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THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF SADC: AN EXPERT VIEW LEADING TO THE MATERIALIZATION OF ECONOMIC POLICIES IN THE SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION

A DIMENSÃO ECONÔMICA DA SADC: UM OLHAR CONDUCENTE A MATERIALIZAÇÃO DE POLÍTICAS ECONÔMICAS DA REGIÃO AUSTRAL DA ÁFRICA

LA DIMENSIÓN ECONÓMICA DE LA SADC: UNA VISIÓN EXPERTA QUE CONDUCE A LA MATERIALIZACIÓN DE POLÍTICAS ECONÓMICAS EM LA REGIÓN DE ÁFRICA AUSTRAL

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ABSTRACT

This work with the theme "Economic Dimension of SADC: A Look leading to the materialization of economic Policies in the Southern Region of Africa", discusses the negative impacts of globalization and establishes a common platform for the region's insertion in the international economy, especially, the regional bloc has undergone major transformations, which reflect changes in the international economic system. In fact, SADC's economic policies and strategies aim to eliminate barriers to the free movement of capital, labor, goods and services and improve the region's management and economic performance. Thus, several measures are being adopted in an attempt to reduce the dependence of these countries on developed nations. In the same vein, despite the region's countries facing underdevelopment problems, there is a strong conviction that through cooperation they will be able to mitigate the negative impacts of globalization and establish a common platform for the region's insertion in the international economy.

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RESUMO

O Presente trabalho com o tema "Dimensão Económica da SADC: Um Olhar conducente a materialização das políticas econômicas da Região Austral da África", discute os impactos negativos da globalização e estabelece uma plataforma comum para a inserção da região na economia internacional, mormente, o bloco regional tem sofrido grandes transformações, que consubstancia às mudanças do sistema económico internacional. Aliás, as políticas económicas e estratégias da SADC, têm como objetivos eliminar barreiras à livre circulação de capitais, da mão-de-obra, de bens e serviços e melhorara gestão e o desempenho económico da região. Assim, diversas medidas estão sendo adoptadas numa tentativa de diminuir a dependência desses países com as nações desenvolvidas. Na mesma senda, apesar dos países da região enfrentarem problemas de subdesenvolvimento, mormente, existe uma forte convicção de que através da cooperação sejam capazes de mitigar os impactos negativos da globalização e estabelecer uma plataforma comum para a inserção da região na economia internacional.
Palavras-chave: Dimensão Económica. Materialização. Políticas económicas. SADC. África Austral.

RESUMEN

El presente trabajo titulado 'Dimensión Económica de la SADC: Una mirada conducente a la materialización de las políticas económicas de la Región Austral de África' discute los impactos negativos de la globalización y establece una plataforma común para la inserción de la región en la economía internacional. En particular, el bloque regional ha sufrido grandes transformaciones que acompañan los cambios del sistema económico internacional. Es más, las políticas económicas y estrategias de la SADC tienen como objetivos eliminar barreras a la libre circulación de capitales, mano de obra, bienes y servicios, y mejorar la gestión y el desempeño económico de la región. Así, se están adoptando diversas medidas en un intento por disminuir la dependencia de estos países con respecto a las naciones desarrolladas. En la misma línea, aunque los países de la región enfrentan problemas de subdesarrollo, existe una fuerte convicción de que, a través de la cooperación, serán capaces de mitigar los impactos negativos de la globalización y establecer una plataforma común para la inserción de la región en la economía internacional.
Palabras clave: Dimensión económica. Materialización. Politicas económicas. SADC. África Austral.

INTRODUCTION

Any process of Regional Integration requires, for its effectiveness and success, the realization and consolidation of several dimensions: economic, social, political, cultural, environmental, and legal. Thus, the Economic Dimension of Regional Integration may be analyzed from various systematic perspectives concerning the unification of member states for the establishment of a genuine economic regionalism. Nevertheless, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has an institutional agenda that allows regional integration to be examined in a broader sense.

In fact, although it was originally established as a cooperation organization, it is currently envisioned as moving toward integration in the true sense of the term.

