

The Role and Challenges of Angola in the Integration Process of the Southern African Development Community

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Abstract

Angola, located in the southern region of Western Africa, is a founding member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), joining when it was established in Lusaka, Zambia, in 1980. Angola is the second-largest country in sub-Saharan Africa, next to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). As the current (2023/2024) chair of the rotating presidency (serving as the chair for the third time since the establishment of SADC), Angola will play a crucial role in advancing the integration process of SADC. This article discusses the domestic and international issues faced by Angola before and after the establishment of SADC, its participation in the integration process, and its potential future role.

Keywords

Angola, SADC, Regional Integration, Strengths, Weaknesses.

1. Introduction

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is a regional economic community comprising 16 member states, namely Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The main objectives of SADC are to achieve development, peace and security, economic growth, poverty reduction, improvement of the quality of life of the people of Southern Africa, and to support disadvantaged countries or societies through regional integration based on the principles of democracy and equitable and sustainable development.

2. The Role of Angola in the Evolution of SADC

Throughout the development history of Southern Africa, it can be observed that the establishment of the initial regional organizations in Southern Africa can be traced back to the colonial era. The common fate experienced by member states during their pursuit of national independence and development objectively promoted the process of regional integration. The colonial powers, in their exploitation of mineral and agricultural resources in Southern Africa, created conditions for mineral exploration and production by establishing transportation links, gradually forming a true physical spatial region. For example, British and German capital, combined with some local capital, invested in regional railways, roads, energy, and communication network construction to support labor migration and commodity exports (F.Soderbaum, 2004).

From the early 19th century, Britain gradually expanded northward from its base in South Africa, using its advantages in transportation, energy, capital, and technology to control Southern African countries. This prompted other countries in the region to seek stronger

economic cooperation to escape South Africa's control and exploitation, and to achieve economic independence and liberation after gaining national independence. They also sought this cooperation to carry out the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa. In April 1969, the Fifth Conference of Heads of State of Eastern and Central African Countries adopted the "Manifesto of Lusaka on Southern Africa," jointly drafted by Kaunda and Nyerere. Additionally, the Sixth Summit of the Organization of African Unity in September adopted the "Dar es Salaam Declaration on Southern Africa," which reiterated the stance against the apartheid regime in South Africa and supported the principles of the struggle of the peoples of Southern Africa against racism and colonialism. These two declarations became programmatic documents for the common struggle of Southern African countries (B.J.Li., 2013).

Since then, through three stages of cooperation, Southern Africa has gradually embarked on the historical process of integration.

2.1. Emergence Phase: The "Mulungushi Club"¹ and the "Front States"² in the 1970s

In the 1970s, the struggle for regional national independence and liberation greatly strengthened the connections among countries in the region. Southern African countries, in pursuit of political independence, sought political and security cooperation among nations within the region. In 1970, the "Mulungushi Club" was formed by Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, and Milton Obote of Uganda to discuss issues related to Southern Africa (W.C. Liu, 2010). However, due to its lack of efficiency in addressing the overall regional security situation and disagreements among its leaders, the club disbanded in 1974. In the same year, the "Front States" was established by a quartet consisting of Botswana, the Mozambican Liberation Front (FRELIMO), Tanzania, and Zambia. The core member countries were Tanzania and Zambia. The initial impetus for its formation was to resolve the conflict against colonialism within Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and it gradually evolved to encompass the struggle against apartheid and the pursuit of political independence and freedom for the entire Southern African region (K. Zhang and Z.X. Wang, 2011).

In 1975, after gaining independence, Angola also joined the ranks of these countries and made significant contributions to the organization. They held regular meetings aimed at investigating and developing appropriate strategies to achieve national liberation in Southern Africa, curb the apartheid regime in South Africa, and counteract military sabotage operations initiated against independent countries in the region. In 1979, in order to maintain its economic dominance in Southern Africa and politically alleviate the pressure from other Southern African countries, South Africa proposed the "Constellation Plan," which envisioned an economic community with South Africa as the axis, encompassing South Africa's "black homelands" and "satellite states" in Southern Africa. The core of this plan was to lift restrictions on South African

¹ Mulungushi is a district in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. It is home to the National Conference Centre of Zambia and is close to the Zambian Parliament. Many important meetings and events are held here. <https://www.micc.co.zm/about/>

