Fostering a common SADC regional identity through higher education institutions

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ABSTRACT

Finding a common regional identity in Southern Africa will have to be based on a set of common values. This article will argue that the most sustainable attempt to create a common regional identity in the Southern African Development Community must be based on common democratic values. It argues that higher education institutions in the region – currently at the margins of the political project to create a common regional identity, should be at the core of any project to secure a common regional identity in SADC, based on democratic values. Furthermore, this article analyses how higher education in the region can help foster a common regional identity, which, it argues is a pre-condition for building a more sustainable regional integration project. Higher education can play its role in the context of enhancing integration and building a common regional identity based on democratic values in one of two ways: it can either be used as a tool to foster a regional identity either in its own right, or by serving as a catalyst to help along the processes of identity formation. The article analyses the implications–in terms of governance, leadership, and management–for higher education institutions in SADC, if they pursue such a new democratisation mission.

INTRODUCTION

In the Southern African Development Community (SADC), higher education will be crucial to forge a common regional identity, without which regional integration efforts will falter. Unless such a common regional identity is secured, it will be difficult to secure stakeholder participation across SADC for any regional initiative, whether for development or democratisation. "Collective identity is an essential variable in integration theory,

since without changes in identity the most we can expect is behavioral cooperation, not community" (Wendt 1994).

This article analyses how higher education can help to foster a common regional identity, which is a pre-condition for building a more sustainable regional integration project. Furthermore, it will be argued that higher education institutions in the region must foster a regional common identity that is based on the principles of democracy, participative citizenry, solidarity, and inclusive economic development.

All states in the SADC have higher education institutions. These are institutions of "shared learning". This means that higher education institutions in the region are at the core of any project to secure a common regional identity in SADC and are of cardinal importance for the success of a regional integration project. Higher education can play its role in the context of enhancing integration and building a common regional identity in one of two ways: it can either be used as a tool to foster regional integration and identity either in its own right, or by serving as a catalyst to help along the processes of identity formation and integration.

Traditionally, higher education institutions have played a crucial role in assisting countries and regions to manage the complex challenges of changing societies, technology and the world. Higher education institutions have played an important role in "structuring the life and development of the community" (Jarab 2006:36) in other regional attempts at integration, such as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Community. Education is not only a vehicle for the transmission of values, but also reproduces values. The role of higher education in SADC should be to foster democratic values, be an active mediator in the discourse that seeks to advance these values and actively defend them.

WIDER SOCIETAL ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The traditional role of higher education institutions is to be of service to society, through laying the basis of "sustainable employment, preparation for citizenship, personal development, (and) advancement of the knowledge base" (Jareb 2006:46). Perhaps the best description of the role of higher education, given the quest by most countries to become *knowledge societies*, is one that defines their role as including: "besides independent inquiry and free advancement of acquired knowledge (but also through these activities), steady contributions to developing social order and a sense of basic values in societies, cultivating of national identity as well as an open-minded understanding of international and universal merits, promotion of democratic citizenship and sensitivity to human and natural environment both locally and globally, setting of academic objectives, training for practical flexibility as well as teaching in critical thinking" (Jareb 2006:31).

Higher education institutions are of service to their societies through "contributing to the solution of fundamental problems concerning the quality of life, and by giving substance to a citizenship that is ethically based... Thus universities (higher education) must teach, they must help produce technologies and create professional figures that are of use to the country. They must not only make a contribution to analysing society in a critical way but also help solving its problems and improving its conditions" (Conference of Italian University Rectors 2011:4).

De Boer-Buquicchio (2006:172), the then deputy general secretary of the Council of Europe, addressing university leaders in that region, put the dual challenge for higher education institutions thus: how could higher education institutions "on the one hand ensure

that universities (higher education) solve short-term problems in the societies of which they are part, and on the other hand maintain sufficient distance to these societies to take a longer term view and work not only to solve short-term problems but also to solve fundamental concerns of societies – the concerns that define us as societies and human beings and not only as customers and economic actors?"
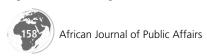
Many higher education institutions in SADC since independence for most of this period either operated as *ivory towers*, standing aloof from the project of the overall development and democratisation of SADC (or individual countries), or have merely followed the political leaders' often flawed dictates. The social fabric of societies that come out of colonial and racial oppression or that wage liberation struggles or civil wars (as has been the case in SADC), are often brittle. The concerns that define us as societies and as human beings are more pronounced.

Regional identity in SADC has been partially based on common experiences of colonial and racial oppression, a persistent colonial legacy of underdevelopment, continued ethnic divisions, and limited (if any) democracies. Anti-colonial and anti-apartheid movements, once in government, have failed to move individual SADC nations (and the region) from a common identity based on this common negative experience towards a positive identity of quality democracies, inclusive societies, and sustainable economies. Given the failure of liberation movements to take a lead on this (and the fact that they seem unlikely to come up with solutions to these problems in the immediate future), and given the urgency of finding solutions, higher education institutions will have to provide leadership in forging a new common identity for SADC.

