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A STUDY OF THE POLITICS OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION DYNAMICS: THE CASE OF ZIMBABWE'S ROLE IN THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

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Abstract. This study delves into the intricate web of regional integration, with a keen focus on Zimbabwe's pivotal role within the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Zimbabwe's participation in regional integration initiatives has been a interplay of political, economic, and social factors. The study seeks to unpack how Zimbabwe's engagement within the SADC has left its mark on the broader discourse surrounding regional integration in Southern Africa. It delves into the multifaceted relationship between Zimbabwe and its SADC counterparts, delving deep into the political motivations, economic synergies, and the social tapestry of this engagement. Furthermore, it explores the historical roots and contemporary developments that have sculpted Zimbabwe's matrix discourse within the SADC. By dissecting the nuanced interplay of regional integration dynamics, this study aspires to offer insights for policymakers, scholars, and stakeholders invested in the ever-evolving landscape of regional cooperation in Southern Africa. The findings are expected to illuminate the opportunities and challenges entailed in Zimbabwe's involvement in the SADC, along with its broader impact on the regional integration agenda.

Keywords: *regional integration, regional dynamics, Southern African development, Zimbabwe.*

Rezumat. Studiul explorează rețeaua complexă a integrării regionale, cu un accent deosebit pe rolul esențial al Zimbabwe în cadrul Comunității de Dezvoltare a Africii Australe (SADC). Participarea Zimbabwe la inițiativele de integrare regională a reprezentat o interacțiune fascinantă de factori politici, economici și sociali. Studiul își propune să descopere modul în care implicarea Zimbabwe și-a lăsat amprenta asupra discursului din jurul integrării regionale în Africa de Sud. Acesta analizează relația mult fațetată dintre Zimbabwe și omologii săi din SADC, analizând în profunzime motivațiile politice, sinergia economică și tapițeria socială a acestei implicări. În plus, explorează rădăcinile istorice și evoluțiile contemporane care au

sculptat discursul matricial al Zimbabwe în cadrul SADC. Prin disecția interacțiunii nuanțate a dinamicii integrării regionale, studiul aspiră să ofere perspective pentru factorii de decizie politică, cercetători și părțile interesate implicate în peisajul în continuă evoluție al cooperării regionale din Africa de Sud. Se așteaptă ca rezultatele să evidențieze oportunitățile și provocările cauzate de implicarea Zimbabwe în SADC, împreună cu impactul mai larg asupra agendei de integrare regională.

Cuvinte cheie: *integrare regională, dinamică regională, dezvoltare sud-africană, Zimbabwe.*

1. Introduction

The Zimbabwean existential challenges have gripped and exposed the rhetoric diplomatic paradigm of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) since November 2017 in the wake of the military constitutionalism foisted on it. The bloc has gravely been exposed to its surreptitious weaknesses of upholding constitutionalism and good governance virtues. Principle guidelines on human rights, democracy, and good governance have been exposed both in the pre-election build-up and post-election in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Yet, another juxtaposed threat and weakness SADC faces is a lack of funding, crippled into a disorderly organization marred with controversies and cornered by corruption resulting from power governance structures within the regional bloc [1].

Basically, regional integration is the amalgamation of nation-states within geographical proximity, for increased political, economic, and security. Regional integration encourages all member states to work collectively in achieving peace, security, sustainable development, and economic growth. Regional integration has mostly been used to bridge gaps and limitations that countries face ranging from markets to attainment of peace and security. Regional integration in the case of SADC has been used to empower weak economies and also advance member states' interests evidenced by economic development and partnerships such as Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), South African Custom Union (SACU), and SADC common market. SADC is comprised of fourteen member states. The regional integration bloc was founded in 1980 as SADC, it comprises wealthy countries and largely underdeveloped states which share political, economic, and security cooperation. Since its genesis SADC has been faced with plenty of security challenges, governance issues of autocracy and democracy, and military coups.

The regional bloc has over the years remained unsettled on human rights abuses by member states, much of the abuses are politically inclined due to deprivation and declining economies. SADC as a regional body has been encompassed by a plethora of challenges in its operations as a regional integration bloc. The conduct of the bloc has come into question on democratic principles and electoral practices. While the bloc has been castigated for ignoring electoral misconduct in most of its member states, the bloc has substantial, electoral or liberal democracies [2]. SADC has established an electoral advisory council and harmonized strategic indicative plan, irrespective of the fact that Southern Africa Development Committee and African Union have proven to be merely driven by self-interest.

