

Bolstering regional stability

South Africa forges ahead as chair of the SADC organ in promoting peace and development in the region

Analysis
MAITE NKOANA-MASHABANE

THE involvement of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in the maintenance of peace and security in the region vindicates our assertion that there should be African solutions to Africa's problems.

The peace prevailing in our region, which should not be taken for granted, gives it an opportunity to direct its efforts towards other priorities, which include regional economic integration.

When South Africa was elected to the chair of the SADC at its summit in Zimbabwe last August we accepted the responsibility entrusted to us to promote stability in the region, which is in line with our foreign policy objective of championing the African agenda of development, peace and security.

We cannot achieve a developed and stable region if our neighbourhood is not at peace with itself. This activism is based on the belief that regional peace, security, stability, and socioeconomic development, are mutually reinforcing and significant for regional integration.

During our tenure the region continued to witness peaceful, credible, free and fair elections in six member states within a seven-month period, which attest to our ever-maturing democratic values and systems.

As chair of the SADC, South Africa led successful SADC election observer missions to Mozambique, Botswana, Namibia, Mauritius, Zambia and Lesotho with a view to strengthening democratic practices in the region.

South Africa's policy orientation has always been geared towards the consolidation of a regional and continental peace and security architecture, focussing primarily on conflict prevention through preventive diplomacy and early warning systems.

In terms of our commitment to regional stability we assumed a very important role in resolving the constitutional crisis in Lesotho through dialogue that was all-inclusive and where all parties concerned negotiated peacefully towards a political settlement.

South Africa facilitated negotiations between the leaders of Lesotho's governing coalition parties in an effort at finding a lasting political situation to the impasse of last year.

We hosted a number of emergency SADC meetings which, among others, resulted in the rejection of unconstitutional change of government, a call for the immediate restoration of constitutional normalcy, the safe repatriation of Lesotho's leadership, the appointment of Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa as the SADC facilitator on Lesotho and the deployment of an SADC politics, defence and security observer mission.

These interventions resulted in the signing



LINING UP TO VOTE: South Africa played a key role in facilitating negotiations among the leaders of Lesotho, which eventually resulted in elections in the mountain kingdom with the hope of the country moving towards peace and stability. PICTURE: GETTY IMAGES

KEY POINTS

- » The involvement of the SADC in the maintenance of peace and security in the region vindicates our long-held assertion that there should be African solutions to Africa's problems
- » The peace prevailing in our region gives our region an opportunity to direct its efforts towards other priorities, which include regional economic integration
- » When South Africa was elected to the chair of the SADC we accepted the responsibility entrusted to us to promote stability in the region
- » We cannot achieve a developed and stable region if our neighbourhood is not at peace with itself
- » This activism is based on the belief that regional peace, security and stability, as well as socio-economic development, are mutually reinforcing and significant for regional integration

of the Maseru Facilitation Declaration and the Maseru Security Accord, both of which paved the way for the reopening of its parliament and preparations for early elections, which took place on February 28.

Critical for the holding of these early elections was the need to ensure that the people of the kingdom of Lesotho were able to exercise their democratic right to vote in a peaceful, stable and secure environment.

This required that the security situation

be stabilised as part of creating a climate conducive for the holding of the February 2015 elections, in line with Lesotho's electoral laws and the SADC guidelines for the holding of free and fair elections.

The stabilisation of the security situation assisted in producing an outcome that was a true expression of the will of the people of Lesotho – an outcome that would communicate a message to the people of the country, the SADC, Africa and the world that the elections were indeed free, fair and credible.

The elections, which were declared by all election observer missions as peaceful, transparent, credible, free and fair, culminated in the recent inauguration of Pakalitha Mosisili, as prime minister of Lesotho. The Independent Electoral Commission was commended for delivering credible elections at short notice.

Although the SADC assisted its fellow member in finding peace, stability and security, it was ultimately the ordinary people of Lesotho who exercised their right to elect their own political leaders.