² Frontline States is referred to Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, which are adjacent to or close to South Africa and are named for being at the forefront of the struggle for national independence and liberation. In 1974, these six countries collectively became known as the Frontline States. Due to their geographical location, they opposed South Africa's apartheid policies and were actively involved in supporting Zimbabwe's struggle for independence. Subsequently, they began to hold irregular conferences of the Heads of State of the Frontline States to discuss the situation and issues in Southern Africa and coordinate their actions. Occasionally, expanded meetings involving the heads of state of Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana, and Mozambique were held. From then on, the Frontline States, along with organizations such as the Southern African Liberation Movement, frequently attended these conferences. Organizations such as the African National Congress of South Africa and the South West Africa People's Organization also participated.

investments in the "Constellation Zone" and establish a common market within this zone (Y. Yuan,1982, 1982).

In response to South Africa's economic offensive, in July 1979, ministers from five "Front States" in Southern Africa convened a meeting in Arusha, Tanzania. They emphasized that after achieving political independence, Southern African countries must also achieve economic liberation by pursuing regional cooperation. The meeting ultimately adopted the promotional draft "Southern Africa: Towards Economic Liberation" and established a standing committee. This meeting was a product of the nine Southern African countries' opposition to the "Constellation Plan" and laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference in the next stage (W. Hao, 1983).

2.2. Early Stage: The Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) in the 1980s

In the previous stage, the "Front States" were busy opposing colonialism and apartheid, which led to a deteriorating economic situation in each country. To address economic development issues, on April 1, 1980, nine countries including Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Swaziland, and Lesotho convened a meeting in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, and officially announced the establishment of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) (hereinafter referred to as the "Coordination Conference"). They formally adopted the declaration "Southern Africa: Toward Economic Liberation," which called for unity and cooperation among the participating countries to strive for independence from foreign economic dependence, particularly on South Africa, and for the establishment of a Southern African Economic Community. To achieve regional cooperation, the meeting also adopted a program of action, which included the establishment of policies for transportation, shipping, agricultural research, industrialization, and energy, as well as the sharing of training facilities and the exploration of establishing institutions such as the Southern African Development Fund (Y. Yuan, 1982).

To reduce dependence on South Africa and the outside world and enhance the economic independence of its member states, the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) focused on functional cooperation in key sectors, implemented through the SADCC's action plan. The sectoral cooperation established by the action plan was decentralized, with member states responsible for coordinating functional cooperation in different sectors. For example, Angola was responsible for coordinating the energy sector. At the time of SADCC's establishment, Angola was the only member state capable of producing crude oil. Angola's oil resources were extremely abundant, mainly concentrated in offshore areas. Based on the levels at that time, Angola's annual oil production was three times the annual demand of the other eight member states (A.Tostense,1982).

As the coordinating country for the energy sector, Angola established a "Technical and Administrative Group" within its Ministry of Energy and Petroleum to specifically handle related matters. SADCC divided energy sector cooperation into the following areas: coal cooperation, electricity cooperation, energy storage cooperation, oil cooperation, wood fuel cooperation, new and renewable energy cooperation, as well as energy development planning and human resources development cooperation. SADCC outlined specific steps for cooperation in the energy sector:

- (1) Assess the needs of each member state, collect data, and analyze energy demand quantity and types;
- (2) Evaluate the elasticity of demand in each member state, identify areas where energy can be saved, and improve energy efficiency;
- (3) Assess energy supply conditions and determine the amount and extent of energy self-sufficiency for each country;

- (4) Compare national demand with estimated supply potential;
- (5) Compare supply and demand information across countries to obtain a regional planning framework;
- (6) Assess the costs and benefits of regional energy cooperation;
- (7) Evaluate the impact of cooperation on the energy development of each country;
- (8) Propose a series of national and regional energy policy concepts;
- (9) Transform policy concepts into projects;
- (10) Invest funds;
- (11) Conduct further research and continue to focus on human resources training.

The region covered by SADCC had huge potential in terms of oil, gas, coal, and electricity—the three modern commercial energy sources. However, most of the region still relied on traditional energy sources, such as wood, agricultural residue, and manure, as traditional fuels. The region lacked the funds, technology, talent, and infrastructure needed for energy transformation. Although SADCC had clarified various plans in the energy sector, for Angola, it was complex and time-consuming to identify potential energy conflicts among member states, find cooperative and mutually beneficial energy product trade, and address the energy issues of each country at the regional level. Given the loose mechanism of SADCC at that time, ultimately, it was not something that Angola could improve on its own; the implementation of various plans rested on the shoulders of each member state (W.C. Liu, 2010).