The endorsement by SADC on Zimbabwean 2018 harmonized elections which were marred with electoral irregularities of voter intimidation, vote fraud, and usage of lethal force on the August first demonstration have been scrutinized. The next harmonised election of 2023 had a diverging view from the normal SADC endorsement of elections. The Nervous Mumba led SADC observer mission castigated the electoral outcome citing several

irregularities that the mission had witnessed during their observation. The effectiveness of the promised political, administrative, and electoral reforms under the second republic, propounded by President Mnangagwa are yet to be witnessed as there has been a circus of parliamentary recalls of legislators from the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Alliance, the second largest political party in parliament.

The regional bloc has been plunged into a plethora of challenges that included the installation of President Mnangagwa to the deputy SADC chair position on Politics and defence 2018 in the backdrop of a contested election marred with electoral irregularities and malpractice [3]. The fundamental problem faced by SADC is the lack of *carte blanche* enforcement on any jurisdictional decisions. In the wake of financial incapacitation, the socio-economic complication of wallowing grinding poverty from the ground-breaking mantra of the states in the body the 2018 Zimbabwean election provided the damascene opportunity. This study, therefore, examines and dissects the challenges being faced by SADC after the 2018 and 2023 Zimbabwean elections and the accompanying concomitant regional dynamics within the SADC.

1.2 Zimbabwe's Role in Shaping Southern African Development Community through the Theoretical Lens of Neo-Functionalism

Here, we consider the most appropriate theory to analyze Zimbabwe's Role in Shaping Southern African Development Community vis-a-vis the Politics of Regional Integration Dynamics to be the theory of Neofunctionalism. Neofunctionalism, crucial in the study of regional integration, focuses on explaining how and why nations integrate into larger regional entities like the SADC. Neofunctionalism is particularly suitable for this study because it emphasizes the role of political elites, the spillover effect, and the gradual creation of supranational institutions [4]. These elements are crucial in understanding Zimbabwe's involvement in SADC and the dynamics of regional integration in Southern Africa. In contrast to other theories, such as realism or intergovernmentalism, which focus more on state sovereignty and power politics, neofunctionalism offers a more nuanced understanding of the cooperative mechanisms and incremental processes that drive regional integration.

Neofunctionalism, developed by political scientists Ernst Haas and Leon Lindberg in the mid-20th century, centers on how national governments voluntarily cede power to regional institutions. It examines how these regional institutions evolve over time to drive further integration among member states. This theory provides a robust framework for analyzing the political, economic, and institutional dynamics of SADC, especially in light of Zimbabwe's role within the organization. Several key assumptions of neofunctionalism align well with this study. Firstly, the theory suggests that integration in one sector of a region, such as the economy, naturally leads to integration in other areas, such as politics and security. In the case of SADC, Zimbabwe's economic cooperation with other member states creates pressure for broader political collaboration, furthering regional integration in areas such as governance and security. Secondly, neofunctionalism underscores the importance of supranational institutions like the SADC secretariat, which gain autonomy and play a vital role in driving regional integration. Zimbabwe's involvement in SADC, as analyzed in the study, aligns with this idea because the country's participation influences and interacts with SADC's supranational structures. Thirdly, political elites are essential actors in the integration process. These elites, particularly those who are regionalists, drive the integration agenda by recognizing the benefits of regionalism. Zimbabwe's role within SADC can be

analyzed through the actions and political motivations of its leadership, consistent with neofunctionalism's emphasis on elite-driven integration. Finally, neofunctionalism posits that regional integration is a gradual, step-by-step process. This incremental approach is evident in SADC's historical development and Zimbabwe's engagement, particularly in terms of its strategic alliances, political influence, and economic collaborations.