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AT SUPRA-NATIONAL LEVELS

Whatever their theoretical approach to identity, most scholars put emphasis on the idea of the *nation* as a flexible social construction which is changeable (Hobsbawm 1992). Importantly, identities can be conceived as both social process and political project (Katzenstein 1996). Ignatieff (1998:18) puts it succinctly: "National identity is not fixed or stable: it is a continuing exercise in the fabrication of illusion and the elaboration of convenient fables about 'who we are'". This means that it is possible to create new patterns of identification (Baki 2009). Finally, identities are central determinants of state behaviour. Katzenstein (1996) argues that changes in state identity may affect national interests and state policies directly. He points to the importance of socially constructed shared norms, culture[1] and values in the forging of identities (Katzenstein 1996). Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue that identity can be the basis for the collective solidarity that makes collective action possible.

Researchers have mulled over how to resolve the collective action problem: how to "socialise" states to cooperate with other states in an international community. Those of the realist school in international relations have taken a materialist line, arguing that "power and human nature preclude significant cooperation" among states (Wendt 1994:384). Realists have argued that states are by nature self-interested, and thus could never form collective identities, because they would not be interested in advancing the welfare of other states (Baki 2009). Idealists, on the other hand, have argued that co-operation is possible, with significant knowledge of each other and appropriate institutions (Wendt 1994).

Rationalists have based their arguments on Olsen's (1965) thesis which takes self-interest as given, but considers the kind of incentives that can be provided to persuade individuals or states to co-operate. Scholars using the constructivist approach reacted to neo-liberalism and neo-realism, making a case for the creation of regional communities to foster security and peace (Sudo 2002; Acharya 2001). Collective identity is a pillar of integration theory of the constructivist school.

Integration theorists argue that collective identification is crucial in creating a supra-national community (Deutsch *et al.* 1957). Collective identity makes collective "social or political action" possible (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). They argue that collective identity has the ability to induce actors (in this case states) to define each other's welfare as part of their own welfare. Wendt (1994) argues that "interests are dependent on identities". Katzenstein (1996) in turn argues that changes in state identities affect national interests, and subsequently policies. The construction of collective identity helps to provide the *we-feeling,* a sense of solidarity and community which is crucial for any regional integration project to succeed.

Abad (2007), a director at the ASEAN secretariat in Jakarta, argues that *social construction*, in the form of (regional) identity and community building, is a far better way of promoting peace, stability and cooperation, than approaches "such as the pre-occupation with balance of power or strategic equilibrium" (Abad 2007). In the context of Southern Africa, regional integration is obviously beneficial because countries "can pursue their social and economic development aspirations without their survival, independence and well-being being threatened by anyone" (Abad 2007) in or outside the neighbourhood.

FACTORS, ACTORS PRACTICES, PROCESSES IN REGIONAL COLLECTIVE CONSTRUCTION

Regions, which are more complex social entities, "acquire and maintain identities based on the degree to which both internal and external audiences develop shared understandings about the key features of life and work in a region" (Romanelli and Khessina 2005). Residents and non-residents could, for example, through their shared understandings of the key features of life and work in a region, respond in similar ways, through either moving their investments there or relocating there, in order to secure the perceived benefits of the opportunities in the region. "Regional identity influences the developmental capacities of regions through informing the understandings of observers and directing their geographic targets of investment" (Romanelli and Khessina 2005).

Regions, such as the SADC consist of multiple types of social and business activity, and can (through political and economic agreements) transcend economic, political and physical boundaries. Regions may also be characterised in terms of "cultural, political and industrial characteristics". Although the emphasis traditionally has been on external characterisations of a region, "the process of identity formation often starts with socially negotiated agreements" among individual countries who want to construct a supra-national identity. SADC is an example of such a negotiated regional identity construct (Romanelli and Khessina 2005).

Much of the literature on the formation of regional identity (especially those publications under the aegis of *new regionalism*) have considered primarily economic integration, generally based on the premise that economic factors drive regionalism. Regional collective

identity formation should be seen on three levels: as a social process, as economic development, and as a political project. Seen as a social process, "identities flow through multiple networks and create new patterns of identification" (Baki 2009). Some researchers argue that "positive identification and interaction between the members (of a regional body) would lead" to a positive *we-feeling* (Aggestam 1999). Deutsch *et al.* (1957) argue that different social-communicative processes between states may affect their identities and interests. High levels of interaction encourage *we-feeling* and common identity. The "mutual responsiveness and compatibility may... make possible new repertoires of action and behavior" (Aggestam 1999). Indeed, collective identity can form because of increased interactions (Buzan 1993) between states, for example through increased trade or capital flows (Wendt 1994).

A prerequisite then for a durable regional community is for member states to interact with each other, to socialise and cooperate with each other. Common regional institutions help to foster a sense of regional identity. The act of carrying out common decisions, voting in unison in international fora, and so on (and the expectation by member states of the same regional grouping that they should vote as a collective and take common positions), in turn helps to foster the forces of regional identity and integration (Aggestam 1999). Community building at the inter-state level, where "cooperation in social and cultural spheres creates positive mutual perceptions, makes people identify with each other, and addresses potential irritants among neighbouring states with adjacent borders and resources" (Abad 2007).