An important issue that cannot be ignored is that Angola was still in the midst of a civil war at that time. Even though it had established a corresponding department to coordinate energy affairs among countries in the region, it was still overwhelmed. During this period, due to the slump in crude oil exports and the international oil market, Angola did not earn more revenue from its oil industry.

2.3. Mature Stage: The Southern African Development Community from the 1990s to Present

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, significant changes occurred in both the international situation and the regional landscape of Southern Africa. On one hand, the end of the Cold War brought an end to the rivalry and confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union on the African continent, accompanied by the collapse of the Soviet Union; on the other hand, the apartheid system in South Africa faced severe challenges (K. Zhang and Z.X. Wang, 2011). To adapt to the trend of regionalization in Africa and the global economy, on August 17, 1992, the leaders of the 10 member states of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference held a meeting in Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, where they signed the "Treaty Establishing the Southern African Development Community" and three related declarations and protocols. Since then, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) was formally established. The aim of this organization is to promote mutually beneficial, balanced, and equitable economies, break down tariff barriers, facilitate mutual trade and investment, achieve the free movement of people, goods, and services, gradually unify tariffs and currencies, and ultimately realize regional economic integration.

The most distinctive feature of SADC compared to other African regional organizations lies in its organizational structure, particularly the establishment of the "Troika" (a triumvirate consisting of three heads of state) as the decision-making body of SADC, responsible for making decisions on relevant matters, formulating relevant meeting resolutions, promoting the implementation of relevant resolutions, and providing policy guidance (B.J.Li., 2013). On March 9, 2001, the heads of state and government of SADC approved the "Report on the Review of the Operations of SADC Institutions." Subsequently, institutional reforms led to the establishment of a new structure consisting of eight main institutions and bodies to carry out the

organization's tasks, namely the SADC Parliamentary Forum, the SADC Committee of Ambassadors and High Commissioners, the SADC National Committees, the SADC Secretariat, the Standing Committee of Senior Officials, the Sectoral and Thematic Ministerial Committees, the SADC Council of Ministers, the SADC Administrative Court, the Troika Summit, and the Summit of Heads of State or Government.

In 2002, after the end of the civil war in Angola, former President José Eduardo dos Santos served as the chairperson for the 2002/2003 and 2011/2012 terms, while the current President, João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, is serving as the chairperson for the 2023/2024 term.

In 2003, SADC formulated the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), which analyzed the SADC integration framework; described and analyzed the economic, human development, and social trends in SADC at that time based on selected socio-economic indicators; and briefly analyzed and evaluated the current economic and social strategies and policies in different areas of SADC regional cooperation and integration, rationalizing the action plan and strategic priorities for the next 15 years. Angola's goals and pragmatic actions within SADC are to: promote sustainable and equitable economic growth and socio-economic development to ensure the gradual eradication of poverty and improve the living standards and quality of life of the people in the region; support socially vulnerable groups through regional integration; achieve sustainable utilization of natural resources in the region, promote environmental protection, and promote and optimize productive employment and resource utilization in the region; promote the integration of poverty eradication programs into all SADC activities; and promote the prevention and treatment of fatal diseases such as HIV/AIDS (C.F. Zhao, and J.X. Zhao, 2012).

3. Major Issues Currently Facing Angola

Among the current member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), South Africa and Angola are considered to have relatively higher levels of economic and social development in the region. Nevertheless, while South Africa's economic development is quite impressive, the overall situation in Angola remains unoptimistic. In 2017, when President João Lourenço came to power, the downturn in international crude oil prices and the resulting loss of foreign exchange reserves left Angola's economic and financial situation still severe. The significant reduction in oil revenue has left the Angolan government severely lacking in funds for infrastructure investment. Negotiations for loan assistance with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are conducted annually, but they are always halted at the last moment. Several international credit rating agencies have downgraded Angola's sovereign credit rating, deterring international private investors (D.Jia,2019).