Neofunctionalism helps us to analyze Zimbabwe's political, economic, and social strategies as critical drivers of regional integration. Neofunctionalism provides a framework for understanding how Zimbabwe's involvement, rooted in the aspirations of its political elites, affects broader regional integration. For example, Zimbabwe's participation in SADC's economic activities, such as initiatives like the SADC Common Market, illustrates the theory's spillover effect. By engaging in economic cooperation, Zimbabwe helps to build momentum for further political and social collaboration within the region. Neofunctionalism is more appropriate than other theories like realism or intergovernmentalism because it focuses on cooperation and institutional development rather than state sovereignty and power competition. Realism, for example, would emphasize Zimbabwe's attempts to maximize power in relation to its neighbors, overlooking the cooperative dynamics that are central to this study. Intergovernmentalism, while useful in explaining some aspects of state cooperation, places too much emphasis on state sovereignty and decision-making at the intergovernmental level. It fails to account for the role of supranational institutions and the socialization of political elites, which are critical to understanding regional integration within SADC. In contrast, neofunctionalism's emphasis on the spillover effect, the autonomy of supranational institutions, and elite-driven integration provides a more comprehensive explanation of the dynamics at play in SADC. This theory allows us to understand how Zimbabwe, despite its internal political challenges, remains a key player in driving regional integration in Southern Africa. Neofunctionalism also provides insights into how Zimbabwe's economic integration with SADC creates momentum for broader cooperation in areas such as governance, security, and human rights. Furthermore, the theory highlights how SADC institutions gradually gain power and influence, creating the conditions for deeper regional integration over time.

Applicably, Zimbabwe's economic and political ties with SADC have notably influenced the regional bloc's policies, especially in election oversight and governance. The SADC Electoral Advisory Council (SEAC) is responsible for ensuring member states uphold election standards that promote fairness and transparency. However, Zimbabwe's electoral history, marked by controversies in 2008, 2018, and 2023, has tested SADC's capacity to enforce these standards, revealing both strengths and vulnerabilities. Zimbabwe's 2008 elections, plagued by violence and irregularities, forced SADC to mediate by forming a Government of National Unity between ZANU-PF and the MDC. This showed SADC's capability as a mediator but also highlighted its reluctance to impose stricter measures when member state leaders resisted oversight, an example of the neo-functional concept of institutional resistance.

In 2018, SADC endorsed the elections despite reports of voter intimidation and post-election violence that left civilians dead. This underscored SADC's delicate balance between maintaining unity and upholding its governance protocols. SEAC's relatively cautious stance mirrored Zimbabwe's influence in the bloc and illustrated the spillover effect described by neo-functionalism: regional bodies expanding their focus from economic matters to include complex political issues. The 2023 elections presented another test. SEAC's report, led by

Nevers Mumba, flagged significant electoral issues, suggesting a shift toward more assertive oversight. Yet, SADC's limited follow-up actions revealed persistent resistance from political elites. This inconsistency in enforcing standards, despite established frameworks, shows how policy can be shaped or stalled by the interests of powerful member states like Zimbabwe [5]. It highlights the nuanced, incremental nature of regional integration and reform, as posited by neo-functionalism. In essence, neofunctionalism remains, for this study, appropriate theoretical framework for analyzing Zimbabwe's role in shaping SADC. It provides a structured approach to understanding how regional integration develops through political, economic, and social cooperation. Neofunctionalism's focus on elite socialization, the spillover effect, and the gradual evolution of supranational institutions aligns with the study's examination of Zimbabwe's participation in SADC and the broader dynamics of regional integration in Southern Africa. This theory not only explains the process of integration but also highlights the challenges and opportunities that Zimbabwe and SADC face in their pursuit of regional cooperation.

2. Materials and Methods

This study takes an analytical approach, drawing on existing materials to explore Zimbabwe's role within the SADC and how it has shaped regional integration. The research relies on a variety of sources, including academic articles, official reports, books, and institutional publications. These materials offer valuable insights into regional cooperation, Zimbabwe's political and economic activities, and the overall structure of SADC. By using the neofunctionalism theory, the research examines how regional integration evolves step by step, focusing on the influence of political leaders, economic partnerships, and regional institutions. The data collected help illustrate how Zimbabwe's involvement in SADC's economic, political, and social efforts has contributed to shaping broader policies within the region. Key areas such as election integrity, governance, and economic collaboration are analyzed to show how they connect with Zimbabwe's political context and its ongoing participation in regional integration. Ultimately, the study sheds light on the challenges and opportunities that Zimbabwe's actions present for SADC's goal of deeper regional cooperation.

