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SADC-led Peace Operations: Successes, Challenges, and Future Prospects

© Singuwa Chimuka^{a,b} (Zambia), Bokeriya S.A.^{a,c} (Russia), 2025

^a Peoples' Friendship University of Russia named after Patrice Lumumba,
Moscow, Russia

^b ORCID: 0000-0002-0812-9234; Jonathanial@yahoo.com

^c ORCID: 0000-0002-9052-4363; bokeria_sa@pfur.ru

Abstract. Peacekeeping operations led by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have played a pivotal role in promoting stability and resolving regional conflicts in Southern Africa. This article aims to explore both the successes and challenges encountered by SADC in its peacekeeping efforts. It examines key peacekeeping operations, such as those in Lesotho, Madagascar, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, highlighting the significant achievements made in conflict resolution and political stabilization. The article identifies crucial factors contributing to SADC's successes, including strong regional cooperation, diplomatic mediation, and the fostering of consensus among member states. However, it also addresses the ongoing challenges faced by SADC, particularly resource limitations, political complexities, and the evolving nature of security threats such as terrorism and insurgencies. By applying a situation-structural approach and analyzing these factors, authors provide valuable insights into the operational dynamics of SADC-led peacekeeping missions and suggest strategies for strengthening the organization's capacity to address emerging regional security challenges. The discussion emphasizes the need for institutional reforms, improved logistics, and enhanced international partnerships to improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. Ultimately, the article aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the regional organization's peacekeeping role and its contribution to the long-term peace and stability of Southern Africa.

Keywords: SADC, peacekeeping operations, peacekeeping, Southern Africa, security, diplomatic mediation, institutional reform

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Миротворческие операции САДК: успехи, проблемы и перспективы

© Сингува Чимука^{a,b} (Замбия), Бокерия С.А.^{a,c} (Россия), 2025

^a Российский университет дружбы народов
им. Патриса Лумумбы, Москва, Россия

^b ORCID: 0000-0002-0812-9234; Jonathanial@yahoo.com

^c ORCID: 0000-0002-9052-4363; bokeria_sa@pfur.ru

Резюме. В статье рассматриваются успехи и проблемы, с которыми сталкивается Сообщество развития Юга Африки (САДК) в своих усилиях по поддержанию мира. Оцениваются достижения ключевых миротворческих операций в Лесото, Мадагаскаре, Демократической Республике Конго, Зимбабве и Мозамбике и факторы, способствующие успехам САДК, включая региональное сотрудничество, дипломатическое посредничество и поиск консенсуса среди государств-членов. Применяя ситуационно-структурный подход, авторы рассматривают постоянные вызовы: ограниченные ресурсы, политические проблемы и изменения в характере угроз безопасности, включая терроризм и восстания. Подчеркивается необходимость институциональных реформ, улучшения логистики и укрепления международного партнерства для повышения эффективности миротворческих операций. В статье представлено всестороннее понимание роли САДК в миротворчестве и ее вклада в долгосрочный мир на юге Африки.

Ключевые слова: САДК, миротворческие операции, миротворчество, юг Африки, безопасность, дипломатическое посредничество, институциональная реформа

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INTRODUCTION

Since its establishment, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has been a dynamic force in peacekeeping operations to foster stability and resolve conflicts across the region. These efforts are crucial in addressing immediate security threats while laying the foundation for sustainable socio-economic development. SADC's approach to peacekeeping spans from diplomatic mediation and peacebuilding initiatives to robust military deployments in response to crises. The organization's involvement in peacekeeping demonstrates its steadfast commitment to regional security and its understanding of the intrinsic link between peace, stability, and prosperity within Southern Africa [1].

Over the years, SADC-led peacekeeping operations have achieved notable successes, showcasing the organization's capacity to facilitate conflict resolution and political stabilization. These successes include effective mediation in various conflict situations, contributing to peaceful transitions of power and supporting democratic processes in member states. Moreover, SADC has deployed peacekeeping missions to address internal conflicts and foster reconciliation, thereby mitigating the impact of violence on communities and creating conditions conducive to long-term peace [2].

