

Knowledge for Development

A STRATEGIC RESOURCE FOR UNROLLING SADC'S DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Abstract...

This paper lays the groundwork for the concept of Knowledge for Development (KfD) in southern Africa, placing it within the context of development plans that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is currently rolling out. These are the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) and the Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (SIPO). The paper recommends that in order to take up the challenge of effectively implementing the two plans, a partnership involving knowledge institutions and SADC should be strengthened.

Introduction

SADC has over the years defined its policies and activities through sector protocols, declarations and charters, which spell out the aims and objectives in each key policy area. Strategic means of achieving these aims and objectives are outlined in RISDP and SIPO documents.

Approved by SADC Heads of State and Government in 2003, RISDP and SIPO have realigned and refocused the regional community's policies and strategies, setting targets for each intervention or priority area. In 2004, the development plans were unbundled into five-year and one-year implementation plans. Business plans were also adopted, defining priorities for each directorate at SADC. Thus the implementation of SADC's two development plans is already in motion.

One of the greatest challenges now lies in strengthening mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation in order to track progress towards the set targets. For this purpose, a smooth and efficient flow of information and knowledge becomes vital.

Whatever the form, the right knowledge needs to be harvested, managed and availed to the right people at the right time if it is to be relevant to any aspect of social advancement.

SADC's development plans can be successfully implemented with the involvement of players who can ensure that the right knowledge for development is generated and made available to the right people at the right time.

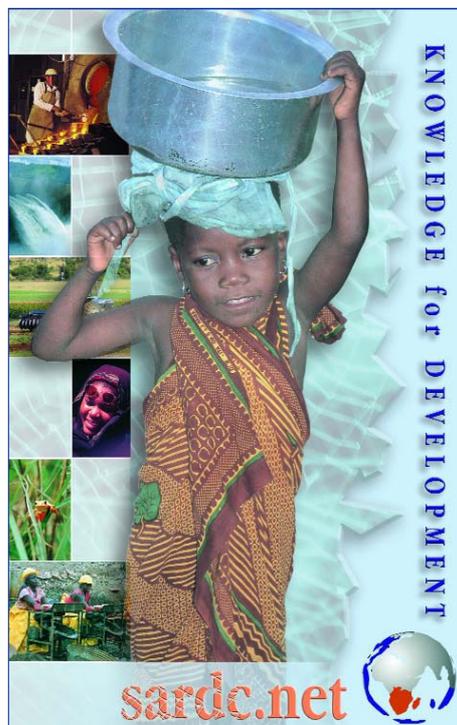
This is as true for SADC's five directorates as it is for all its cross cutting issues including gender and statistics. The five directorates are Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment (TIFI); Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources (FANR); Infrastructure and Services (IS); Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (PDSC) and Social and Human Development and Special Programmes (SHD).

It is generally agreed that the information and knowledge revolution offers opportunities for the developing world, southern Africa included, to leapfrog stages of development and place countries in a more effective position to deal with the challenges of socio-economic and political development.

Knowledge unpacked

Knowledge is multidimensional, with varying foundations, structure and characteristics. It can be tacit or explicit knowledge, it can be ancient and indigenous, religious medieval or it can be modern knowledge. It can be local, regional or international, it can be general or specific to a particular subject area (expert knowledge). In other words, knowledge has varying meanings, understanding and usage depending on the knowledge community.

Knowledge is a combination of contextual information and the individual awareness and understanding of facts, truths or information acquired through reasoning, experience and learning.



Background paper prepared by Munetsi Madakufamba, Deputy Director, Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC), for the SADC Consultative Conference on Partnership for the Implementation of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) and the Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (SIPO)

In organizations, knowledge often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organizational routines, processes, practices, and norms. The same can be said about countries and regional communities, SADC included.

Knowledge can be obtained from individuals, groups of people, and sometimes in those organizational routines and processes.

Knowledge is delivered through structured media such as documents, Internet and person-to-person interactions.

New knowledge is created or acquired through experience, interacting and learning.

This paper restricts itself to knowledge insofar as it relates to regional development and integration in southern Africa.

This dimension of knowledge is seen as a principal currency and strategic resource that SADC cannot afford to ignore in its pursuance of equitable and sustainable socio-economic development.