3. Results

3.1 SADC's Political Dilemma

SADC has been keen to push reforms in the region through the enactment of the harmonized strategic indicative plan which is meant to ensure capacity building in the context of peace [6]. Electoral integrity has always been at the epitome of agenda discussions, especially in the Zimbabwean context. The Zimbabwean political landscape has churned out serious concerns since the start of the millennium when Trade unionist leader Morgan Tsvangirai formed the MDC in the quest to break the one-party state that had been established by Robert Mugabe. The political challenges have given prominence and sympathy to the opposition through a series of arrests on frivolous and vexatious charges ranging from treason, the bloc has been engulfed with a litany of challenges ranging from being a troupe bloc gallivanting on taxpayers' monies that have resultantly escalated to the preterit of trivial impediments plaguing the region like power retention.

The regional body has over the years since its establishment been handling a *laissez-faire* attitude towards poor governance issues, the famed *Mugabeism* doctrine, according to Gatsheni is a summation of a constellation of political controversies, political behaviors,

political utterances, rhetoric, and crystallized actions of the former president, Mugabe's Political life once deemed the godfather of the SADC bloc is still whole and enforce as only the administrator has changed but the systems are still prevalent [7]. Mohletsu Mbeki argues that the lack of harmonization in a regional context to offer a prescription to the Zimbabwean challenges has offered the enabling ground of exportation of these problems to other countries within the bloc [8].

3.2 Zimbabwe and the Electoral Legitimacy Conundrum in SADC

The 2018 election in Zimbabwe was dubbed an economic rejuvenation election however legitimacy crisis in Zimbabwe has plunged towards an acephalous function. The 2018 election was marred by numerous irregularities such as the skewed media coverage on state-owned media platforms, the opposition parties had limited access to private print and digital media house coverage whereas the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) had the monopoly on electoral campaign coverage on the state run. The Herald like its predecessor Rhodesian Herald established during the colonial period to demonize black people of Zimbabwe, has not abandoned the trait of victimizing and vilifying opposition parties, this being a pure violation of the electoral principles of SADC Electoral Advisory Council which alludes to the equality of political parties' access to state media both print and broadcast [9]. The government of Zimbabwe has been found wanting through its media mouthpiece that has clandestinely romanticized and portrayed freedom of speech as a hypothetically bona fide state gift though it being vis-a-vis SADC despite making major developments in pre-election and post-election period observation and monitoring much has not been done to secure surety from other contesting parties, the conduct of elections in some member states have often been inconsistent with the SADC electoral standards it seemed that the administration had only a facial change as the systems at play had no reforms implemented by the new dispensation.

The historical context of acquiring independence for SADC member states has affected the administration procedure of these nation-states these vanguard parties had a strong mutual bond of militarized liberation movements. These movements had revolutions backed by the masses but the violent transition from the colonial government to independent administration did not establish ample time for the demilitarization in practice attitude and managerial criteria as the decisions are militant given the nexus between the revolutionary party and the military [7]. These failures by SADC nations from the beginning failed to prove futile ground the regional bloc. Founded with the quest to foster regional integration would be subject to a litany of spurious and fraudulent claims and not withstand big brother politics coupled with the national interest at play Zimbabwe has over the years been a futile ground for largely disputed elections since the start of the millennium. Several allegations of electoral malpractices and capture even witnessed SADC endorsing the contested 2008 elections as free and fair in which Robert Mugabe, later on, acknowledged defeat from the opposition that left the regional bloc with an egg on its face [10]. All these challenges have emanated from non-establishment impartiality within the bloc, which has bred deep traits of bureaucracy, corruption, nepotism, and patronage within the region. This has resultantly abandoned the populace wallowing in abject poverty that necessitated corruption and maladministration prompting the precipitation and proliferation of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to supersede the upscaling livelihoods in the region.

The Zimbabwean 2018 harmonized elections were a litmus test on SADC and it proved otherwise having robust sound policies inscribed on paper but limited undertaken. Thus, the notion that regional blocs like the African Union and SADC have a mammoth task though they have grown over the years in election observation. The contestations arising from the elections have presented a headache to SADC to try and mediate the political dilemma that has engulfed Zimbabwe, interests are at play with interests to safeguard and subsequently, confine Zimbabwe as a 'supermarket' economy of SADC Nation-states.