However, alongside these successes, SADC has faced significant challenges in its peacekeeping endeavors. Resource constraints, including limited financial resources and logistical capabilities, often hinder the organization's ability to effectively deploy and sustain peacekeeping missions. Moreover, political complexities, such as divergent national interests among member states and external influences, can complicate consensus-building and collective action within the organization. Furthermore, the evolving nature of security threats in the region demands adaptable strategies and responses, testing the organization's operational capacities and necessitating ongoing adjustments in approach [3].

Nevertheless, SADC remains deeply committed to strengthening its peacekeeping capabilities and enhancing regional security cooperation. Through addressing these challenges and leveraging its regional expertise, SADC aims to strengthen its position as a pivotal actor in promoting peace and stability across Southern Africa.

SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY SADC IN PEACEKEEPING

SADC has achieved significant success in peacekeeping, mainly through its mediation efforts and deployment of peacekeeping missions. The organization has played a pivotal role in stabilizing political situations and facilitating peaceful transitions in several member states, showcasing its unwavering commitment to regional security and stability. One striking example of SADC's effective intervention is its operation in Lesotho. SADC's peacekeeping mission in the country and diplomatic efforts played a vital role in mitigating a political crisis and restoring order. The deployment of peacekeepers was instrumental in maintaining security and creating an environment conducive to political dialogue, ultimately leading to a peaceful resolution of conflicts and bolstering the country's democratic processes [4].

In 1998, SADC launched a military and police intervention (Operation Boleas) in response to an attempted coup d'état and political unrest in Lesotho. The operation was led by the South African and Botswana forces. In 2017–2018, SADC deployed the SADC Preventive Mission in the Kingdom of Lesotho (SAPMIL), comprising military, police and civilian components to stabilize the country and support reform processes. As a result, further escalation of violence in the country was prevented, dialogue and reforms in the security sector were promoted, and the country's governance was temporarily stabilized.

SADC played a significant role in stabilizing Madagascar following its 2009 political crisis. Through diplomatic efforts and political mediation, the SADC-led peacekeeping mission helped restore constitutional order by facilitating dialogue between rival factions [5]. Critical successes included: firstly, SADC's mediation, led by Joaquim Chissano, helped broker peace agreements that culminated in the signing of the "Roadmap for Ending the Crisis" in 2011. Secondly, SADC oversaw the peaceful 2013 elections, which marked the return to democratic governance after four years of political instability. Thirdly, by preventing further escalation of conflict, SADC's intervention preserved stability in the region, avoiding broader disruption in Southern Africa [6].

SADC's intervention in Zimbabwe is another compelling example of its peacekeeping success. Through diplomatic engagements and mediation, SADC played a crucial role in facilitating dialogue between

conflicting parties, ultimately forming a national unity government. This intervention helped to defuse a potentially explosive situation and paved the way for more stable governance. SADC's ability to convene divergent political factions and support democratic processes underscores the significance of regional ownership and collaboration in peacekeeping efforts [7].

However, despite accomplishments mentioned above, SADC encounters significant challenges in its peacekeeping operations. One of the primary obstacles is resource constraints. Financial limitations and inadequate logistical support often hinder the organization's ability to effectively deploy and sustain peacekeeping missions. The substantial costs associated with mobilizing and maintaining peacekeeping forces and the limited budget allocated to these operations can impede timely and efficient responses to emerging conflicts. Furthermore, logistical challenges exacerbate the difficulties in executing peacekeeping mandates and ensuring the safety and effectiveness of deployed personnel [8].

Moreover, the SADC's peacekeeping efforts face significant challenges due to political complexities. Divergent interests among member states can lead to disagreements and hinder consensus-building, which is crucial for unified action. Each member state has national priorities and foreign policy objectives, which can sometimes conflict with collective regional goals [9]. Additionally, when it comes to intervening in crises, SADC is hamstrung by a complicated system that dates back to before South Africa joined the Southern African Development Coordination Conference in 1992.