Furthermore, when discussing regional integration (Timbane, 2022), particularly within the context of SADC, the following milestones are commonly highlighted: the establishment of the Free Trade Area (2008), the conclusion of negotiations on the Customs Union (2010), the completion of negotiations on the Common Market (2015), the creation of the Monetary Union (2016), and the introduction of a single regional currency for the Monetary Union (2018). In addition to these defined temporal milestones, several other measures have been agreed upon through various Protocols aimed at harmonizing national economic legislation among member states.

However, according to Tomás Timbane (2022), these instruments do not establish a definite timeframe for their implementation. Indeed, an examination of all instruments regulating SADC's international performance reveals a general absence of effective integration, as there remains a predominantly economic view of integration within the organization. This can also be observed through an analysis of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), which, at least initially, established SADC's objectives and intervention priorities up to 2019.

Moreover, within SADC, particular attention has been given to the Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons, signed in 2005 by the Member States. Under this Protocol, countries are expected to harmonize their legislation and administrative practices so that nationals of one Member State may freely move and establish residence in any other Member State. This objective carries a significant economic rationale, as it would facilitate regional development. Indeed, once the aforementioned Protocol enters into force, it will guarantee freedom of movement for citizens across Southern Africa, thereby fostering economic growth and strengthening regional integration.

1 THEORETICAL REVIEW

1.1 Regional Integration and International Trade

The first contributions to the systematic analysis of economic integration (Timbane, 2022) emerged from the studies of Mitrany between 1966 and 1968, as well as from Jacob Viner's seminal work on Customs Unions published in 1950. These studies went beyond the theories of comparative advantage that dominated the debate on international trade at that time.

Accordingly, Jacob Viner (2013) explained integration from the perspective of international trade, particularly through the concepts of trade creation and trade diversion. Along the same lines, in the context of the European Economic Community, integration was understood as a dual process involving both a negative and a positive dimension.

The negative aspect consists of "that aspect of economic integration that consists in the elimination of discrimination against participating members." Conversely, the positive aspect "symbolizes the formation and application of coordinated and common policies in order to fulfill economic and welfare objectives other than mere removal of discrimination."

Furthermore, integration may be interpreted in two distinct senses:

I. A dynamic sense, as a process through which economic borders among Member States are gradually eliminated; or, in a static sense, as a situation in which the national components of the economy are no longer separated by economic boundaries but instead function collectively as a unified entity.

II. Within the framework of the classical integration model developed during the 1960s, Bela Balassa (2012 [1962]) conceived integration as "the creation of formal cooperation between states and the forward movement from a free trade area, to customs union, a common market, a monetary union and finally total economic integration."

However, as Gilles Cistac (2012) argues,

> when conceiving the strategy for harmonizing Economic and Commercial Law in the Southern African region, it is fundamentally necessary to consider a set of means and plans or programs to achieve an end, in this case, the harmonization of the economic and commercial laws of the member states of this organization.

Indeed, the section of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) dedicated to "Trade, Economic Liberalization and Development" (RISDP, 4.10) reflects the wellknown stages of SADC's institutional agenda (Cistac, 2012).

Nevertheless, the limited success of economic integration processes in other regions of the world has increased skepticism regarding the applicability of these integration theories to developing countries. This skepticism is based on several factors. In developing countries, regional integration is primarily intended to accelerate economic growth under conditions of scarce resources and is therefore viewed as a tool for development. In contrast, in the highly industrialized countries of Europe, the integration process seeks to enhance welfare and promote high-technology industries through trade expansion and comparative advantages.

Moreover, economic integration within SADC is shaped by the particular characteristics of the countries in the region, which differ significantly from the advanced economies of the European Union and other regional blocs such as MERCOSUR and ASEAN in terms of modernization and levels of development. Consequently, SADC Member States are characterized by weak institutional capacity, inadequate infrastructure, and limited interdependence among markets and social sectors, all of which hinder the political and legal implementation of regional integration.