3.3 Glasnost, Perestroika or Mugabeism: The Machinery of the Second Republic Zimbabwe

Political grandstanding has been rife in SADC especially after the 2018 Zimbabwean elections, deteriorating state and civilian relationship being at the epitome, the nonexistence of post-election euphoria and celebration has raised many eyebrows that political machinations are still much abundant and rife and an inconclusive judiciary 'press conference' judgment [5]. Angola's Joao Manuel Lourence during the 38th SADC Summit of heads of State and Government SADC clamoured for the removal of sanctions on Zimbabwe and highlighted them as major impediments to national developments [3]. The call for the eradication of sanctions has been systematically used to make reference to all the challenges bedeviling Zimbabwe, the removal of sanctions call has been even taken up to the African Union and enactment an anti-sanctions day the 25th of September every year. However, sanctions have had very little significance much of the economic decline has been contributed by maladministration and corruption by political bigwigs at the start of the millennium that has seen unemployment rates gobbling and massive outward migration to Europe and other neighbouring countries. Sarcastically the fiascos of these sitting SADC vanguard parties have been romanticized as results of sanctions, kleptocracy, nepotism, and maladministration is immensely evident in SADC member states. Maodza alludes that the bloc has for a while expedited the introduction of a visa-free regime coherent with the SADC protocol of the free movement of persons in Africa 2005 to ensure the purging of impediments to free movement of people, services goods, and capital flow [11].

Questions have been raised on the implementation of the rule of law and independence of the different commission, particularly after the doubtful constitutional court hearing in which South African Legal Experts s Mpofu, Ngcukaitobi, and Gauntlette were denied the right to appear for their client's counsel Chamisa. Contrary to their denial the Minister of Justice had a conflict of interest in the matter due to being one of the respondent's chief election agents. Despite e of the conflict of interest he failed to recuse himself, he alluded that even lawyers from Mars are free to come and counsel but the statement was only pregnant with oxymoron the results on a fateful day.

It later proved that the law can be used for comparative advantages in political cases; it has morphed into being an obstacle to power dynamics that produced a shell shocker, an electoral verdict that failed to address the percentage of the results which the president-elect that was to be sworn in had amassed in the election. Moyo argues that the substitution of ZANU-PF leaders does not purport administrative and governance *modus operandi* [12]. But a system bequeathed unto the bloc is believed to be the major stumbling block to be eradicated in the reformation of SADC to start producing results in the socio-economic and political sphere in the region.

The Zimbabwean elections from the onset had been tantamount to romanticized reforms that did not address the needs of the civilians but were mere political public relations stunts that had no effect in strengthening the local communities, especially after the apocalyptic 2008 period. The build-up to the election was tense and uneasy peace as the terrifying encounters were witnessed after ZANU-PF lost the elections. Torture, harassment, and killing of opposition supporters were done with impunity prevailing, the relationship between the party seurocrats and judiciary systems. The Government of National Unity agreement between Tsvangirai and Mugabe had done little to strengthen local communities affected by the violence it was merely a stop-gap measure to curb further continuation of the opposition supporter's purge. The top-down peacebuilding initiative did not provide transitional justice for the victims of violence at the community level, relations had been fractured at the grassroots levels. The signing of the agreement at the elite level barely affected the highly polarised local communities which had been plunged into forced silencing and forgetting through deprivation of justice along with political affiliation.

SADC has not entirely pushed for national healing and reconciliation during the build-up to the elections in member states with the regional bloc that has sparked controversies and violence Election issues have been classified as a low political matter that has no fundamental urgency and marred with gross irregularities concerning the African continent. The African Union (AU) is a banana organization failing to act and offer prescription and funding to the panacea befalling the continent. Though the SADC head of State and Government Summit in 2018 urged stakeholders to remain calm and wait for the court's decision all was to be questioned and juxtaposed with the installation of Zimbabwe deputies of the organ of politics and defense in the wake of contested presidential polls. SADC is faced with a grave policy contingency, leadership skills that have failed to uphold democracy, development, and sustainable peace in the region.