The Organ on Defence, Politics, and Security troika handles political issues. In 2023, it was led by Hakainde Hichilema, the President of Zambia. This is distinct from the troika of current, previous, and upcoming chairs of SADC. This so-called 'double troika' rotating system might be more inclusive – with six heads of state serving in leadership positions at any given time – but the public often misunderstands it and creates confusion. Some in SADC have called for reforms to the double troika system. These rotating positions are also rarely occupied by the leaders of smaller and newcomer states such as Madagascar, Mauritius, the Seychelles, or the Comoros. Following the 44th summit held on 17 August 2024, SADC was headed by Tanzania's President Samia Suluhu Hassan¹.

Several institutional obstacles are also hamstringing SADC. Institutional reforms could give it a more significant political role [10]. It has a weak secretariat with few decision-making powers compared to the ECOWAS Commission. The latter has a bigger budget and arguably more capacity than SADC to carry out its programs independently of member states². Member states have not considered strengthening the SADC Secretariat to be in their interest.

The SADC Secretariat and its executive secretary rarely speak out on controversial issues. This is left to member states. Yet member states only meet once a year, and if the organization's chair is not engaged in issues, as might be the case with Tanzania, the new SADC chair, – nothing happens.

The fact that SADC does not have institutions that properly represent citizens is a huge obstacle to decisive action and buy-in from ordinary people in the region. For example, citizens in SADC cannot turn to a tribunal when they feel wronged by their governments, as citizens in West Africa can turn to the ECOWAS Court of Justice. The SADC tribunal was dissolved in 2012 following pressure from Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe.

It is crucial to reinstate the tribunal with full powers to hear complaints from SADC citizens. SADC also does not have a regional parliament. It only has a Parliamentary Forum with no legislative powers. Frequent requests have been made to upgrade the forum to a fully-fledged parliament, but this has still not happened. Such a move could improve the relationship between people and the regional organization [11].

The structure of election observation missions, which are often made up of government officials with little civil society participation, has in the past undermined their credibility. This is usually the only time citizens see SADC at work in their own countries, when vehicles with the SADC logo and officials with flap jackets do the rounds at election time [12].

Past incidents, such as those in Malawi and the many controversial statements by SADC on elections in Zimbabwe, have not ingratiated SADC with the people of those countries or the opposition. On this score,

¹ Key outcomes from SADC's 44th Ordinary Summit. <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/key-outcomes-from-sadcs-44th-ordinary-summit/> (accessed 10.11.2024)

² ECOWAS Parliament approves a budget of 21,005,052 units of account for 2023. <https://www.parl.ecowas.int/ecowas-parliament-approves-a-budget-of-21005052-units-of-account-for-2023/> (accessed 17.03.2025)

ECOWAS and other regional economic communities are not without fault either, having rubber-stamped many elections that were considered deeply compromised over the years³.

Finally, the fact that many resolutions are adopted and not implemented also undermines people's faith in SADC. For example, in ECOWAS, a citizen of a member state can travel freely with an ECOWAS passport across the 15 member states of the organization – barring harassment by corrupt officials at borders. There is no such luxury for most SADC citizens, especially those from outlier countries such as Madagascar. While free movement across borders might be possible for some, working and living in another member state owing to your regional status is still a pipe dream.

Over the years, SADC has claimed important milestones in improving regional integration and ensuring greater synergy between policies in member states – from gender representation in politics to infrastructure and border management. It has also attempted to coordinate responses to COVID-19 by ensuring that freight transport can move across the region. However, people living in conflict-ridden countries and those experiencing bad governance will continue to hope for reforms that facilitate greater intervention and a moral stance by SADC.

The region's evolving nature of conflicts and security threats further strains SADC's peacekeeping capacities. Modern conflicts are increasingly characterized by asymmetrical warfare involving non-state actors, insurgencies, and transnational threats such as terrorism and organized crime. These challenges require adaptable and responsive peacekeeping strategies beyond traditional military interventions. SADC must continuously evolve its operational doctrines and training programs to effectively address these new forms of conflict. However, the need for rapid adaptation can stretch the organization's resources and capabilities, highlighting the importance of flexibility and innovation in peacekeeping approaches [13].