In some regions, leaders have tried to use symbols (such as a common regional flag, as in the case of ASEAN) or common currency (the European Union is one example) to forge regional identity, and to help construct feelings of community. Individual leaders can attempt to foster a common regional identity and integration through speeches, documents and statements, but it is important that promoters of regional integration frame it to the broader public not as a threat to their national identity, but as an "enhancement of multiple identities" (Bull 1977).

Building "mutual understanding among the people" (Abad 2007) is core to regional identity formation. Fostering people-to-people solidarity has been a key element of most successful regional identity formation initiatives. Trust is crucial in the "development of common definitions of problems and appropriate actions" (March and Olsen 1998).

Regional identity can also be fostered by the establishment of common economic development projects, common policies on specific issues, free trade zones, or allowing the free movement of people. Such common economic development projects must be seen as beneficial by both the elites and the ordinary citizens.

Another approach has been for countries in a region to create security communities, an argument that was first made by Deutsch (1953). He conceptualised a *security community* as "transnational regional in which the positive identification and interaction between members would lead to a decline of military force and a rise in the expectancy of peaceful relations". This approach only became influential at the end of the 1980s, following the end of the Cold War (Sudo 2002; Acharya 2001). SADC, the European Union and ASEAN were all examples of this. Many projects of regional integration have been on the basis of how to avoid the recurrence of war, and how to establish permanent peace (Acharya 2001).

Collective identity is formed in relation to a common *other*, whether potential environmental disaster, or threats of invasion by others, or just the threat of a nearby big

power. The emergence of what Wendt (1994) calls a *common other* may increase the incentive to identify with other states.

Lasting regional identity is built on specific norms and values. An important ingredient for collective identity is for social learning to take place, where the different "actors involved begin to reassess their fundamental beliefs and values" (Aggestam 1999). In this process, states embrace a common new set of values and norms agreed upon by the collective. Acharya (2005) argues that the creation of new identities based on new norms, values and cultures in a region, in themselves promote regional order.

REGIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION IN SADC: NATURE, PATTERNS AND CHALLENGES

It will be crucial for SADC to create a collective identity for the regional integration project to succeed. The region will have to Southern Africanise on the basis of democracy and inclusive economic development. Such Southern Africanisation could refer to "processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalisation of formal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ways of doing things and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of (SADC) decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourses, identities, political structures and public policies"[2]. Clearly, SADC is far from this scenario.

Many of the divisions and separations imposed by colonial rule and apartheid still remain. Groups of countries in the region were colonised by different colonial powers – Britain, Portugal, France, and Belgium. Institutions (including those involved in higher education) were modelled on those in the *mother country*, and moulded in the distinct *mother country* identity. Like elsewhere on the continent, most SADC countries were carved up arbitrarily by colonial powers, with national borders running through existing communities.

Many of the region's peoples have interacted for centuries. During the colonial and apartheid periods, migrant work was common, with many of the region's men either voluntarily or forcibly recruited to work on mines in South Africa. The interaction between the peoples of the region before and during colonialism and apartheid means that, despite their many differences, most SADC cultures overlap substantially. The basis of collective regional identity is their *interconnected differences.*

SADC was initially set up as a security community to protect members against apartheid South Africa, and to create alternative economic development options separate from South Africa. Not all regional countries were then members. Some rallied behind apartheid South Africa or stayed neutral. At the core of the anti-apartheid regional community were countries led by radical liberation movements. Within these core countries new political identities were formed that in some cases transcended the colonial country's political identities. Members of the South African Customs Union were locked into South Africa's economic and political ambit. When the SADC was constituted these political differences ran deep. This legacy has meant that, on occasion, members of SADC still see their common collective identity as being against South Africa.

Individual SADC leaders have tried to create a sense of solidarity and community for the regional integration project by agitating for it in speeches, documents and statements. Linked

to that, regional leaders have often rhetorically attacked big powers, former colonisers and *imperialists* as opponents of the region – as part of a *them against us* narrative, aimed at fostering a common regional identity, replacing apartheid South Africa as common enemy against whom the region should defend itself. In this narrative of *us* (SADC) and *them* (former colonisers and imperialists), the idea of a regional identity based on democracy has been severely undermined, as SADC leaders regularly band together to protect local autocrats, or to dismiss outside criticism of undemocratic behaviour.

SADC leaders and political elites have attempted to forge a common regional identity through regular meetings, voting as a collective, and socialising as a collective. Member states expect each other to carry out decisions, vote e.g. in international fora, as part of SADC. Such expectation (and performance) helps to further foster the forces of regional identity and integration (Aggestam 1999).

SADC institutions have adopted policies and attempted to harmonise individual country policies to these, but so far, collective identity through regional policies has had uneven success. Individual countries routinely ignore implementing policies that they themselves voted for. For example, most of the SADC regional policies talk about *constitutionality, gender equality*, and *human rights*, yet individual governments regularly ignore these concepts. Although transparency, press freedom, and openness are ostensibly SADC policies, almost every country in SADC has secrecy laws that date from the colonial era, which set high penalties for individual journalists and activists who blow the whistle on official wrong-doing (Gumede 2011).