3.4 Evening Constitutionalism and Political Patronage

The regional bloc has failed to rectify the post-election challenges through pacifying the MDC Alliance and ZANU-PF to work on the rejuvenation of the national economy, the bloc has been tainted as an institution incapable of self-propulsion. This nature helped spur mayhem in many of the member countries in the bloc. The aftermath of the Zimbabwean elections in 2018 signalled a mammoth rutted road that SADC was yet to encounter, the lack of specified electoral reforms as outlined in the 2013 constitution has continuously fuelled electoral controversy in 2018 and 2023. All these come in the aftermath of SADC having proved to be a weak ailing institution in the monitoring of human rights, democracy, and governance issues, Moyo suggests that it has failed to be even perfunctory in its modus operandi [5]. Electoral issues have over the years been fundamental in the SADC region with the contested election in Democratic Republic of Congo 2018, Malawi, 2020, Zambia 2021, and the Eswatini uprisings against the monarch. Constitutional and electoral abuse were evident in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2018 when Kabila extended his term of office and the disqualification of Katumbi and Bemba's candidacy [13]. Again, the 2018 Zimbabwean elections provide a clear case where SADC endorsed an election that was marred by reports of voter suppression, intimidation, and the lethal use of force during post-election protests on August 1, resulting in six civilian deaths. Similarly, the 2023 Zimbabwean elections, scrutinized by a SADC observer mission led by Nevers Mumba, noted significant irregularities, including delayed voting and questions around transparency. Incorporating

data from election observation reports and human rights organizations' findings, such as those from Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International, can reinforce these points with empirical evidence [14].

The problem of not being able to contain electoral conflict escalating has prompted the escalation of rampant electoral disputes that have in the past and present triggered thunderous blows as a bloc for SADC. The DRC elections are anticipated to bring forth escalation of conflict as tension has been flared through side-lining of key presidential aspirants Bemba and Katumbi that had postulated that gross irregularities in the Congo will have adverse effects that will ripple the regional bloc. The mayhem pre and post-election in DRC exposed the robust and radical hypocrisy of the regional bloc on, Zambia being the chair on politics and defence then under former president Lungu failed to help Katumbi who was denied entry into the DRC to file his nomination papers for the upcoming presidential election scheduled for December 2018. In 2021, Lungu and the Patriotic front used the Covid 19 pandemic to try and thwart opposition campaigns their main target was now president Hachilema whose supporters were subjected to brutality and arbitrary arrests.

The grand coalition by Bemba and Katumbi to field a common candidate posed a serious threat to Kabila, several calls according to the Mail & Guardian were made by Bemba on SADC to intervene in the squabbles taking centre stage in the country such as the electoral voting machines that have failed the litmus test in Iraq and Afghanistan [15]. The call by the opposition candidates to SADC for good governance and democracy has often fell on deaf ears that surprisingly get a political grandstanding response like the Zimbabwean context in the aftermath of the 2018 elections. The major challenge facing SADC from adopting an assertive diplomatic stance on member states is the liberation struggle solidarity they share. The biggest test to the solidarity came from SADC observer mission in 2023, highlighted that the electoral standards fell short of the SADC protocol and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections of 2015 that help ensure electoral best practises. In 2017 and 2018 respectively the legitimacy conundrum has been at the epitome of the SADC with (Zambia and Zimbabwe) having faced with State of the Nation address boycott and walkout. Bere alluded that no law has been promulgated in Zimbabwe to compel the members of the august house to remain in the parliament building when the SONA is being addressed this signifies an impasse in the local political arena and fails to address the legitimacy conundrum [16].

3.5 The Struggle for Power and Vanguard Politicking in SADC

SADC has been laced with a legitimacy poison this has sparked controversy in the case of Zimbabwe and history has hence therefore littered with the collision of whether Zimbabwe is a *de facto* or *de jure* state, this has left both the bloc and the nation on tenterhooks especially after post-election violence that rocked the streets of Harare. SADC has been known to be the haven for acts of banditry and authoritarianism in the name of being patriotic and acceding to demands of the vanguard powers at all expense. This has proven to be the weakest point of the regional bloc and has gravely exposed that the block is increasingly irrelevant to the internal politics of its member states and the big bother politicking by South Africa so happens to be part of its failure as a regional grouping.

It seems that SADC and its mutual relations with the vanguard parties of the member states have been caught in a precarious condition of generational consensus Fanon asserts that 'Each generation must, out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it [17]. Egocentrism has been rife for the regional bloc that has veneered it to a litany of

plethora's the only challenges that are obstructing African development, the lack of robust vibrant, and strong institutions that stand for a cause. Lately, Economic Community of West African States has moved from the bandwagon to instilling strong regional grouping ideologies both democratically and economically. SADC is democratically lagging haunted and entrenched in the Stalin age where those that cast the ballot do not decide anything but those that count steal the people's future.