Therefore, considering that one of the principal — if not the primary — objectives of SADC (Cistac, 2012) is economic cooperation among its Member States, the organization has increasingly faced challenges and external influences that have contributed to setbacks and shortcomings in the economic integration of the region.

2 THE RESURGENCE OF REGIONALISM AND CHANGES IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

The new geopolitical and economic configuration that emerged after the Cold War, within the broader context of globalization, was characterized not only by changes in the relationships among States (Cistac, 2012), resulting in greater interdependence, but also by the proliferation of non-state actors. According to Justin Rosenberg (2005, p. 6):

> […] Social changes in the West combined with the end of the Cold War to remove the fetters on transnational forces of all kinds; and those forces, newly armed with the latest communications technologies, and finally had a free hand to integrate the globe. As the transnational interconnections proliferated, state sovereignty would become increasingly unworkable. In its place was emerging a new „post-Westphalian" system of multi-lateral world governance, which would increasingly consign traditional international relations to the past.

These transformations contributed to the economic erosion of sovereignty and to the relative decline of the State. Consequently, States have increasingly been compelled to seek solutions to their problems within transnational, regional, and global frameworks. As Robert Gilpin (2001, p. 25–45) observes:

> […] the collapse of the Soviet command economy, the failure of the Third World's importsubstitution strategy, and the outstanding economic success of the American economy in the 1990s have encouraged acceptance of unrestricted markets as the solution to the economic ills of modern society. As deregulation and other reforms have reduced the role of the state in the economy, many believe that markets have become the most important mechanism determining both domestic and international economic and even political affairs.
> "[...] New regionalism would not have been consistent with the cold war system since the quasi regions of that system tended to reproduce the dualist bipolar structured within themselves."

Within the framework of the new regionalism, economic factors became increasingly important in explaining interdependent relations among States. This development is evidenced by the significant increase in free trade agreements, the establishment of trade regimes, and the proliferation of regional blocs throughout the world.

Economic integration processes came to be viewed as mechanisms for multilateral liberalization and insertion into the global economy. The paradigmatic example of successful integration has been the European Union, whose regional integration process (Gilpin, 2001) began with sectoral cooperation in coal and steel in the 1950s and gradually evolved into the supranational economic and political union that characterizes the contemporary EU. Nevertheless, the limited outcomes of integration processes outside Europe have generated skepticism regarding the feasibility of regional integration in other parts of the world.

In Southern Africa, despite the fact that the countries of the region continue to face significant development challenges (Cistac, 2012), there remains a strong conviction that cooperation can help mitigate the negative effects of globalization and establish a common platform for integrating the region into the international economy. For this reason, the regional bloc has undergone substantial transformations aimed at adapting to changes in the international system.

Indeed, SADC's policies and strategies (Cistac, 2012) are designed to eliminate barriers to the free movement of capital, labor, goods, and services, while simultaneously improving economic governance and enhancing the overall economic performance of the region.

Furthermore, the Protocol on Trade (Cistac, 2012) explicitly advocates the removal of barriers to intra-SADC trade. In accordance with Article 3 of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), it promotes the elimination of import duties (Article 4), export duties (Article 5), quantitative restrictions on imports (Article 7) and exports (Article 8), as well as the prohibition of subsidies that may adversely affect trade competition within the region (Article 19).

3 CHANGES IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

The principal changes in the international context (Jamine, 2009) that have had significant impacts at both the regional and national levels may be analyzed as follows:

I. The end of the Cold War altered the political and strategic configuration of the region, as it transformed the network of alliances and interests that had previously prevailed.

II. These alliances consisted, on the one hand, of the alignment of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) with the Western or capitalist bloc led by the United States and, on the other hand, the alignment of certain countries that were formerly members of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), later transformed into SADC, with the socialist bloc led by the Soviet Union.

Accordingly, the end of the Cold War resulted, in Viner's view, in a: "[…] diminution in superpower interest and (for the ex-Soviet Union) ability to intervene in Africa, together with the declining role of the formal colonial power, may open the way for a greater assertiveness on the part of African states" (Clapham, 1996, p. 122).