The challenge for SADC has been that the process of regional integration has so far produced uneven behavioural cooperation between states – this is the case even among the national elites who have mainly driven regional integration so far – resulting in an uneven sense of community and solidarity between both states and communities within the region. Progress on collective action has been minimal. The region has had no uniform and mutually beneficial policy towards interacting with outside powers, and no common foreign policy. A common response to regional problems has often been lacking. Individual countries often do not vote according to SADC agreements in international fora, but according their individual interests.

SADC leaders remain preoccupied with the idea of national sovereignty, the so-called *non-interference* principle, which effectively means that SADC cannot intervene in member states when they rule badly. As a result SADC cannot effectively deal with problems such as undemocratic behaviour, corruption, or human rights violations by member states, even though domestic strife in one country threatens the stability and well-being of the whole region. SADC often operates using the lowest common denominator approach, which results in inertia in decision-making, and the region has been unable to deal effectively with Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe. Unless, SADC moves away from the national sovereignty model, towards one that is more collectively beneficial, progress on regional integration (Hill and Wallace 1996), peace and development will remain a distant dream.

SADC's regional integration and common identity project was initially started as a political process through the formation of a security community, at the heart of which is the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, which was supposed to play *a vanguard role* in promoting peace and stability. Although SADC signed a mutual defence pact in 2004, the organ has fostered a regional identity based on the defence of human rights abuses (especially in Zimbabwe and Swaziland).

Apart from the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, seven regional institutions have so far been created:

- the Summit of Heads of State and Government,
- the SADC Tribunal,
- the Council of Ministers,
- the Sectoral/Cluster Ministerial Committees,
- the SADC Secretariat,
- the Standing Committee of Senior Officials, and
- the SADC National Committees.

In these regional institutions, elites of the member states interact and socialise, and a sense of community and identity is supposed to develop. Most of these institutions have ended up as jobs-for-pals networks. They are ineffective talk-shops that have little popular legitimacy (let alone participation), and this has undermined the formation of a common regional identity.

Some leaders have attempted to build "a regional awareness and fostering mutual understanding among the people" (Abad 2007:3) of SADC, but this process has been uneven, and the development of *we-feelings* among the general populace of SADC has been even more uneven. The xenophobic attacks against Africans in South Africa in 2007 are a case in point. *We-feelings* appear to be restricted to political leaders, who express solidarity primarily by supporting each other's undemocratic behaviour. Any regional identity appears to have been at the level of the elite, and not at the grassroots level.

There is an absence of shared values among SADC member states. Members range from absolute monarchies run along despotic lines (such as Swaziland) to reasonably well-functioning democracies (such as Mauritius). This lack of shared values (specifically shared democratic values) undermines co-operation among the member states. Regional dictators are happily in power, looting their countries and clobbering their citizens, while SADC remains conspicuously silent. It is clear that the governance system of SADC has not yet been institutionalised. Regional institutions have not been fully stabilised, with individual leaders often (as in the case of the security organ) using them for self-interest.

Instilling democratic values in SADC must certainly rank as the least successful aspect of regional integration. The domination of SADC institutions by undemocratic leaders has on occasion created the perception of a regional identity characterised by undemocracy. *Social learning* (Aggestam's reassessment of *fundamental beliefs* and values) appears not to have happened to any great extent among the political leaders of SADC. The region does have a core of democratic governments – South Africa, Botswana and Mauritius – but the *fundamental beliefs and values* of non-democratic governments appear to dominate the political culture of SADC.

If regional integration is to be a success, democratic values will have to underpin regional identity construction. Most of SADC's liberation movements have been dominated by military wings – Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique. As a result the undemocratic political culture in individual SADC countries has spilled over into SADC.

Regional institutions in SADC will only generate their stabilising properties once leaders consistently adopt democratic roles and behaviours, and the expectation of democratic behaviour is generated among all leaders (Barnett 1993). Any regional identity initiative must go beyond elites and limited leadership circles to include ordinary citizens. It needs to be

based on the common values, norms, and political culture of democracy. Crafting an inclusive regional identity for SADC will be at the heart of any effective attempts at regional integration.

As a political project, political leaders, elites and regional institutions have attempted to foster a sense a regional identity and integration through a *top-down* process (Baki 2009). Political leaders have attempted to communicate the merits of regional integration to their citizens and to external audiences, but crafting a more *bottom-up* regional identity has rarely been on the official agenda. Non-governmental groups, civil society, organised business, labour, or communities have generally been on the margins of decision-making. Not much progress has been made in the development of *we-feelings* among ordinary citizens and communities in the region (Sudo 2002; Acharya 2001).

Among the core challenges for the SADC region is to turn the negotiated regional identity that has been constructed into a thriving industrial development and democratic identity. Human security – fostered by both democracy and economic development at domestic level in each SADC member state – will provide a strong foundation for stability and harmony, not only for individual states but also at regional level. These challenges undermine not only the formation of a more sustainable common SADC regional identity, but also undermine the kind of regional identity formed.