The total registered voters were 1.2 million people, with approximately a 49% voter turnout on election day. By March 2, when it was realised that there were no outright winner, political parties opted to form coalitions. The new coalition government of Prime Minister Mosisili comprises the Democratic Congress (DC) the Lesotho Congress for Democracy and other smaller parties.

Considering that Lesotho has successfully conducted its elections, the SADC observer

mission which has been in Lesotho since September 2014, will soon close down. The mandate of this mission ends on March 31, and a process to wind down has begun.

As the SADC we reaffirm our commitment to supporting Lesotho in its quest for sustainable peace, stability and security. As neighbours we need to continue to work together to uplift and improve the lives of our peoples through the creation of conducive conditions for a progressive developmental agenda that seeks to create jobs, enhance infrastructure development and, above all, maintain a stable, peaceful, prosperous and progressive future.

One of the decisions taken at the SADC double troika summit in Pretoria on February 20 was that Lesotho would need to initiate constitutional and security reforms. This should be done with a view to ensuring that all the people of Lesotho live in a secure, stable and democratic environment. In this regard, the SADC reaffirms its readiness to assist the people and government of Lesotho on the required constitutional and security reforms.

The people of Lesotho have demonstrated their genuine commitment and desire to ensure their country takes its rightful place among the nations of the world as a reliable and equal partner in development and maintenance of global peace and security.

As the SADC, we stand ready to continue to assist the people of Lesotho on this road to democracy, peace, security and prosperity. Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation

Challenges facing the student aid scheme

SOME may argue that more than 40 years ago, black youth were in the midst of one of the most turbulent political struggles on the African continent. However, more than 20 years after South Africa's political victory, the youth of the rainbow nation continue to struggle, but this time for their right to employment.

In South Africa, unemployment rates of the youth are higher than for adults. In 2014, the adult unemployment rate was 15.6% while the youth unemployment rate was 36.1%.

The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) can play a role in actively reducing youth unemployment, but not in its current form. It is currently structured to fund students, irrespective of their field of study, registered at one of the 25 public universities or 50 Training Vocational Educational and Training colleges across South Africa.

Student funding is meant to be renewed on an annual basis and is based on academic performance. Once a student graduates and finds employment, they then begin repayments to NSFAS. These repayments are re-injected into the pool of NSFAS funding and are used to fund a new cohort of students every year.

The first problem that exists with NSFAS in its current form is that it does very little to align its funding with qualifications relevant to the scarce skills needed by the South African labour market.

Youth unemployment exists not only because of the lack of skills but also because of the lack of job opportunities, work experience, job search abilities and financial resources needed to actively seek employment.

The Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (Jipsa), the Industrial Policy Action Plans (Ipap and Ipap 2) and the National Development Plan (NDP) have all emphasised skills initiatives in a number of scarce skills areas.

NSFAS should form clear partnerships with relevant stakeholders in the public and private sector, in line with initiatives such as Jipsa, Ipap 2 and the NDP to promote absorption into areas, such as science, commerce and education, where skills shortages occur.

This would present NSFAS graduates with an opportunity to reduce their own

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NAIEFA RASHIED

KEY POINTS

- » Some may argue that more than 40 years ago, black youth were in the midst of one of the most turbulent political struggles on the African continent
- » However, more than 20 years after South Africa's political victory, the youth of the rainbow nation continue to struggle
- » In South Africa, unemployment rates for the youth are higher than for adults
- » In 2014, the adult unemployment rate was 15.6% while the youth unemployment rate was 36.1%
- » NSFAS can play a role in reducing youth unemployment, but not in its current form.
- » If repayments are made regularly, NSFAS could grow its pool of funds

vulnerability as youth in the South African labour market while obtaining skills-related employment. Over and above labour market alignment, the structure of NSFAS has to allow for long term financial sustainability in order to efficiently maintain its operations.