Why SADC needs efficient KfD

In a paper to the Economic Commission for Africa, Jacques L. Hamel says, "As we move into the 21st century, superior development knowledge bases, knowledge assets and knowledge capital are conceivably the ultimate development resources for the sustainable advancement of the African continent."

This is relevant for SADC as the regional community rolls out its RISDP and SIPO.

SADC development plans set targets and timeframes for goals in various fields of cooperation ranging from trade liberalisation to macroeconomic convergence, human development to food security, infrastructure development to environmental management, and gender equality to good governance.

In principle, these goals are in conformity with continental and global objectives as promoted through the African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Essentially, RISDP and SIPO targets are the preconditions for sustainable development in the SADC.

The region needs more knowledge and more capable knowledge systems for increasing the annual economic growth rate from current aver-

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ages of around four percent to the desired six percent and above. It requires more knowledge to increase per capita food production, better conserve the environment, attain gender equality, maintain peace and security and achieve a better standard of living for all its citizens.

Greater awareness on the multi-dimensional nature of HIV and AIDS is critical in finding a holistic response to the pandemic. Even at the individual level, knowing one's status is vital in making informed decisions about the future, whether negative or positive.

In other words, by better knowing, collecting, managing and disseminating as well as using knowledge on the various development fronts, the region can be better equipped to achieve its development objectives.

On the other hand, knowledge deficiencies and shortcomings in the determinants of sustainable development may lead to underdevelopment, misdevelopment, non-development or unsustainable development.

Lack of knowledge about certain farming methods, for instance, has led to serious environmental degradation. Likewise, ill-advised development projects such as damming by upstream countries have led to disasters such as flooding (when the dams spill over or are opened without prior warning) to downstream countries.

SADC needs strong regional knowledge centres that fully understand the region's historical context and share its development agenda and vision.

Unlike other forms of knowledge, it can be argued that with the right policies, Knowledge for Development can be acquired, managed, analysed and can be efficiently and timeously made available globally through use of media such as the Internet.

This is why one of the key goals of the RISDP is to ensure that SADC is "building a self-sustaining process with the positioning of the community as an effective participant in the information and knowledge-based society".

It should be understood that the opportunity cost of not having knowledge for development is at best maintaining the status quo (which in the majority of cases is not satisfactory as exemplified by widespread poverty situation in the region), or at worst achieving negative development.

Role of ICTs in knowledge delivery

Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) represent the transmission belt in generating, accessing, disseminating and sharing knowledge for development. ICTs enable information and knowledge to be instantaneous, accessible, disseminated simultaneously to an unlimited number of users across the globe. ICTs enable knowledge to become a resource that cannot be depleted, that is, its use by one does not prevent the use or consumption by somebody else.

ICTs render knowledge a public good, which cannot be owned by any one person, although the mechanisms of acquiring and delivery can. Often it is the mechanisms needed to acquire, manage and disseminate knowledge that make it one of the most expensive commodities in the world, hence the need to invest in the sector.

Although ICTs are at the core of knowledge revolution, they should not be considered a panacea. While the potential of ICTs is phenomenal, they should be promoted in conjunction with other technologies. Furthermore, it has to be noted that not everybody in the region has access to the Internet. As such other media still have to be mobilised to disseminate the knowledge so that it reaches the length and breadth of the region. This includes print, radio and television.

Potential pitfalls posed by over reliance on ICTs are precisely the reason many have argued that while internet-based knowledge can be regarded a public good, access to it is not. Nonetheless, member states must be encouraged to develop skills in ICTs and expand the relevant infrastructure if they are to compete regionally and globally.

What challenges does the region face vis-à-vis KfD?

There are many challenges that southern Africa, like any other developing region, faces in relation to managing knowledge for development.

Although it is a common perception that knowledge deficiency retards development, knowledge overdose, commonly known as information overload particularly with reference to the Internet, may have similar undesirable consequences for any society.

The problem of knowledge explosion invokes the question of relevance and appropriateness of information, statistics, indicators and other data sets. Furthermore, knowledge can be used to further certain agendas. Knowledge is a tool that can be misused, misinterpreted or misappropriated. It can be counter productive.

While knowledge can be a resource, an asset, a skill, an advantage or a tool, it can be used or applied constructively or destructively. Knowledge

An Africa without a sustainable, strong knowledge sector of its own will always remain in a dangerously dependent position.

