



A Network of People
Building Peace



Advancing Sustainable Peace in Southern Africa

Through civil society and SADC partnerships

A CASE STUDY



Regional intergovernmental organisations (RIGOs) play a unique role in peacebuilding and sustaining peace – they have the potential to bring together the combined political and financial resources of their Member States while understanding local nuances, cross-border challenges to peace, and how to support national ownership.

As instability grows in Southern Africa, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) has increased its work in preventing conflicts and sustaining peace. However, SADC requires more resources, capacity and engagement from Member States to meet its conflict prevention potential. By analysing SADC's existing frameworks and partnerships with civil society, this report suggests that strengthening relationships with civil society enhances SADC's capacity to fulfil its role in prevention and sustaining peace. Thus, this case study will make recommendations on how to realise strong and operational partnerships between SADC and civil society on conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

What is SADC?

SADC is a sub-regional inter-governmental organisation made up of the 16 countries in Southern Africa. It was formally established in 1980 with the goals of resisting destabilisation and reducing dependency on apartheid South Africa. Now, its overarching purpose is to contribute towards economic development, peace and security and the quality of living in the region.¹

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Regional Security Challenges

SADC's region – the last part of Africa to be decolonised – is relatively peaceful compared to neighbouring regions. A culture of political solidarity among Member States remains, fostered by a common history of liberation movements and a stated commitment to non-interference in the internal politics of its members.

However, the region increasingly faces a range of evolving peace and security threats. These include maritime security and piracy, cyber and technology-driven security threats, climate change and socio-economic unrest. A large youth population, high levels of unemployment, poor governance, rapid urbanisation and a range of other drivers of instability and violent extremism are present in many of the region's countries.²

SADC has been criticised for its inability to ensure a regional response to various problems. Traditionally, SADC supported its Member States through military intervention with the consent of the government(s).³ However, recently, the organisation demonstrates increased recognition and interest in utilising prevention and peacebuilding methodologies to support peace in the region.

¹ SADC Overview. *Southern African Development Community*, 2022. More information is accessible at: <https://au.int/en/recs/sadc> and <http://www.sadc.int>.

² Nieuwkerk, Anthoni van. Extremisms in Africa, *South African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 27, 2020, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10220461.2020.1738267?journalCode=rsaj20>

³ Svicevic, Marko. The Legality of a SADC Intervention in Cabo Delgado in the Absence of Mozambican Consent, *OpinioJuris*, 2020, <http://opiniojuris.org/2020/11/02/the-legality-of-a-sadc-intervention-in-cabo-delgado-in-the-absence-of-mozambican-consent/>.

SADC-Civil Society Partnerships

The legal framework for civil society participation is outlined in the SADC Treaty of 1992, which recognises non-state actors as key stakeholders in the implementation of the sub-region's democracy, peace and security project.⁴ At the operational level, the 2004 Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ (SIPO)⁵ and the updated 2010 SIPO II⁶ provide strategies for civil society engagement in conflict resolution and raise public awareness on security issues.⁷ Such participation can take various forms, including research collaboration, participation in public debates, coordination of seminars and conflict management efforts. At the country level, SADC national committees are responsible for building cooperation and collaboration between state and non-state actors. The SADC Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (SADC-CNGO) was intended to be the body that advocates for the participation and representation of CSOs in SADC's work. However, this body is no longer active. It is imperative for SADC and CSOs to have an agreement that improves their collaboration with civil society, and as such enhances the impact of peacebuilding and conflict prevention work.

Despite lacking formal partnership mechanisms, there have been notable strides by SADC in their engagement of Non-State Actors (NSAs) as a vehicle for the engagement of CSOs. However, there are gaps in SADC's current CSO engagements as they are all *ad hoc*, so there is no systematic process within SADC's structures. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is no dedicated focal point or office within the SADC Secretariat to coordinate CSO engagements.

Civil Society Organisations in SADC Peace and Security Frameworks

Recent conflict prevention partnerships between SADC and civil society have been successful, providing a foundation that can be built upon. Two examples that showcase these partnerships are joint SADC-civil society work on a Regional Early Warning System and mediation.

Regional Early Warning System

REWS is one of the strongest examples of effective regional-CSO partnerships as it builds capacity, enhances resources and includes local knowledge.