3.6 Debt Diplomacy for Sovereignty: The Chinese Dilemma

The bloc has failed to inculcate mechanisms of transparency, accountability, and responsibility over the years, these are the biggest diseases diagnosed that only need a panacea to stop the degeneration of the bloc's ethics and principal guidelines. The problems that SADC is facing cannot be thwarted by tinkering on the edges of them but through tough decision making for the betterment of the block, by so doing it will plug the region of the slumber and erase the fundamental notion that has gripped African politics of livelihoods and politics of the stomach [18]. This has precipitated the rise of debt diplomacy on poor yet rich African countries evidence can be established from Zimbabwe and Zambia that have sold their sovereignty for the love of money, besides the home-grown challenges the Chinese through exporting ultra-nationalism to the SADC region have become both a challenge and threat.

Magniloquence is the rudimental problem facing SADC, rhetoric has taken a central figure with implementation being very minimal it seems that the once victims who turned liberators have only turned to be oppressors of their masses. The organization is a replica of banana organizations that have only ratified treaties on paper but fundamentally breached the clauses they signed for such as the cause to promote strong political values, institutions, systems that promote democratically, legitimates, and effective governance modes coupled with socio-economic development [19]. The only notable achievement has been producing dictators that have overstayed their welcome under the guise of Pan Africanism plundering and hampering any socio-economic development, credible examples should be emulated from how the late President Magafuli steered the turnaround strategy for Tanzania. SADC needs an overhaul as a bloc to strengthen funding and compliance to its principles challenges such as incompatible political and economic systems, poor political governance, and game theory-driven nationalist rivalry. Changes from grandiloquence to action will wait to be established under his leadership as he has promised to steer the SADC objectives and drive whilst strengthening the regional bloc. SADC member states have and are still amassed by a litany of challenges s Angola, Mozambique and Zambia face a staggering debt crisis, South Africa faces an economic recession, and Zimbabwe and DRC are always in a crisis the regional bloc is on tenterhooks.

4. Conclusion

Conclusively the study concludes that SADC as a regional bloc has failed dismally to uphold electoral principles, guidelines, and the upholding of human rights issues in member states owing to lack of coherent policy establishment to address the bloc's needs. Tantamount to this development has established confusion and big brother politicking that has left the regional block as an egalitarian pseudo partnership to which it is only beneficiary to South Africa. The Zimbabwean challenge has presented SADC with a torrid time. The organizations' principles and guidelines on democratic elections are nothing but pure caricature, which has failed to uphold democratic principles. The secretariat in 2018 was

entirely unfazed by the flaunting of electoral principles and progressed to grant Zimbabwe the Deputy Chair on Politics and Defence at a time the opposition had launched a court petition challenging the poll results. The handling of the appeal was retrogressive and repugnant with the verdict dismissing the lawsuit with cost and denial of South African lawyers to represent their client as a setback catalyst to democracy [20].

To address these concerns in the SADC region, a thoughtful development strategy grounded in substantial reforms is essential. Building stronger institutions with clear mandates and adequate resources is pivotal to ensure impartial evaluations. Aligning national policies with international human rights standards would enhance regional consistency. Training for officials and local organizations supports skills in advocacy and governance, while integrating technology into monitoring systems facilitates transparency and accountability. Enforcing compliance through peer reviews and potential penalties is important for adherence. Public participation, driven by civic education and a free press, cultivates a culture of accountability, ensuring leaders uphold democratic principles. Partnering with international bodies and NGOs can offer crucial technical and financial support to reinforce these initiatives.

To further reinforce SADC's independence and reduce reliance on external aid, particularly from sources like Chinese funding, it is essential to pursue comprehensive policy reforms and establish sustainable, internal funding mechanisms. Thomas Sankara's idea that dependence limits autonomy serves as a reminder that true self-governance stems from financial independence. This means SADC should prioritize innovative revenue strategies and sustainable development. Moving beyond rhetoric to real action is vital, calling for visionary leadership committed to reform. Malcolm X's call for candid leadership evaluation emphasizes that progress hinges on accountable, educated, and service-minded leaders who confront systemic issues. Such leaders are key to fostering a resilient, self-sustaining region where policies reflect genuine progress rather than empty promises. Collectively, these efforts could ultimately aid SADC's mission and pursuit for sustainable development, robust democracy, and stability within the region.

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