The second problem is that NSFAS cannot efficiently fund the growing student numbers in South Africa unless it reconsiders its own financing structure and in particular, the management of repayments. The fund alone remains insufficient and, in relative terms, continues to fund a very small proportion of the new student population.

Many new and existing university students continue to experience funding difficulties as a large proportion of students do not qualify for NSFAS or student loans.

The scheme perpetuates the notion of "giving back" by using student loan repayments of former NSFAS recipients to provide financial assistance to current NSFAS recipients. However, only a relatively small proportion of students are able to make their repayments.



NEXT CHAPTER: Youth unemployment exists not only because of the lack of skills but also because of the lack of job opportunities, work experience and financial resources.

For instance, in 2002, repayments from former NSFAS recipients amounted to R190m of the R732m in NSFAS allocations. While the South African government usually converts almost 40% of these allocations into bursaries, a sizable proportion of the funds are sponsored by NSFAS donors.

If successful, stable employment created through labour market alignment could result in more consistent repayments by former NSFAS recipients on their NSFAS loans.

If repayments are made regularly, NSFAS could recover a lot more of its previous alloca-

tions and grow its pool of funds for the current or next cohort of university entrants.

But, in order to achieve this, NSFAS needs to apply the current repayment terms and conditions more clearly and more consistently.

While its socio-political success cannot be ignored, NSFAS can be more effective and efficient if it improves its repayment structure and promotes greater labour market alignment.

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THE NEW AGE

Online COMMENTS



LETTER

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We need civil servants who are competent

THE government should stop appointing people on the basis of how well they dance and sing struggle songs during public gatherings, but rather on how best a person is able to tackle pressing social issues.

Many service delivery protests are triggered by corrupt and incompetent public servants.

I also am aware that there are public servants who are not qualified academically but who have acquired valuable experience and are trying to do their best in carrying out their responsibilities.

At last President Jacob Zuma has noticed the value and importance of education and skills in respect of service delivery in our country.

Also he has pointed to the danger of corruption and nepotism in the recruitment of public sector staff in his address on issues of poor service delivery at Gallagher Convention Centre in Midrand on Wednesday.

I agree with the president that those who they employ should not in turn hire their friends and relatives, but qualified people who can stick to their job duties and perform them efficiently.

There should be no compromise in ensuring that officials possess skills and the necessary qualifications.

However, I have no doubt that changes will boost service delivery ahead of the 2016 local government election.

Miyelani Hlungwani, Mukhomi Village

TWEETS

@The_New_Age

President Zuma slams corruption in municipalities

@georgepeacock50: it's like the kettle calling the pot black
@zethule: he's corrupt by himself
@nomorebadservice: municipalities owing ESKOM more than R4billion poor people's lights are cut for owing pittance what a disgrace for liberation
@KatitseM: Woowoo!

Minister makes surprise visit to Kempton Park Affairs

@JerryMpiana: @mgigaba his working. We can see his hard work.

Metro cop foils Soweto hijacking

@Ntsako_Mashaba: this is what our police officers must do to protect our communities from the criminals who rob people of their belongings

Court questions Aurora funds

@mlungisidlelap: corruption must be rooted out

Man killed by car in Free State

@carienduplessis: I hope the car gets slapped with a murder charge and no bail

Ntlemenza saddened by judge's comments

@TSMAJOLALAWYER: He is not as sad as we are as his employers, taxpayers

Sophie Ndaba to judge Miss SA

@lungilenyani: Please tell me why?

AB de Villiers shows raw emotions after SA falls again

@ace_nogume: coz this could be the last world cup for other players

British police hunt thieves who stole 38 pythons

@Innotee_dj: no damn ways!
@thabangmutlane: What?

Pitso blasts Shakes's selections. 'Only one Brazilian in Bafana squad'

@LoetoMocwane: We can do without Pitso's inflated ego and his excessive delusion of grandeur. @The_New_Age

Elderly sex lives more satisfying now. 'Seniors spicier between the sheets since the '70s'

@ZweliKing: Eeeww
@Melusi_MD: Hey?