Since the inception of the Regional Early Warning System (REWS) in 2010, civil society has played a major role in securing lines of communication with the Regional Early Warning Centre (REWC) at the SADC headquarters in Gaborone for all 16 Member States.⁸ Civil society's role is to collect data, provide recommendations and present periodic reports on potential conflicts. SADC can also request a situation analysis with recommendations from civil society if a conflict appears to be growing. Although these partnerships are beneficial to all parties involved, they need to be formalised to strengthen engagements.

⁴ Declaration and Treaty of SADC, SADC, 1992, <https://www.sadc.int/document/declaration-treaty-sadc-1992>.

⁵ Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (SIPO I), SADC, 2004, <https://www.sadc.int/document/strategic-indicative-plan-organ-politics-defence-and-security-cooperation-sipo-i>

⁶ SADC SIPO II, SADC, 2010. <https://www.sadc.int/document/sadc-sipo-ii-english>

⁷ 'Southern Africa's Post-Apartheid Security Agenda: The role of civil society organisations.' *Centre for Conflict Resolution*.

⁸ Ootob, Ejeviome Eloho. 'Regional Economic Communities and Conflict Prevention in Africa: An Overview of Capacity Gaps and Priority Needs.' *Office of the Special Advisor in Africa*, 2018.

One area where this partnership has proved especially useful is election monitoring, which can be a tense time in many SADC states. Ensuring that elections are surrounded with strong early warning systems has been useful for alleviating stress and mitigating conflicts that may arise over elections.

Mediation

SADC uses a “Mediation, Conflict Prevention and Preventive Diplomacy Structure,” which includes a mediation support unit (MSU), a mediation reference group (MRG) and a Panel of Elders (PoE). The participation consists of 50 percent of PoE members working in the governmental sector and 50 percent are from the non-governmental sector, including civil society.⁹ The PoE has increasingly been training civil society experts to be a part of their mediation team due to their consistent success and non-governmental perspectives which are appreciated by community members. Additionally, civil society conducts women mediator training in an effort to centre more women in the peacebuilding process.

The Next Steps:

SADC’s capacity to prevent conflict and build peace is growing but continues to be in need of improvement. Strong prevention and peacebuilding partnerships with civil society are an avenue for such an improvement. Forging partnerships with civil society takes a high level of political will from all involved parties. Increased coordination among civil society through a collective platform could support the unification of political will. In the past, these partnerships have been symbolic rather than authentic, but the foundation in the policy framework coupled with successful collaboration in mediation and early warning, provide a strong foundation for the partnerships to grow. Civil society and SADC are both doing instrumental work on peace and security in Southern Africa, and their strong and operational partnership will only make the impact more sustainable for all people in the region.

As such, SADC and civil society should work together to clarify, strengthen and institutionalise their partnership modalities. This includes:

First, CSOs have to align in a regional collective platform. Peace and security civil society organisations can strengthen their collaboration in the form of a centralised regional network in order to demonstrate a united leadership front, build on each other’s work and define the best mechanisms for engagement with SADC. All partners do not all have to share the same goals, but they can define two or three areas for joint work that will be achieved faster with collective effort. The Southern Africa Partnership for the Prevention of Conflict (SAPPC) is bringing together local peacebuilders in the region. Such a platform could be built on.

Second, SADC has to conduct a mapping of relevant civil society partners. SADC can identify diverse local civil society actors working in peacebuilding within the community context based on jointly defined peacebuilding needs and priorities. Some factors to look into during this mapping include:

- Type of peacebuilding work
- Gender and age of leadership and membership
- Previous and ongoing peacebuilding interventions
- Urgent peacebuilding needs and planned initiatives
- Existing capacity needs
- Relationships with the government

⁹ McNamee, Terrence, Muyangwa, Monde. *The State of Peacebuilding in Africa. Lessons Learned for Policymakers and Practitioners.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

Third, SADC and civil society must agree on objectives for their joint work and regularise their engagement structures and communication channels to ensure consistent and coherent engagement methods. This can take the form of bi-monthly exchanges, joint planning processes, civil society forums ahead of major summits and conferences, civil society standing assemblies and appointment of a civil society focal point at the country secretariats, among other activities.

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