

Southern African Development Research Association (SADRA)

Introduction

In November 1981 the Institute of Southern African Studies at the National University of Lesotho organised the first international workshop on regional priorities for the Southern African region, represented by SADCC. Participating at the workshop were scholars from Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Although invited, participants from Angola and Tanzania were unable to come. Outside the SADCC region there were scholars from Canada, India, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Common Ground: Issues Identified

The workshop identified many areas of common concern regarding the current socio-political and economic situation in Southern Africa. There was general agreement about the need to promote locally-based research to support implementation of the SADCC strategy of economic liberation and regional cooperation for development in Southern Africa. The workshop unanimously endorsed the objectives of SADCC and called upon the international community to give maximum support to the SADCC member states in the realisation of their objectives and in resisting the restabilisation policies of South Africa.

The Roma Declaration

- (a) The meeting discussed at some length what they felt were priority areas of research in both the social and natural sciences, bearing in mind areas identified as primary tasks or priority fields of development for the various SADCC member states. Since participants at this workshop were mainly social scientists discussions and technical proposals tended to centre on the social sciences. The workshop concluded by issuing its conclusions in the form of the Roma Declaration. The main points included the following observations. There was general agreement to promote joint research across disciplines, including research undertaken by teams comprising individuals from more than one country. There was consensus on the desirability of all research institutes in the region exchanging information and documentation.
- (b) The participants agreed that a major objective of research efforts in the region should be the provision of a necessary base for the policy choices facing member governments of SADCC in embarking on a strategy to reduce economic dependency on the Republic of South Africa and promoting regional cooperation among themselves. This implied not only research in and on the situation in the various member states of SADCC, but also continuing research on South Africa to monitor and forecast developments in the Republic of South Africa as they affect the neighbouring states of the region. This it was felt, should include inter alia research on the liberation struggle in South Africa and Namibia "the constellation of states" and Bantustanisation.

- (c) Participants at this workshop also endorsed the centrality of research on women and development in the region. Likewise it was agreed that there was a need for deeper analysis of the nature, character and functions of the post-colonial state in the SADC member countries and of the possibilities for, and limits upon, the use of state power to achieve the SADC and national objectives. Many participants at the workshop laid great stress on specific and precise national needs in several areas of development.
- (d) It was accordingly emphasised that every effort should be made by institutions in the SADC region to promote national research manpower capability. This it was felt, would call for greater involvement of students and others in the research process itself, and ensuring that both process and the results of research are integrated into teaching and development.
- (e) It was recognised that the SADC countries would themselves have to struggle to develop the scientific research that would help to build a sound and independent technological basis for the socio-economic development of the SADC region. Further, SADC member states were urged to take note of the already existing research capacity and expertise in the region. The workshop stressed the absolute importance of harnessing and strengthening this local talent and experience, especially by consumers of consultancy services in government and international organisations.
- (f) Utilisation and strengthening of local research capacity can best be done by turning first to local, national or regional institutes for services required, rather than calling in expertise from outside the region. Also governments of SADC member states should be pressed to use local consultants in equal cooperation with external consultants, where local capacity is inadequate. The workshop underlined the existence of much scope for greater cooperation between governments and local universities and research institutions and that such cooperation should be encouraged.
- (g) The workshop deplored the proliferation of aid agreements for research projects which ignore and tend to undermine existing local research capacity. Such agreements tend to favour the employment of international consultants as project managers and research coordinators rather than use local personnel. It was recommended that research institutes in the region act together to develop a framework and self-reliant criteria for more effective evaluation and utilization of the contribution of international agencies to research.

A Continuation Committee

The participants concluded by agreeing to establish a Continuation Committee as part of the necessary follow-up to the workshop. This committee would be given latitude to interact with individual institutions represented at the workshop and other bodies such as the SADC Secretariat, SAUSSC, CODESRIA, AAU, PADIS and others in order to prepare the way for the establishment of SADRA. Existing research institutes were asked to nominate one person from their country to serve on the Continuation Committee.

Meetings of the Continuation Committee

An attempt by the Secretary of the Continuation Committee to convene a meeting to coincide with the fifth SAUSSC meeting in Lusaka in July 1982 did not materialise as only three members of the Committee attended. However, the informal consultations and exchange of views of those attending there were communicated to the SAUSCC meeting which endorsed the principles contained in the Roma Declaration as well as the idea of the formation of SADRA as a SADCC-related body.

The first proper meeting of the Continuation Committee was held in Maputo on 12 August 1982, on the occasion of the UNESCO-sponsored Experts' meeting on Problems and Priorities in Social Science Training in Southern Africa held from 9 to 13 August 1982. The most important decision of this meeting was that the Secretary should propose or arrange that a draft constitution be prepared for discussion at a meeting to be held in the near future. The Secretary was also mandated to continue his efforts to ensure the establishment of SADRA.

The second meeting of the Continuation Committee convened on 28 January 1983 in Maseru. The second meeting was planned to coincide with the Maseru SADCC Summit. This meeting endorsed the tabling of the Roma Declaration by its Secretary before the Maseru Meeting of SADCC. This was considered quite apposite especially in the light of the presentation at and adoption by the SADCC summit held in Maseru of the SADIS memorandum on information and documentation services in the region. A draft constitution for SADRA was reviewed and adopted for presentation at the inaugural conference of SADRA scheduled for mid-October 1983 in Roma, Lesotho. This, it was also agreed that the draft constitution be tabled at the next SADCC meeting scheduled for May 1983 in Tanzania. The second meeting also passed a resolution to condemn the destabilisation policies of the Republic of South Africa in relation to the neighbouring SADCC states and more particularly the recent invasion of Lesotho by the Republic of South Africa which resulted in the deaths of forty-two persons including twelve citizens of Lesotho.

Publicity for Area

It was agreed that members of the Continuation Committee should in the interim, seize every opportunity to publicise widely in their own countries and if possible at other forums the present efforts to set up the Southern African Development Research Association, and to solicit as much support as possible for this important association.

LEONARD NG'ONGCO
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