However, several years later, the reluctance of Member States (Murapa, 2002) to advance a process aimed at establishing supranational authority within the organization may be considered one of the principal causes of the repeated delays in achieving the approved objectives, as well as the slow implementation of the Free Trade Area and the Customs Union.

4 SADC PROTOCOLS AND TRADE LIBERALIZATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Aware of the region's economic inequalities, SADC promoted new political initiatives from 1994 onward, developed programs, and adopted several protocols aimed at deepening regional integration (Jamine, 2009). Among these initiatives, the beginning of a coordinated regional effort toward trade liberalization stands out, culminating in the adoption of the Trade Protocol in 1996, widely regarded as the driving force behind the integration process.

The Trade Protocol entered into force in 2000. Its first step required Member States to engage in negotiations for the gradual reduction of tariffs, thereby promoting the elimination of customs duties. The principal instrument of trade liberalization established by the Protocol was the removal of customs tariffs and non-tariff barriers affecting the majority of intra-SADC trade. The SADC Trade Protocol provides a legal framework for economic cooperation among Member States and aims to promote intra-regional trade and development through the elimination of tariff barriers and the gradual removal of non-tariff obstacles to trade.

The Protocol also recognizes the specific characteristics of the region's economies, particularly those arising from disparities in development levels among Member States (Branco, 2003). Consequently, it establishes that countries which have been, or may be, adversely affected by the removal of trade barriers may request—and be granted—a grace period to prepare for the economic adjustments required by the liberalization process. Differentiated schedules for the elimination of trade barriers were designed to be implemented over an eight-year period following the Protocol's entry into force for each participating country.

The repeated delays in implementing the Protocol resulted largely from the complexity of negotiations concerning the removal of trade barriers. These negotiations involved tariff reduction schedules, harmonization of procedures, rules of origin for SADC products, dispute-settlement mechanisms, customs cooperation, trade facilitation measures, and the definition and establishment of institutional mechanisms necessary for effective implementation.

With the ratification of the Trade Protocol, characterized by the expansion of trade and the reduction of development asymmetries among Member States, SADC entered a new phase focused on the establishment of a Free Trade Area, a central objective within the broader agenda of economic integration in the region. Nevertheless, the existence of bilateral agreements among Member States may undermine the credibility of the Trade Protocol as an effective instrument for promoting crossborder trade and advancing regional economic integration.

5 SADC'S INTEGRATION INTO THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

The integration of SADC Member States into the international economy has been constrained by the fact that these countries participate in international trade primarily as producers and exporters of primary commodities and as importers of manufactured goods and capital equipment (Waty, 2011).

According to the African Development Bank (AfDB), "the dependence on commodity exports has made the region vulnerable to external shocks induced by fluctuations in commodity prices and demand." Similarly, the 2006 SADC Report demonstrates that regional integration has been:

> […] characterized by low recorded intra-regional trade, heavy dependence on external trade, limited cross-border flows of capital, relatively small economic size, and marked disparities in fiscal policies among other things. This is also worsened by the ineffective implementation of regional integration agreements".

Furthermore, regional integration within SADC has occurred in a context marked by several structural challenges, including asymmetries among Member States, the influence of extra-regional actors—particularly the European Union (Cistac, 2012)—and the multiple memberships of Member States in different regional integration arrangements.

Accordingly, several factors have negatively affected the regional integration process, among which the following may be highlighted:

i) Multiple membership in various regional integration blocs;

ii) Limited economic complementarity and the existence of profound asymmetries among SADC Member States;

iii)Lower levels of intra-regional trade when compared to extra-regional trade;

iv) Strong dependence on commodity exports, particularly minerals;

v) Significant dependence on South Africa, the region's dominant economic power; and

vi) Extreme dependence on customs revenues and fiscal tariffs.

With regard to extra-regional trade, SADC has negotiated Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with external partners, notably the European Union, the United States, and China. Consequently, SADC countries have generally maintained higher trade volumes with extra-regional partners than with countries within the region itself, resulting in comparatively limited intra-regional trade.