Additionally, the success of peacekeeping in the SADC sub-region is hindered by the lack of adequate and sustained post-conflict peacebuilding. Achieving lasting peace requires comprehensive peacebuilding efforts that address the root causes of conflict and promote long-term stability. Insufficient investment in post-conflict reconstruction and development can leave countries vulnerable to a return to violence. For instance, in countries like Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the absence of sustained peacebuilding initiatives has often led to renewed tensions and conflict [14].

The ongoing conflict in the DRC is largely due to the failure of sustained peacebuilding efforts. Despite peacekeeping interventions, such as the SADC-supported Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) under MONUSCO, deep-rooted issues like weak governance, unresolved ethnic tensions, and competition over natural resources have not been fully addressed. Rebel groups, including the M23 and various militias, have taken advantage of these gaps, leading to continued instability. Without long-term investment in post-conflict reconstruction, disarmament, and economic opportunities, armed groups easily regroup and launch new offensives, perpetuating violence [15].

In Mozambique, the SADC Mission (SAMIM) was deployed in 2021 to combat the insurgency in Cabo Delgado, where extremist groups linked to ISIL have caused widespread violence. While SAMIM has helped stabilize some areas through military operations, the lack of a strong peacebuilding strategy risks prolonging instability. Many root causes such as poverty, youth unemployment, and poor governance remain unaddressed. Without sustained investment in rebuilding affected communities, economic development, and reconciliation efforts, insurgents can regain strength, leading to recurring violence. Effective peacebuilding in Mozambique requires not just military intervention but also long-term solutions like education, infrastructure development, and political reforms [16].

Effective peacebuilding demands resources, political will, and a coordinated approach involving various stakeholders, including governments, civil society, and international partners. When done effectively, peacebuilding can help prevent the need for further peacekeeping interventions by addressing underlying issues such as poverty, inequality, governance deficits, and social injustices that often fuel conflict. SADC's ability to invest in peacebuilding activities, such as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs⁴, infrastructure development, and institutional capacity building, is crucial for creating resilient

³ Bittiger T. Election Observation in West Africa: The ECOWAS Experience. <https://aceproject.org/today/feature-articles/election-observation-in-west-africa-the-ecowas-experience> (accessed 15.03.2025)

⁴ Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) is a process that contributes to security and stability by disarming combatants, removing them from military structures, and socially and economically integrating them into society.

societies. Strengthening the rule of law, promoting human rights, and fostering inclusive political processes are essential components of peacebuilding that can contribute to sustainable peace.

However, as seen with the pan-African parliament, such a body must adequately represent the entire political landscape and have a high profile to play a meaningful role. Generally, SADC does not have stronger links with non-governmental organizations and civil society than regional organizations such as ECOWAS [17]. When commentators in the region criticize SADC, the solidarity between former liberation movements is usually mentioned as the main obstacle in any meaningful engagement to intervene on behalf of citizens of these countries.

This is undoubtedly true in many instances. Ruling parties such as the ANC in South Africa, ZANU PF in Zimbabwe, Frelimo in Mozambique, SWAPO in Namibia, and the MPLA in Angola tend to shield one another from interference or criticism [18]. This is also where SADC differs from ECOWAS, where the memories of the struggle against colonialism are not as fresh in everyone's minds as in Southern Africa. Here, the links between former liberation movements remain strong.

In summary, the progress made by SADC in its peacekeeping operations is commendable, but there are still significant challenges to overcome. Resource constraints, complex political dynamics, and the evolving nature of conflicts present ongoing obstacles to practical peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts. A multifaceted approach is necessary to address these challenges, including securing adequate funding, fostering political cohesion among member states, and developing adaptable strategies to meet emerging security threats. Additionally, prioritizing sustained peacebuilding initiatives is essential for preventing the recurrence of conflict and ensuring long-term stability in the region.

By overcoming these challenges, SADC can solidify its role as a critical regional peace and security actor, thereby contributing to the broader development and integration goals in Southern Africa.

