



SARPN/CPS Roundtable Meeting on linkages between Democracy and Development

Over the last 20 years, a wave of democratic transitions has swept across Southern African states. It is now accepted that these transitions have not been matched by the consolidation of democracy¹ Hence while a substantial number of the region's states are said to be formal democracies, adhering to the minimum requirement of democracy such as holding elections - the substance of democracy is less developed as demonstrated by the poor capacity of states to - demonstrate responsiveness to the needs of their citizenry; ensure the effective participation of citizens in policy and decision-making, tackle social injustice challenges such as land dispossession.² In countries where democracies are even more fragile, dominant executives, weak parliaments, weak or non-existent opposition parties, human rights abuses and restrictive media laws are evident.

Democratic governance has been correlated to prospects for development. The basic civil and political Freedoms associated with democracy are generally accepted as being conducive to development. An intuitive link can also be made between prevalent livelihood insecurity, electorate discontent and the reversal of democracy, particularly if discontent is accompanied by protest. Hence, the Commission for Africa Report, Our Common Interest of 2005, placed governance at the heart of the development crisis on the continent. In spite of these linkages and the extensive commentary which exists, the case for a causal-effect relationship between democracy and the extent of development particularly in the SADC region, still needs to be established and/or interrogated.

In light of this apparently complex relationship, SARPN proposes a series of policy discussion fora to create space for policy-relevant dialogue on the relationship between democracy and development. These fora would include:

- small, planning and strategy making round tables;
- small regional policy seminars
- annual conferences involving a range of actors (50 - 60 people).

These fora would explore historic, current and future considerations, relating to issues such as:

- the experiences of other continents with respect to development paradigms
- exploring recognised successful states and assessing the factors underlying their developmental successes
- identifying extreme cases both in terms of democratic governance and development status and seeking correlations between these
- Investigating correlations between democracy and other concepts influencing development such as human security etc.

By commissioning insightful and academically rigorous papers for presentation at policy fora involving leading actors from a range of sectors and institutional arrangements over a three year period, and by linking these for a on complimentary ongoing processes such as the African Peer Review Mechanism, SARPN intends to contribute to the emergence of a sound and vibrant discourse on the perceived interlinkages between these issues. In this way, SARPN ultimately hopes to affect policy practice, policy formulation and opinions relating to development in the interest of poverty reduction.

In order to launch the proposed process, SARPN, in partnership with the Centre for Policy Studies³, proposes a half day roundtable discussion forum with key policy actors in the SADC region. The discussion will be expected to clarify the key considerations, actors and possible processes which SARPN may incorporate into the proposed series.

¹ See for instance Landsberg, 2004

² Matlosa 2005

³ A partner organisation presently implementing a similar project