Angolan economist Precioso Domingos, in an interview with Deutsche Welle Africa, believes that Angola needs to intensify efforts from the perspective of political reform to reform the state machinery that favors the market. Secondly, reforms are needed to establish market institutions. In the past, part of the oil production was still used to repay debts. In the process of economic diversification in Angola, on the one hand, the government hopes that the private sector can diversify the Angolan economy; on the other hand, these private individuals have no way to smoothly participate in the construction of economic diversification. He believes that the government "remains a central planner" when implementing macroeconomic policies, and that Angola must introduce more liberalization, deregulation, and allow people to freely do what they want (Lusa,2023).

It can be seen from this that Angola's macroeconomy still faces many challenges, and the economic diversification strategy introduced by the government still has a long way to go to be put into practice, requiring joint efforts from the government, market, and society.

4. Challenges for Angola in the Regional Integration of SADC

Angola faces multiple challenges, which can be summarized into the following key aspects:

(1) **Economic Imbalance:** As a resource-rich country, Angola relies heavily on oil and minerals as its economic pillars, which may lead to a monolithic economic structure susceptible to international market fluctuations. Moreover, the significant disparities in economic development levels among SADC member states pose a challenge in balancing development needs and reducing wealth gaps while promoting regional integration.

(2) **Infrastructure Development:** To facilitate intraregional trade and investment, enhancing connectivity is crucial. Angola and its neighboring countries may require substantial investments in transportation, energy, and communication infrastructure, a daunting task for financially strained nations.

(3) **Political Stability and Security:** Angola and some SADC member states have historically experienced conflict and instability. Maintaining regional peace and security, preventing the spread of conflicts, is a prerequisite for achieving regional integration. Transnational crime, terrorism, and other security challenges cannot be ignored.

(4) **Slow Regional Integration Process:** Despite SADC's ambitious goals, progress in advancing regional economic integration, such as establishing a customs union or a common market, is often slow due to factors such as coordinating member states' interests and ensuring policy consistency.

(5) **Health and Social Welfare:** In the face of public health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, Angola and other SADC countries need to strengthen cooperation in their healthcare systems to jointly address challenges related to disease prevention and control, vaccine distribution, etc. Improving education, reducing poverty, and enhancing overall social welfare are also long-term tasks.

(6) **Environmental Protection and Climate Change:** The southern African region is particularly sensitive to climate change, with frequent droughts, floods, and other natural disasters. Finding a balance between economic development and environmental protection, and implementing sustainable development strategies, are common challenges faced by Angola and SADC.

In summary, Angola continues to face tasks and challenges such as sustained efforts to reduce poverty, promote economic cooperation and balanced development among member states, deepen free trade area construction to reduce trade barriers and facilitate investment flows, strengthen regional agricultural strategies to enhance food production and security, maintain regional security and collaboratively address threats like cross-border crime and terrorism, and enhance regional cooperation in healthcare systems to prepare for future public health crises.

Therefore, to better advance the integration of SADC, Angola must strengthen its domestic development. This includes continuing to accelerate industrialization (in agriculture, livestock, etc.) and address infrastructure issues related to energy, water, sanitation, roads, railways, and telecommunications; attracting foreign investment to promote the development of the domestic market economy, reducing high inflation rates, establishing a reliable banking system, reducing financial crimes like money laundering, and continuing to promote innovation, competitiveness, productivity, business environment optimization, and the elimination of institutional bureaucracy.

5. Potential Role of Angola in the Future Integration of the SADC Region

Angola and the SADC member states can advance the implementation of various initiatives by enhancing policy coordination, increasing investments in regional cooperation funds, and promoting multilateral dialogue mechanisms. Strategic plans should be formulated at the

national level, along with oversight of actual execution and monitoring of deviations from these plans. This includes developing legal coordination plans encompassing tax laws, criminal laws, commercial laws, etc. Furthermore, Angola, currently participating in multiple regional cooperation initiatives, can leverage its advantageous geographical location and abundant natural resources to strengthen trade ties and economic progress. For instance, as a member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Angola contributes to expanding the market for regional products and services.

President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço of Angola has emphasized the importance of "economic diplomacy" and proposed strengthening regional integration efforts to unlock new sources of growth. He has also highlighted the significance of education and training for the younger generation. Additionally, the Angolan government is taking measures to address the impact of climate change on arid regions and seeking long-term solutions to food insecurity, which contribute to enhancing Angola's sustainable development capabilities (UN Country Team of Angola,2022).

In summary, Angola can play a pivotal role in the future integration of the SADC region by strengthening regional economic cooperation, promoting infrastructure development, advancing trade liberalization, and enhancing human capital through education and training.

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