This situation raises important questions regarding the viability of the economic integration process, particularly customs integration, in a context where countries within the region buy and sell relatively little among themselves while conducting a much greater volume of trade in goods and services with extra-regional partners, especially with the European Union, one of SADC's principal strategic partners.

Similarly, the emphasis placed on external trade has contributed to the influence of extra-regional actors on the SADC agenda, particularly donor countries from the European Union, whose priorities do not always coincide with regional development objectives. As Diallo (2020, p. 134) argues:

> SADC maintains stronger economic ties and trade relations with countries outside its own region—primarily with developed countries of the Global North—largely as a consequence of colonialism. Thus, extra-regional actors (for example, economically powerful states or regional organizations) are in a position to influence regional integration projects in the Global South by affecting the interests of Southern countries through their policies and by altering the nature of the underlying challenges of regional cooperation.

Economic Partnership Agreements have also generated negative effects within the region, as they contribute to competition and fragmentation among Member States, thereby undermining collective efforts aimed at deepening regional economic integration.

6 INTRA-REGINAL TRADE IN SADC

The adoption of the Trade Protocol (Accioly, 2000) and the establishment of the Free Trade Area generated significant expectations regarding the benefits of trade liberalization. It was anticipated that the new regionalism would produce dynamic effects, economies of scale, increased competition and investment, as well as the static gains associated with economic integration through trade creation and trade diversion.

However, these objectives were not fully achieved. Trade within SADC has had a limited impact on regional development for several reasons:

I. There is a lack of clarity and considerable uncertainty regarding the equitable distribution of the gains derived from integration among Member States. This situation has contributed to weak commitment among countries in the region, many of which have joined other regional blocs in an effort to maximize their commercial benefits.

II. Intra-SADC trade has had a relatively low impact on the economies of Member States, as regional trade flows remain modest when compared with those observed in other regional blocs worldwide.

III. Market integration and specialization based on comparative advantages have not significantly contributed to regional development. In practice, economic liberalization associated with market integration has often failed to increase regional welfare and has instead contributed to unemployment and the deterioration of the terms of trade.

In our view, the principal factors hindering deeper economic integration in Southern Africa include:

I. Multiple memberships in regional organizations, commercial rivalries, tariff and non-tariff barriers, and the lack of complementarity among SADC economies;

II. The tendency of countries to join other regional blocs as a means of attracting investment and securing commercial gains, while simultaneously facing difficulties in removing tariff and non-tariff barriers due to strong fiscal dependence and uncertainty regarding the distribution of integration benefits.

Within this context, the integration of regional economies into the global market becomes increasingly difficult, particularly when countries are involved in commercial disputes and face challenges associated with overlapping regional memberships.

7 MULTIPLE MEMBERSHIPS OF MEMBER STATES AND THEIR NEGATIVE IMPACT ON SADC DEVELOPMENT

7.1 Multiple Memberships and the Failure to Establish Economic Policies

The tendency of SADC countries to maintain membership in multiple regional organizations has raised concerns regarding their commitment to the construction of a regional integration project based on a common agenda. Moreover, the participation of SADC Member States in other regional blocs has contributed to fragmentation, overlapping agendas, and limited progress in deepening regional integration.

The incompatibility between multiple memberships and deeper regional integration (Cistac, 2012) may be explained through the following factors:

i) Competition among SADC countries resulting from participation in multiple regional arrangements;

ii) Divergent perceptions regarding the distribution of benefits derived from integration;

iii) Difficulties in implementing regional agreements and harmonizing economic policies.

As previously noted, a defining characteristic of regional arrangements in Southern Africa is that many countries belong to more than one regional organization. This phenomenon has intensified regional competition, contributing to fragmentation and reducing the bloc's collective bargaining capacity, as highlighted by Franke (2007, p. 13):

> […] Overlap among Africa"s organizations not only leads to wasteful duplications of effort and counterproductive competition among countries and institutions, but also tends to dissipate collective efforts towards the common goals integration. country belonging to two or more organizations not only faces multiple financial obligations, but must cope with different meetings, policy decisions, instruments, procedures, and schedules.

