions; many of them are in fact driven into exile. At a time when much attention is focused on Zimbabwe, Swaziland is a political

powder keg, stemming from the democratisation crisis in that country. The need for an early warning system is obvious as all the evidence is there that this is a political combustion in the making. In April 2003, the Swazi Chief Justice resigned because of what he perceived as growing tensions and a crisis between the modern court system in Swaziland and that country's absolute monarchy¹⁴. Government increasingly showed its willingness to defy court orders¹⁵, again indicating its dominance and domineering force in that society.

Until the death of UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi in 2002, the government and opposition in Angola have long interacted with each other not through Parliament but in continued warfare. The two sides were locked in a major civil war for twenty-seven years. With the death of Savimbi, a formal peace process began but we should not confuse a formal peace process with democratisation; it is not the same. Thus, now that formal attempts at peace-making are underway, the gains of the past two years could be reversed unless the legacy of war is addressed through democratic peace-building. This would involve the strengthening of democratic institutions and a democratic culture. Unless this form of peace-building is addressed, peace could prove to be short lived. Indeed, the Angolan war has had a past tendency to spill over into Zambia and Namibia's border districts. There has also been what analysts have called a resource war, in Angola given that the warring factions have fought over diamonds and oil. If war reverts, it could again trigger wider implications.

In Lesotho, the short occupation by Southern African Development Community (SADC) troops after the 1998 military intervention (to stave off a military *coup*) has paved the way for a new and largely successful election in May 2002. If there is one case, however, that brings home the importance of democratic governance in Southern Africa then it must be Lesotho. Lesotho was able to hold largely successful elections in 2002 because of the processes of

¹² 'Historic pact rings in new period for DRC', in *The Star*, 3 April 2003.

¹³ Luis de Brito, 'Prospects for more transparency in Mozambique's 2004 elections', in EISA Election Talk, no 8, February 2004.

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<http://www.mg.co.za/Content/13.asp?ao=12805>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

democratic engagement which preceded that election. That process was highly accommodating and built on consensus. The Lesotho Independent Electoral Commission, the government and all opposition forces engaged in efforts to establish 'new rules' and all participated in drafting a new Electoral Code for Lesotho. This has helped to boost confidence and co-operation and is a classic example of the importance of governance.

Lesotho is a young and fragile democracy, one that remains a poor and brittle democracy. It has never been able to provide employment to the bulk of its population. Because of poverty and underdevelopment, political contestation is highly combative and the stakes are typically high. Lesotho has, especially around the time of elections, a history of ceaseless and persistent instability and violence. HIV/AIDS is on the increase. While the election of May 2002 has been largely violent-free and even credible, because of the high stakes, politics in Lesotho remain frail and breakable. The fragile democracy needs to be rebuilt through the strengthening of democratic institutions, building of consensus, fostering of cooperation and coexistence, and just generally political reconciliation, notably between the ruling LCD party and the BNP, as well as other parties like the LPC.

In Zambia, prior to the contested December 2001 elections, constitutional changes were used to limit the right of opposition parties to contest elections. This has created the potential for widespread political violence. The mere fact that the electoral disputes have not yet been resolved suggests that the new President, Mwanawasa is presiding over a highly very fragile polity. The elections and its outcome suggest that democratisation in Zambia is bound to come under significant challenges.

Historically, after the 1991 elections a stalling of the democratisation process has been evident. Institutional failure has resulted in the domination of the executive and the ruling party. The lack of political accountability and executive dominance is accompanied by systemic corruption. In the wake of the December 2001 disputed election, civil society remains weak but increasingly confident of the potential to

play a democratising role. This could result in the positive realignment of politics that would make it difficult for any one political party to dominate politics according to its will. It is conceivable that a lot of pressure will be placed on civil society actors to take on the role of opposition.

In Zimbabwe, tensions between government and opposition forces over the state of democracy reveals that this once stability icon of Southern Africa is now one of the region's most unstable states. Some ten years ago, Zimbabwe was a classic dominant party state in the sense that Zanu-Pf dominated the state through legitimate means. Ten years later however, Zanu-PF's dominance derives more from illegitimate means, such as clinging to power through disputed elections and highly contested election results. Today, Zimbabwe is more a two-party dominated state, with the Movement for Democratic Change having emerged as the real alternative to the governing party. Mugabe has even resorted to the tactic of trying to boost his election prospects by laying stress on the social justice issue of land possession, dispossession and restitution, and again resorting to the politics of liberation in order to secure continuing dominance.