Instead of a regional identity that is based on democracy and inclusiveness, an identity based on the negativity of exclusion, human rights abuses, and ethnic division has taken root in significant parts of SADC. Economic development has largely taken place along lines that benefit small elites rather than a wider majority. Only inclusive economic prosperity across the region will promote a common sense of identity in individual countries and on a regional level.

REGIONAL IDENTITY AND DEMOCRATISATION: ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

SADC: National identities in the context of diverse societies

Most SADC countries have had to build national identities within the context of ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse societies with politically divided pasts. The diversity bequeathed by colonialism and apartheid means that nation-hood in most SADC countries cannot but be a *layered,* plural, and inclusive one, involving "self-enforced communities, always potentially – and in the absence of the (colonial or apartheid) state, actually – in gruesome conflict with one another" (Khilnani 1999).

Centuries of colonialism and apartheid have meant that SADC country cultures are not *gated communities* with fixed borders, but more often than not overlap considerably (Khilnani 1999). National identity in individual SADC countries is one of *interconnected differences.* The challenge for individual SADC countries is how to build a common identity on the basis of their interconnected differences. The fact that individual SADC countries are so ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse should be a central plank of the unique national identity of each country, and the multiple identities of individual SADC countries should be the basis of their shared nation-hood. At the same time, the basis of SADC's regional identity must also be based on multiple identities, which may be diverse, but which are also interconnected.

The fact that most SADC countries are so diverse means that common national identities will have to be based on a political construct. Such political constructs would be based on democratic constitutions, values, rules, and political culture. This common national identity would have to be woven around the idea of an inclusive democracy, which means that the conduct of political leaders, institutions and cultures must also be based on democratic values. Such political constructs will have to be continuously reinforced by leaders, parties and institutions consistently and actively upholding a democratic political culture. Common national identity is unlikely to come by decree, by good intentions, or by public statements.

This also means that political leaders and parties must govern inclusively at all times; they cannot favour one ethnic, language or regional grouping over another. Many regional leaders and parties have stayed in power by playing off ethnic groups against each other. Some have based their rule on favouring one ethnic group, faction, or regional grouping over others, either through appointments in the civil service, government tenders or business licences, or through selected development of areas and people allied to particular ethnic groups, political factions, or favoured regions. If the poor majority in SADC countries remain poor while small elites become fabulously prosperous, an inclusive collective identity is unlikely to take hold.

Since democracy should be at the heart of individual national identities, undermining democracy necessarily undermines the formation of a common collective identity. Because collective identity in individual SADC countries will be based on the idea of a political construct, there are some obvious pitfalls. A democratic identity necessitates widespread public trust in the democratic system, institutions, and the state itself. Democratic institutions (such as the courts, the media, civil society, and higher education institutions) are critical watchdogs to ensure that the values of democracy are lived out in everyday routines. Some of the liberation movements now in government (including ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe, or the MPLA in Angola) have ruled by manipulating institutions that were supposed to advance democracy (such as the judiciary, elections, and constitutions). This has undermined the idea of a national identity based on interconnected differences.

A democratic state is central to building a collective national identity based on democracy. The democratic state and its related institutions are central unifying symbols around which diverse citizens can rally. The legitimacy of the state in SADC countries will hinge on whether it delivers public services fairly to all its citizens. A combination of lack of delivery, a non-democratic state, and the perceptions that only a few elites connected to the top ruling party leaders' benefit will erode the legitimacy of the state as a common symbol of national identity. Absolute loyalty must not be to a party, leader or tribe, but to democratic constitutions.

Another prerequisite is for the talents of all citizens (and not only those of the same colour, party or faction) to be used. Otherwise too many people are left marginalised or excluded. Seeking exclusive definitions of who is an African (or an Angolan, or a Zimbabwean) undermines national and regional identity formation. SADC leaders will have to govern more democratically.

Common national identities in SADC countries will have to be built as a mosaic of the best elements of societies' diverse past and present, histories and cultures. This does not mean committing cultural suicide, but cultures must be practised in such a way that they do not conflict with democratic values, human dignity, and respect for others. Democracy

must always trump cultural practices. For example, individual cultures cannot undermine gender equality.

Freedom of expression is also critical. Tolerance for differences (whether ethnic, cultural, or differences of opinion) is crucial in diverse societies – in fact it may be the glue that holds such societies together. Unfortunately, a defining aspect of SADC's post-independence period is that most ruling parties and leaders have been highly intolerant of differences. Higher education institutions – many of whom were highly critical of the human rights abuses under colonial and apartheid rule – have in the post-independence dispensation been silent in the face of autocratic, corrupt and incompetent ruling parties and leaders.

Role of higher education in fostering a regional identity based on democratisation

Higher education, more than other social actors, has the potential to interpret (Berlinguer 2006:123) a common Southern African regional identity. However, SADC higher education institutions have lagged behind in interpreting the outlines of a common regional identity (and national identities), leaving this to the politicians – with clearly disastrous effects.