An analysis of the membership patterns of SADC Member States (Cistac, 2012) reveals that almost all countries belong to more than one regional bloc, with the exception of Mozambique. Regarding membership in organizations such as COMESA, SACU, and East African Community, the situation may be summarized as follows:

- Five countries belong to SACU: Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Eswatini, and Lesotho;
- Eight countries belong to COMESA: Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Seychelles, Zambia, and Zimbabwe;
- Tanzania belongs to the East African Community (EAC);
- Mozambique is the only country exclusively affiliated with SADC.

Numerous examples illustrate the paradoxes generated by multiple memberships within SADC. Zambia, Mauritius, and Zimbabwe, for example, are required under the SADC Trade Protocol to remove trade barriers within the region. Nevertheless, because of divergent commercial interests, countries often join additional regional organizations to attract investment and address domestic economic challenges. In this context, each Member State tends to perceive integration primarily as a mechanism for advancing its own national interests.

The failure to establish the Customs Union illustrates this challenge. It demonstrated that countries in the region were not prepared to relinquish part of their sovereign decision-making authority or share sovereignty in accordance with the provisions of the Windhoek Treaty and other regional integration instruments.

Furthermore, South Africa, the economically dominant state in the region, formally committed itself to the objectives of establishing a Customs Union and a Common Market. However, according to Balassa (1961, p. 48):

> […] South Africa has invested much of its institutional and political efforts into strengthening the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU) as the core platform from which to integrate into the global economy - not the region. SACU separates its member states from the rest of the region in terms of global connectedness. In addition, recent developments with the revenue sharing formula have magnified the levels of inequality between South Africa and the other members (Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland and Lesotho).

This paradox raises important questions regarding the viability of regional integration (Júnior, 2021) in a context of multiple memberships, divergent national interests, and differing conceptions regarding how economic objectives, policies, and integration targets should be achieved.

7.2 Difficulties in the Implementation of Regional Economic Agreements

The success of regional integration depends, to a significant extent, on political commitment and cooperation among Member States in implementing agreements and protocols. Although SADC has made considerable progress in signing agreements, significant challenges remain regarding their effective implementation, for several reasons:

I. The slow pace of protocol negotiations and the repeated failure to meet the targets established in regional development plans;

II. The existence of numerous protocols and the lack of interest among Member States in ratifying them. This challenge is particularly acute in countries belonging to multiple regional organizations, where national parliaments must review and approve a large number of agreements. In some cases, states sign agreements without any genuine intention of ratifying them. Angola's failure to ratify the Trade Protocol, which has been in force since 2000, is an illustrative example;

III. Institutional weakness, particularly within the Secretariat, whose executive powers remain limited due to Member States' resistance to transferring aspects of their sovereignty. The weak implementation of regional agreements suggests that SADC countries have shown limited willingness to deepen integration or share sovereign authority.

As a result, national interests continue to prevail over regional interests. This reality was highlighted by Bohanes J. (2005, p. 49) when comparing regional economic programs with national policies within SADC:

> […] Regional programmes often lack well-defined policy objectives that are not sufficiently aligned with country interests. The consistency between national and regional strategies is often not clearly worked out. While strong political support exists for regional integration initiatives.

An analysis of these factors suggests that the multiple memberships of SADC Member States have a negative impact (Vasques, 1997) on the deepening of regional integration. The greater the participation of SADC countries in other regional organizations, the lower the likelihood of successfully implementing regional agreements and projects, particularly in circumstances where significant disagreements exist regarding the methods through which organizational objectives should be achieved.

One of the most notable examples of this challenge is the repeated postponement of the establishment of a Customs Union in Southern Africa.

8 THE REGIONAL INDICATIVE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN (RISDP)

8.1 Priorities and Social and Economic Policies of SADC

The Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020–2030 and the SADC Vision 2050 constitute two strategic frameworks designed to deepen regional integration and promote the development of Southern Africa (SADC, 2020, p. 10).

The RISDP 2020–2030 is a ten-year strategic plan and represents the culmination of an extensive preparatory process initiated in June 2012, following the decision of Member States to formulate the SADC Vision 2050.