The opposition MDC has laid stress on the lack of democratic governance in Zimbabwe, and Mugabe and Zanu-PF's growing autocracy and dictatorial tendencies. Examples of this lack of democratic governance include the repeated detention of journalists whose reports were unfavourable to the military establishment and the Zanu-PF government of President Mugabe. We have witnessed how the Zanu-PF government has attacked critics of government, especially the opposition MDC. Detention without trial has become a common occurrence, journalists are attacked and detained, and government has begun to pass legislation to control the activities of NGOs, that may be described as a form of crackdown¹⁶. Contrary to the MDC's hope of a victory at the polls and their prospects of trouncing Zanu-PF Mugabe's grip on power internally

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<http://web.amnesty.org/web/web.nsf/print/2004-zwe-summary-end>.

suggests that he plans to be around until the end of his term in 2008. One could furthermore suggest that he hopes to consolidate Zanu-PF as a ruling party, in spite of it being fiercely challenged by the MDC and civil society. Indeed, Mugabe is determined to secure a victory in both the 2005 Parliamentary poll and the 2008 presidential election, by hook or by crook.

Despite the MDC's emergence as a party over the past few years, it remains fundamentally weak on a number of scores. Although it now has a programme called RESTART, it remains weak on structure, weak on leadership, and above all, weak on strategy. These deficiencies suggest that the MDC could be defeated by Zanu-PF at the polls. This means that the prospect of a disintegration of the MDC as a political party should not be ruled out. A defeat for the MDC in next year's Parliamentary election could spell the beginning of the end for this once hopeful party. Such a defeat could initiate talk of its eventual collapse, and we can certainly expect to hear talk of a new and alternative opposition to the MDC doing the rounds.

Irrrespective of who will govern in the foreseeable future, the problem for Zimbabwe is that, even if the power political question could be addressed, the land question and other social justice issues will continue to hover for many decades to come. The handling of these issues could again have impact on governance issues, and unless successfully addressed, could weaken further political parties. A two-pronged strategy will be required that recognises that both dimensions are crucial. The land and democratic governance questions need to be stressed at exactly the same times¹⁷. So serious has the power political issue, and the question of power and human rights abuses become in Zimbabwe, that ten SADC foreign ministers decided in April 2003 to meet with their Zimbabwe counterpart and interrogate the issue of state-sponsored violence and the deteriorating human rights issue¹⁸.

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<http://www.mg.co.za/Content/13.asp?ao=12805>.

¹⁸ Regional Roundup, Information from the SADC Press, *Daily News Zimbabwe*, 4 April 2003.

President Mugabe has used these issues to consolidate his power base within the party and as head of state. There is little room for debate and dissent within Zanu-PF and President Mugabe is running the party like a monarchical head.

Malawi remains one of the poorest countries in Africa; the state of underdevelopment has seen both the ruling party and opposition parties vying for power at all costs. Indebtedness, poverty, a vulnerable agricultural sector, and heavy dependence on foreign aid signifies that the promotion of democratisation and governance in this SADC country has to happen in somewhat adverse conditions. Parties typically fight elections as a means of attaining power but also as a means of financial survival.

The ruling UDF party, in line with the trend throughout the region, dominates politics, even though this has waned in recent years. While we have seen the domination of personalities within the ruling party, the opposition MCP, Aford and others have generally been weak, and even an attempted alliance between them has been riddled with problems and tensions. The fortunes of all these parties continue to be in decline. So unsuccessful has their efforts at alliance building been, that in the end some of the governing parties erstwhile opponents eventually opted to enter into a coalition with government.

But, notwithstanding the dominance of the ruling party the unyielding and unremitting quest on the part of the Muluzi government and the UDF party to seek a third term for President Muluzi has been stopped, mainly by opposition parties. In the end President Muluzi bowed to pressure and stepped down; he did however play a dominant role in the election of his successor, Bingu wa Mutharika, who won a controversial and disputed election in May 2004. Soon after the elections, wa Mutharika appointed the leaders of the two opposition parties as Ministers in his Cabinet; respectively to the portfolios of economic planning and development, and agriculture. In the aftermath of the elections, Malawi's democracy remains fragile and regional democratic engagement will have to take cognisance of political developments in Malawi. Indeed, we will even have to look

out for the potentialities of a violent interregnum in future, should the fragile gains of democratisation since the autocratic decades of Banda become reversed.

In **Namibia**, SWAPO remains highly dominant as it continues to command a massive 75% of the popular vote. Not only is SWAPO a dominant party, but its leader, who is also head of state, is highly assertive, with a centralisation of power and decision-making concentrated in him. Indeed, President Sam Nujoma, who will retire as head of state, still dominates SWAPO politics. Although he will step down as head of state in November 2004 he will remain as leader of SWAPO thereafter. He will therefore continue to be a commanding figure in Namibian politics. Like the ANC in South Africa, SWAPO continues to benefit from its image as the premier liberator of its country. Both these countries benefit from what Steven Friedman calls the 'founding myth'¹⁹ or the liberation dividend.

As in the case of South Africa, Namibia is one of the world's most unequal societies. Nowhere is this inequality better illustrated than in the land question. The Namibian government, frustrated by its own slow pace of land reform, announced during early 2004 that it would accelerate the expropriation of white farms.²⁰ It made clear its intentions to do away with the 'willing seller-willing buyer' policy and replace it with the expropriation policy.²¹ Government blamed this shift on white farmers, who had unfairly inflated the prices of farmland and become obdurate.²² The statistics tell it all; white farmers, who makes up just 5% of the population own 95, 6% of all agricultural land in Namibia.