Higher education institutions in the region could be the core institutions of common regional identity in SADC as institutions of shared learning, and are cardinal for the success of a regional integration project. So far, SADC higher education institutions have not considered themselves as core institutions of regional identity and integration, and have therefore not effectively played this role.

A regional identity that is based on the values of democracy is the most sustainable way to build an inclusive common regional identity for SADC. The regional governance system of SADC itself will have to be built on genuinely democratic principles, solidarity, and inclusion, and individual SADC countries will need to be governed along these democratic lines also.

So far, higher education institutions have not been seen by regional leaders as regional institutions on par with SADC institutions (such as the SADC Secretariat). At places of higher education citizens interact, socialise, and learn together. This should make higher education institutions ideal places to foster a common regional identity, solidarity, and community based on democratic values.

Higher education institutions are sites of education for *democratic citizenship* (Virgilo, former rector of Lisbon University, quoted in Jarab 2006). They should be "giving substance to a citizenship that is ethically based" (Conference of Italian University Rectors 2004). Citizens in SADC have often not engaged with the political structures of society, in part because ruling parties and leaders have discouraged such engagement through autocratic and self-interested behaviour. Producing graduates who are both engaged and critical thinkers is crucial for the region's democratisation and development.

Higher education must be the place where democratic values are lived, practised and promoted – it must be a vehicle for the transmission of values (Chisholm 2005:51). Higher education institutions in SADC must pro-actively transmit democratic values, rather than just producing individuals with degrees of competency. Higher education will have to produce critical minds, and graduates who have the ability to self-reflect and self-criticise (Hadjipavlou 2005).

Higher education can be a "catalyst of changed individual and collective self-understandings" (Jarab 2006), and can take the lead in questioning received values (Sen 1999) which are undemocratic. Higher education institutions will, for example, have to change the received values by which women are discriminated against, often under the aegis of culture.

Higher education institutions often train the decision-makers who "define the ways of social behaviour" (Barblan in Jarab 2006) of citizens. In many SADC countries, leaders and elites have at times behaved appallingly, going on luxury spending sprees in Western capitals while ordinary citizens live in grinding poverty. SADC higher education institutions will have to produce graduates who are more socially conscious, with a greater sense of public duty, empathy, and solidarity with society's vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Higher education institutions play a critical role in building tolerant societies, a prerequisite for collective identity formation in diverse societies. In order to build tolerant societies, higher education institutions must themselves be tolerant communities. Higher education institutions in SADC have unfortunately mirrored the intolerance of their societies, rather than being exporters of tolerance to the rest of society. Instead they must play the role of transmitting democratic values in their own immediate communities, in the societies of which they are a part, and across the region. Such an expanded role will mean that higher education institutions will be active in broader societal and political discourses, and be actively involved in the non-formal learning of democratic values as well as everyday life learning (Chisholm 2005:51).

Traditionally, higher education institutions have tended not to get involved in politics, although during the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, some higher institutions actively participated in the public realm, promoting democratic values and opposing the apartheid governments. In the post-apartheid (and post-colonial) period, higher education institutions in SADC will have to stand clearly and publicly for the values of democracy. This does not mean aligning themselves with political parties, but they must clearly oppose undemocratic practices by ruling parties, opposition forces, and civil society.

Higher education institutions will have to challenge (and provide platforms for others to challenge) outdated undemocratic practices in individual SADC countries and in the region as a whole. They must offer platforms where democratic values, the inclusivity of development and diversity, and the quality of freedom, are constantly reassessed, evaluated and debated. In most SADC countries democracy is viewed very narrowly (as only elections), or has been dismissed as *unAfrican*, or has been embraced only in public rhetoric. It is the role of higher education institutions to shift this limited discourse on democracy towards one that interrogates how to foster quality democracies.

Higher education institutions in SADC should (as institutions) become spaces of dissent within society. SADC countries desperately lack institutions that can freely dissent against the cultural, political and economic choices of ruling elites. Higher education institutions must be able to question and review the accepted features (Jarab 2006:60) of the kind of collective, national or regional identity being promoted by ruling elites.

Higher education institutions are well placed to provide the *common references* that could *frame* (Barblan 2006:15) a national and regional discourse on the social agenda that will be the basis of common national and regional identities. Higher education institutions in SADC have rarely played this role effectively. The national and regional discourses

informing the social agenda for common national and regional identities in SADC currently lack substance, are often outdated and disjointed, and lack common reference points – and credible institutions to frame such reference points.

Higher education institutions must also lead the debate on culture in the region, where elites often hide behind *culture* to dehumanise citizens and oppress women. Elites have in some cases built a discourse against outsiders criticising undemocratic behaviour, arguing that their behaviour is part of indigenous culture. Any individual criticising such culture is then dismissed as an agent of the former colonial powers. This abuse of culture has undermined both democracy and inclusive economic development throughout the region. Higher education institutions have to lead the debunking of this abuse of culture for the purposes of self-enrichment.