The RISDP operationalizes the objectives of Vision 2050, which outlines the long-term aspirations of the region and establishes the strategic direction of SADC through 2050. It succeeds the previous RISDP, a fifteen-year strategic roadmap that guided the pursuit of SADC's long-term socioeconomic objectives.

The original RISDP provided the Secretariat and other SADC institutions with clear guidance regarding approved social and economic priorities and policies, thereby strengthening their effectiveness in coordination and facilitation functions. The first RISDP was approved by the SADC Summit in 2003 and entered into effective implementation in 2005.

The principal objective of the Revised Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation is to create a peaceful, secure, and stable political environment through which the region may achieve its socioeconomic development goals, eradicate poverty, and advance regional integration.

The RISDP 2020–2030 seeks to achieve the following strategic objectives:

- Greater institutional effectiveness and efficiency;
- Enhanced gender equality, women's empowerment and development, and the elimination of gender-based violence;
- High-quality, interconnected, integrated, and sustainable infrastructure networks;
- Strengthened and harmonized regional health systems capable of providing standardized and accessible healthcare services to all citizens and responding effectively to pandemic threats.

8.2 Strategic Priorities in Southern Africa

The principal priorities of SADC include:

- **Foundation:** Peace, Security, and Good Governance;
- **Pillar I:** Industrial Development and Market Integration;
- **Pillar II:** Infrastructure Development to Support Regional Integration;
- **Pillar III:** Social and Human Capital Development;
- **Cross-Cutting Issues:** Gender, youth, environment, climate change, and disaster risk management.

The expected outcomes and corresponding objectives within each of these strategic areas are outlined in detail for the period 2020–2030.

The RISDP is guided by the principles established in Article 4 of the SADC Treaty:

- Sovereign equality of all Member States;
- Solidarity, peace, and security;
- Human rights, democracy, and the rule of law;
- Equity, balance, and mutual benefit;
- Peaceful settlement of disputes.

In addition to the Treaty's fundamental principles, the RISDP 2020–2030 emphasizes the following values:

I. Regional development and integration for the benefit and full employment of SADC citizens;

II. Systematic reduction of poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion;

III. Promotion of innovation and the development and application of science and technology to enhance productivity and global competitiveness;

IV. Sustainable and optimized use of the region's natural resources, both terrestrial and marine.

In implementing its Vision and Mission, the RISDP 2020–2030 focuses on the objectives established in Article 5 of the SADC Treaty, including sustainable economic growth, poverty eradication, democratic governance, peace and security, self-sustaining development, policy complementarity, productive employment, environmental protection, cultural cohesion, combating HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases, mainstreaming poverty reduction across all SADC activities, and integrating gender considerations into the community-building process.

8.3 On the Viability of the Economic Integration Process

The process of economic integration (Schutz, 2014) may take several forms, reflecting different degrees of integration, including:

- **Free Trade Area:** a stage in which tariffs and quantitative restrictions among Member States are eliminated, while each country maintains its own trade policies toward non-members;
- **Customs Union:** a deeper level of integration involving not only the elimination of trade barriers among members but also the adoption of a common external tariff toward non-member countries;
- **Common Market:** a more advanced form of integration in which restrictions on trade and on the movement of factors of production are abolished;
- **Economic and Monetary Union:** distinguished from a common market by combining the free movement of goods and productive factors with a degree of harmonization of national economic policies, thereby eliminating distortions arising from differences among those policies.

9 CHALLENGES OF SACD IN THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION PROCESS

Although there is considerable optimism regarding the improvement of the region's macroeconomic performance (Júnior, 2021), numerous challenges continue to affect the consolidation and strengthening of SADC. Among these challenges, the expansion of organized crime networks throughout the region represents one of the many non-tariff barriers to commercial development, as such activities significantly increase transaction costs, human security risks, and investment losses.