South Africa too, often seen as the strongest democracy, has major problems. The South African government presides over a deeply divided society with acute

poverty levels. Government, particularly at provincial and local levels, has a relatively weak state capacity. Even in a strictly governance sense, one of the more serious challenges faced by South Africa is that of the gap between policy and implementation. It is almost trite to say that South Africa's post-1994 government is good, and has become celebrated at policy-making.

Yet, in spite of South Africa's massive democratisation and socio-economic challenges, the ANC remains a highly dominant party. During the April 2004 poll, the ANC won with a massive 70% victory over its rivals. The state of parliamentary opposition is weak, albeit that opposition parties can be very vociferous in Parliament. One is struck by the levels of infighting and competition amongst opposition parties in Parliament, and there has generally been a lack of a culture of debate in Parliament. Chances are that in the years to come, we will have to look outside of Parliament for democratic points of opposition outside of the state and Parliament. Democratisation's pressures are likely to come from civil society, and in particular social movement forces such as labour movements and others.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that, while more of the region's states are formal democracies than ever before in the sense that they adhere to the minimum requirement of democracy, such as holding elections, the substantive aspect of democratisation is far more unsteady. Democratisation in the region is therefore fluid and inconsistent, and this has in part, been the result in part of the fragile state of democratic governance and democratisation in the region. Baregu and Landsberg argue that we have to draw a distinction between formal or procedural democracy – free and fair elections, the protection of civil liberties, separation of powers, and the role of opposition parties – and, on the other hand, the strengthening of substantive democracy (the ability of the state to be responsive to the needs of the citizenry, to eradicate poverty, and to ensure the effective participation of in decision-making and addressing pressing issues of poverty, land dispossession, and

¹⁹ Steven Friedman, 'No easy stroll to dominance: party dominance, opposition and civil society in South Africa', in Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, *The awkward embrace: One party dominance and democracy*, Tafelberg Publishers, 1999.

²⁰ Tom Nevin, 'Land – A tale of two countries', in *African Business*, April 2004.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

economic injustice)²³.

A key argument of this paper was that the institutions thus far put in place, notably SADC, state institutions, and in general the state in Southern Africa are typically unable to address the vast governance and development challenges faced by states from within and without. One of the seminal problems faced by states in the region is that they are jealous of their sovereignty and are reluctant to surrender some of it to the greater 'regional goods'. They are often unwilling to pool some of that sovereignty in favour of greater integration that would help to address some of the more urgent governance and development challenges facing the region. Indeed, in order to address these challenges, Southern Africa needs greater and deep integration. It is better for Southern African states to face democratisation challenges together, as a collective and on the basis of common norms and values, as opposed to doing it on their own.

This analysis suggests that only half of the regions states have their democratic credentials intact. Even so, most countries seem to be electoral democracies in that they fulfill basic, bare minimum requirements of democracy: elections on time. Beyond electioneering, more importantly, even states that pursue more substantive forms of democratisation, democracy and democratic governance are under stress and strain. The potential for conflict is therefore evident.

While there has much emphasis placed on the holding of elections, there has been little appreciation of the reality that neither democracy nor stability is possible unless the state functions effectively. Government is not simply an instrument of public administration²⁴. Democratic governance is chiefly about the ability of the state to redress citizens' grievances,

responding to their needs, and create avenues for them to participate in governance matters. Instead of deepening democratic governance, in many countries there has been shrinkage in the space for democratisation and public participation.

A significant lesson emanating from this part of the world is that weak states cannot consolidate democratic governance; the two feed off each other. The Southern African region can only strengthen democratic governance when states are strengthened, states learn to pool some of their sovereignty in favour of regional governance, and strengthen avenues for public participation.

Another lesson, however, is that political parties have a key role to play in Southern African democratisation. There is a challenge here: there is a need to place an emphasis on, and develop strategies for, strengthening political parties, and strengthening internal governance within this core sector in society. This focuses on the issue of strengthening internal governance within parties, and strengthening and leveling the playing field for them. This could for example be done through creating better space for competition during elections. There is also urgent need to bring equality in accessing resources, and even though this will bring about its own problems, we have to start talking about whether donors should step in as some stop gap measure. The state in the region, of course has a primary responsibility in this regard. The question of how party leaders and officials are elected and levels of party openness and transparency, becomes crucial.

²³ Mwesiga Baregu and Christopher Landsberg, 'Southern Africa's Security Architecture: Challenges and Projects', in Mwesiga Baregu and Christopher Landsberg, *From Cape to Congo*, op. cit., p. 346.

²⁴ For an influential position on the changing nature of the state, see World Bank, *The state in a changing world: World development report 1997*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997.

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