Prof. J. A. van Ginkel, former rector of the United Nations University

can be deliberately miscontextualised in order to achieve certain objectives, desirable or undesirable. It is an agent of change, for better or worse.

In situations of information overload, the intricate nature of knowledge gets even more complex. This

brings into prominence the need for alternative, credible sources of information and knowledge.

SADC needs knowledge centres that understand the historical context of the region, its development trajectory, cultural, linguistic and other national sensitivities.

The region needs knowledge centres that can provide alternative analysis -- alternative in the sense that the knowledge produced is from a regional perspective. For instance, the region needs to produce its own development statistics and indicators and rely less on data generated by northern institutions, which is often extrapolated or based on wrong context.

The challenge of information overload also brings in yet another problem of accessibility. For instance, there may be plenty of information about better ways of increasing per capita food production in the region produced by universities. However, if this information is presented in technical jargon, it may not be useful to policy makers and other stakeholders who are not experts in crop science.

It requires a different skill to repackage such knowledge, presenting it in a vocabulary that is easily accessible.

SADC has three official languages – English, Portuguese and French – and a plethora of indigenous languages. Knowledge becomes relevant and accessible if it is presented in an appropriate language for suitable communication.

While it may be a far-fetched idea to present knowledge for development in all indigenous languages spoken in the southern African region, it is remains a large but attainable challenge to have it in the three official languages of SADC.

Another challenge has to do with the cost of availing the right knowledge to the right people at the right time. Given the fact that the RISDP and SIPO have time-bound targets, specific knowledge will be constantly required by various expert or stakeholder groups for any given priority area within a reasonable timeframe.

The cost of completing this knowledge cycle demands that technical and financial resources be committed to knowledge institutions to enable them to facilitate the process of development. It is a rare expertise -- but nonetheless one that is available in the region – that is needed to mine relevant

information out of the loads and loads churned out daily through various media, and move it along the knowledge cycle.

Knowledge acquisition and expansion brings another challenge of knowledge management. With the amount of information and knowledge harvested increasing by the day, efficient and robust knowledge management systems are needed to screen, select, store and disseminate the resource.

The concept of knowledge management is spreading rapidly in the community of development agencies and regional organisations such as SADC.

While national knowledge management institutions abound in SADC countries, very few exist with a cross border dimension. Yet regional knowledge institutions play a pivotal role in improving the base of knowledge about regional economic, political, social and cultural issues. The challenge is to increase their capacity so that they are better able to play their role.

Regional hub of KfD @sardc.net

The Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC) is an independent regional information resource centre that specializes in knowledge management. SARDC seeks to strengthen regional integration and community building in partnership with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) by tracking progress and raising awareness of regional development issues, achievements and challenges through the collection, analysis and dissemination of accessible information, and enabling capacity in the region to generate and use information.

SARDC's mission is to improve the base of knowledge about economic, political, cultural and social developments, and their implications, by making information accessible to governments and policy makers, non-governmental organizations

(NGOs), the private sector, regional and international organizations, development agencies, parliaments, and the media.

PARTNERSHIP is at the core of SARDC operations, and SARDC always works in partnership with other organization and institutions. SARDC has developed strong partnerships at national, regional and global levels, and was among the first non-government institutions to begin to work with SADC after the Windhoek Treaty of 1992 and the formal commitment to community-building in 1993. The SARDC partnership with SADC is guided by a Memorandum of Understanding.

SARDC was established more than 20 years ago through an expressed need of the Front Line States for information to cross borders in southern Africa. The founding patron was Mwalimu Julius K Nyerere, the first Chairperson of the FLS. SARDC has a well-established regional library and has produced books, magazines, factsheets, reports and other publications, as well as operating a regional news agency, Southern African News Features.

SARDC has produced the official SADC newsmagazine, SADC Today, for the past decade; and this archive provides an accurate and reliable source on regional development since 1997.

SARDC specializes in regional economic development, environment and water resources including river basin management, gender awareness, human development, and sustainable democracy, with broader focus on issues of culture, science and technology, HIV and AIDs, ICTs, and other pertinent regional issues.

Chairperson of the SARDC Board is Ambassador Peter H. Katjavivi, founding Vice-Chancellor of the University of Namibia and currently Ambassador of Namibia in Brussels.

SARDC knowledge is easily accessible and searchable online through a Virtual Library.

Knowledge management is a tool for development.

Knowledge is power.
Mwalimu Julius Nyerere

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