Finally, higher education institutions will have to promote the idea of "interconnected differences", based on respect for diversity and for the equality of treatment of different communities. The regional integration project in SADC and the nation-building projects in individual nations have in most cases repeated the patterns of apartheid or colonialism which favoured one ethnic, political, regional, or gender group. This has often been reflected in higher education, with higher education institutions in some cases dominated (whether in management, or in the student body) by one ethnic group, region or class. The democratic project within SADC nations and the region will go nowhere unless a meritocratic culture, which balances those historically disadvantaged, is actively promoted and lived.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Foster greater independence

Higher education institutions will have to be autonomous, but also have a mutually beneficial relationship with the state, society, and other stakeholders. The underlying principle of such cooperative relationships must be academic freedom. Higher education institutions in SADC must propose that laws are introduced in all countries which entrench the institutional independence of higher education institutions.

Academic freedom at individual and institutional level

Higher education institutions in the region will not be able to play their full roles in development, democratisation and regional identity formation unless academic freedom at individual and institutional levels becomes a reality (Jarab 2006:35). Academic freedom should "guarantee freedom of expression and of action, freedom of disseminating information, as well as freedom of unrestricted inquiry in the pursuit and distribution of knowledge and truth" (Jarab 2006:28).

One cannot argue for institutional independence, and then reject freedom of expression at the individual level (which has often been the case in the region). One critical problem in SADC countries that has undermined democratisation is that liberation movement culture (and the various interpretations of traditional culture) has not seen freedom of expression,

critical reflection and different opinions as public goods. At the same time, in some countries in the region's laws and regulations do not allow for sufficient autonomy of higher education institutions, sometimes tying these institutions tightly to the state (as just another appendage of the state).

When higher education institutions in SADC start to question national routines (Jarab 2006:47), it is likely that they may come under attack from politicians and entrenched interests in society. Most governments in SADC are in practice opposed to criticism from their own citizens. As one researcher aptly stated "there is a close relationship between the attitude of a government toward free thought in general and the willingness of that government to grant autonomy to higher education institutions" (Isaxanli 2010).

Need for a free movement of academic labour

Regional integration cannot work unless there is a free movement of labour within the region. The first step should be to make the free movement of students, researchers and staff within the region a real possibility. Higher education institutions should lobby SADC governments to introduce a free pass system for students, researchers and academics. There needs to be greater student, academic and staff mobility between higher education institutions in the region. Institutions will also have to be more involved in the non-formal learning process (where a large part of learning takes place, particularly among the young) through exchange and mobility programs.

Spending at least a quarter at a SADC higher education institution in another country could be made compulsory for postgraduate degrees, and undergraduate students could be encouraged to spend time in another country during the study period. The free movement of labour is crucial in building a common regional education identity – it is important not only for people-to-people bonds, but also at the broader level to strengthen regional integration itself. One practical idea is for the creation of a Southern African higher education area and a Southern African research area, within a specific time-frame, which would set the framework for the free movement of researchers, staff and students across the region[3]. This will need legislative changes at the SADC political level.

Creation of common programmes, curricula and *equivalent* status

Common programmes and exchanges of students, academics and staff are fundamental. Degrees, qualifications and skills must be made more comparable and transferable between higher education institutions in the region[4]. Given the acute skills deficit in the region, lifelong and continuous education must become one of the pillars of the higher education system in SADC. There needs to be a move towards a policy of "equivalent" status, standards and examinations in the region, and the harmonisation of curricula content and qualification structures. All these are crucial in developing a common regional higher education identity.

The lack of standardised curricula has been a major impediment to the free movement of academic labour within the region. Greater exchange between institutions, the use of technology to make knowledge available to poorer-resourced institutions, and ensuring that equivalent exchanges from more industrial and emerging markets' institutions take place with poorer-resourced institutions will go a long way in boosting these institutions. Finally,

standardising curricula, the creation of common programmes, and increasing exchanges are crucial in forging a common higher education identity in SADC.

Changing value system of research and teaching

There will have to be a debate on the value system of research and teaching, which varies from one group to another, and on which subject-centred sciences are based (Jarab 2006:49). Higher education institutions must stay true to the values of truth, integrity and quality. Higher education institutions in SADC must collectively decide on the standards – one of the key values, of research and teaching. Perhaps higher education institutions in SADC must come up with a code of conduct for research and teaching, which commits them to basic ethical practices and principles[5].

Improve the position of women in the higher education system

Throughout the SADC region, women are generally worse off than men, including in terms of higher education. Gender inequality in SADC is high, with *culture* often used to legitimise the subjugation of women. Higher education institutions will have to change the received values that perpetuate gender inequality. On this score, higher education institutions will have to educate not only their own immediate constituency, but also broader society. More women must obviously be appointed to critical positions in higher education institutions, but (as importantly) critical subjects which are in most cases inaccessible to women must be opened up. For example, special programmes must be set up by SADC higher education institutions to bring women into scarce skills programmes, such as science and engineering.