The principal challenges may be summarized as follows:

I. The future of SADC will depend on a greater degree of coordination among national development policies, particularly in the areas of infrastructure, the gradual abandonment of strict unanimity and rigid notions of sovereignty, and the eventual adoption of a common African monetary policy. Such objectives, however, will only become feasible through the resolution of the domestic economic and financial crises affecting Member States. Furthermore, the ideal condition for regional integration would be one in which all Member States possess relatively similar levels of development and significant differences in the composition of their productive resources, thereby creating an environment conducive to economic complementarity. In reality, however, SADC countries continue to exhibit substantial disparities in economic development.

II. SADC economies must prioritize diversification and the modernization of production systems. This objective can only be achieved through the deepening and consolidation of economic reforms that promote the integration of national economies. Such a process necessarily includes the harmonization and rationalization of policies that support the implementation and development of the SADC Trade Protocol.

III. The deepening of democracy, the capacity to implement signed agreements and protocols, investment in human capital, the expansion of technical knowledge and institutional expertise, and the production of reliable statistical data constitute critical challenges facing the region.

Furthermore, SADC has adopted a state-led model of integration in which some Member States prioritize nation-building objectives over regional integration. Although the region is rich in natural resources, it lacks a sufficiently robust and diversified industrial sector capable of driving the economies of all Member States.

Due to the participation of several countries in multiple regional organizations, any attempt to implement more advanced stages of integration—such as a Customs Union—must take into account developments within other regional organizations. This is necessary because of the incompatibilities among integration strategies and because divided commitments may create significant difficulties in the administration of customs regimes and external tariffs.

Consequently, if SADC intends to inject new dynamism into the regional integration process, it must adopt a model of economic integration that reflects the specific realities of Southern Africa and serves the interests of all Member States. Such an approach should be accompanied by a comprehensive assessment of the implementation and outcomes of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP).

Ultimately, regional integration has the potential to stimulate economic growth and development in Mozambique and throughout Southern Africa by improving living conditions and quality of life, strengthening the capacity of Member States to address the challenges of globalization, enhancing productive efficiency, and encouraging private investment within a peaceful and competitive economic environment.

10 CONCLUSIONS

The limited success of economic integration processes in several parts of the world has increased skepticism regarding the applicability of classical integration theories to developing countries. In developing economies, regional integration is generally conceived as an instrument for accelerating economic growth under conditions of scarce resources and, consequently, as a strategy for development.

In Southern Africa, despite the persistent challenges of underdevelopment, there remains a strong conviction that cooperation among Member States can mitigate the adverse effects of globalization and establish a common platform for the region's insertion into the international economy.

Over the years, SADC has undergone significant transformations in an effort to adapt to changes in the international system. The organization's policies and strategies seek to eliminate barriers to the free movement of capital, labor, goods, and services while simultaneously improving economic governance and regional economic performance.

The principal objective of SADC's regional economic integration agenda is to promote economic growth among its Member States. However, since its establishment, this objective has not been fully achieved. Several structural and institutional factors have constrained the success of the integration process, including the resurgence of regionalism and transformations in international politics, divergent perceptions regarding the distribution of integration gains, competition among Member States, the coexistence of multiple regional arrangements, and the widespread phenomenon of multiple memberships among SADC countries.

These factors have weakened the effectiveness of regional integration initiatives and contributed to what may be described as the economic underperformance of SADC. Moreover, the central challenge for achieving genuine regional economic integration lies in the selection and implementation of sustainable economic policies and development programs capable of responding to the realities of the region, rather than focusing exclusively on the advancement of customs, monetary, and economic integration schemes.

The analysis undertaken in this study demonstrates that the limitations of regional integration in Southern Africa are evident when compared with other regional organizations that have successfully consolidated their economic policies and expanded their institutional influence internationally. Such organizations have generally achieved greater internal cohesion, stronger institutional frameworks, and more effective mechanisms for implementing regional objectives.

For SADC to advance toward deeper regional integration, Member States must strengthen political commitment, enhance institutional capacity, reduce the negative effects of overlapping regional memberships, improve policy harmonization, and promote economic diversification. Only through these measures will the organization be able to transform its integration agenda into a practical instrument for sustainable development, economic growth, and regional prosperity.

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