Using technology better, to expand the reach of higher education

To expand higher education, institutions will have to dramatically upscale e-learning activities. There has been much talk about using technological innovations, such as information and communications technologies to expand the reach of higher education in SADC. However, so far there is very little development of such infrastructure. Higher education resources in SADC are unevenly distributed, and concentrated in specific centres. Effective e-learning can help bridge the resources gap by sharing resources, and e-learning could be a solution to the overcrowded lecture rooms and large class sizes characteristic of SADC of higher institutions. It is therefore imperative for SADC higher education institutions to "mainstream e-learning in education, training and research in a sustainable way" (Felt and Glanz 2005:22).

A new arrangement of higher education institutions in SADC

Higher education can only be the central motor in regional integration if higher education institutions are more tightly integrated at the regional level. Close co-operation between higher education institutions would also boost the effort to foster a common higher education identity in the region. Successful integration of higher education institutions can provide a practical example of effective regional integration (Berlinguer 2006). So far, the co-operation

between higher institutions within SADC has been weak, diffused, and mostly at the level of rhetoric. There is little compatibility between higher education institutions in the region, with differential levels of resources, different curricula, different traditions (based on different colonisers), and so on. Research institutions, infrastructure and policies in SADC have been fragmented, leading to inefficiencies.

Higher education institutions in the region may have to be restructured on a differentiated model, with a core group of large metropole universities, and locally specific subject-based regional or local ones. This would be augmented by virtual campuses in areas where there are no higher education institutions. Furthermore, within the higher education system of SADC there will have to be a better alignment between universities and vocational institutions[6]. In this new model, higher education institutions in the region would be linked strongly to the locally identified development and industrial clusters.

At the centre of these would be strong specialised research institutes, each having a regional centre with country chapters. In this way scarce resources could be secured, allocated, and directed more efficiently. Research needs and foci aimed at the overall development of the region and individual countries could also be better determined. Foreign donors have often provided funding to SADC countries more focused on the donors' research and development agendas and priorities, than those of the region and individual SADC countries. Thus far in SADC there has been a lot of duplication of funding, research and exchanges.

The first task would be to identify the areas of specialisation of higher education institutions. The second task would be to align higher education institutions into clearly defined industrial clusters around specific comparative advantages. The existing relationship of local higher education institutions with their equivalents in developed and developing countries must be strengthened in a much more coherent way, and new relationships of knowledge exchange and collaboration established with emerging markets.

Stronger internal governance of higher institutions

To respond effectively to the challenges of democratisation and economic development, higher education institutions will need stronger internal governance systems. The internal governance systems of higher education institutions must highlight key values, including a real commitment to promoting democracy, the value systems of research and teaching (through, for example, quality assurance and control systems), and commitment to good corporate governance, accountability and efficient management.

The challenge is to "reconcile autonomy over teaching and research choices with managerial responsibility" (De Boer 2006:175). SADC higher education institutions will have to show a "firm commitment to the principles of democratic governance, genuine respect for equality and non-discrimination and responsiveness to the needs of all members of the academic community, including students and administration" (De Boer 2006:175). Crucially, higher education in SADC will have to show greater "personal accountability of leadership, performance management based on peer review and student satisfaction, (and) independent audit(s)" (De Boer 2006:175). Furthermore, higher education institutions will have to "show democratic attitudes of openness…, transparency, communication and feedback, critique and debate, dispute resolution, thus proving an absence of idiosyncrasy, arbitrariness and privilege" (Meira Soares quoted in Jarab 2006:54).

CONCLUSION

SADC (and Africa) needs new ideas, a new direction, and a new meaning of what it is to be Southern African (or even African), beyond the usual post-independence interpretations. In fact, the discourse to a common identity formation in SADC needs new objectives, new concepts and new words (Roversi-Monaco 2006:11). The challenge is how to base SADC's common identity on democracy. Higher education has a critical role as both, a catalyst, mediator, and critical partner. Yet, so far, higher education institutions have yet to effectively play their role as pro-active critical partners and mediating platforms in fostering a regional identity based on democracy.

NOTES

1   Throughout this article, the definition of culture is based on Vertzberger (1990:267). Vertzberger defines culture as "… a unified set of ideas that are shared by the members of a society and that establish a set of shared premises, values, expectations, and action predispositions among the members of the nation that as a whole constitutes the national style".

2   This is based on Radaelli's (2000) definition of Europeanisation.

3   Europe has already pledged to create a European higher education area and a European research area, which aims to tightly integrate higher education institutions in Europe. The aim there is to harmonise degrees, qualifications, curricula, mobility of researchers, staff and students, and so on.

4   See the European debate in Berlinguer (2006:126).

5   Higher institutions in Europe have established a European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, which states: "Researchers should focus their research for the good of mankind and for expanding the frontiers of scientific knowledge, while enjoying the freedom of thought and expression, and the freedom to identify methods by which problems are solved, according to recognized ethical principles and practices" (Commission of the European Communities 2005:576).

6   In Austria, Germany and the Netherlands, vocational institutions offer more hands-on education to prepare students to enter the labour market immediately. "Their curricula are generally more clearly structured, follow stricter time schedules, involve more actors from outside academia and offer the advantage of shorter study times" (Felt and Glanz 2005:19).

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