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING SADC-LED PEACEKEEPING

Strategic approaches must be adopted to improve the effectiveness of SADC-led peacekeeping operations and surmount the challenges they encounter. Fortifying institutional capacities within the SADC is imperative. This involves investing in comprehensive training programs for peacekeepers, equipping them with essential skills in conflict resolution, humanitarian assistance, and civilian protection. By enhancing the professionalism and readiness of peacekeeping forces, SADC can significantly elevate its ability to deploy and sustain operations effectively in diverse and demanding environments [19].

Moreover, logistical support mechanisms are indispensable in ensuring the operational readiness of peacekeeping missions. Enhancing logistical capabilities, such as transportation, communication systems, and medical support, is vital for facilitating rapid deployment, coordination, and operational effectiveness on the ground. Addressing these logistical challenges can minimize delays and ensure that peacekeepers have the necessary resources to fulfill their mandates efficiently.

Furthermore, SADC is advised to strengthen cooperation with international partners to enhance its peacekeeping capabilities. Collaborating with organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and other regional bodies can provide additional resources, technical expertise, and financial support [20]. Joint training exercises, knowledge sharing, and joint operational planning can significantly improve the interoperability and coordination among peacekeeping forces, enabling more robust and integrated responses to regional conflicts and crises [21].

Leveraging regional expertise and best practices is another invaluable strategy for enhancing SADC-led peacekeeping operations. Drawing on the experiences and lessons learned from successful peacekeeping missions within the region can inform future operations and improve strategic decision-making. Establishing mechanisms for sharing intelligence, conducting joint assessments, and coordinating regional peacebuilding efforts can strengthen SADC's role as a proactive and effective peacekeeping actor [22].

Furthermore, promoting a culture of conflict prevention and early intervention is crucial for mitigating conflict escalation and reducing the need for large-scale peacekeeping operations. Emphasizing diplomacy, mediation, and dialogue as primary tools for resolving disputes can help prevent conflicts from spiraling out of control. Strengthening political dialogue and fostering trust among member states through regional initiatives and mediation efforts can create conducive conditions for the peaceful resolution of disputes before they escalate into violent conflicts [23].

SADC peacekeeping operations should prioritize long-term solutions, including governance reforms, economic development and addressing social inequalities. Peace processes should involve all stakeholders, including civil society, women and youth, to ensure legitimacy and sustainability. Member states should prioritize collective regional interests over individual national agendas to enhance the effectiveness of SADC interventions.

In essence, it is imperative to adopt a holistic approach to enhance the effectiveness of SADC-led peacekeeping operations. This approach should bolster institutional capacities, optimize logistical support, foster stronger collaboration with international partners, tap into regional expertise, and prioritize conflict prevention and early intervention. Embracing these strategies will enable SADC to fulfill its pivotal role in promoting peace, security, and stability in Southern Africa, making significant contributions to regional integration, sustainable development, and prosperity.

CONCLUSION

SADC-led peacekeeping operations have significantly promoted stability and resolved conflicts within Southern Africa. The organization has achieved remarkable success in easing tensions and facilitating peaceful transitions across member states through mediation, peacebuilding initiatives, and occasional military interventions. These efforts have been instrumental in preventing the escalation of conflicts and in reestablishing stability in post-conflict environments.

However, the journey to sustaining peace in the region is riddled with challenges. Resource constraints pose a significant obstacle, hindering the organization's ability to deploy sufficient personnel, equipment, and logistical support for effective peacekeeping operations. The complex political dynamics among member states and regional difficulties often complicate consensus-building and collective action vital for coordinated peace efforts.

Furthermore, the evolving nature of security threats, such as transnational crime, terrorism, and border disputes, demands adaptive strategies and enhanced cooperation with international partners. Collaboration with organizations like the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) can provide additional resources, expertise, and diplomatic backing to strengthen SADC's peacekeeping capabilities.

Addressing these challenges requires unwavering commitment and cooperation from SADC member states. To improve operational readiness and effectiveness significantly, it is imperative to bolster institutional capacities within the organization, including implementing robust training programs for peacekeepers and enhancing logistical support mechanisms. It is necessary to develop its early warning systems, conflict resolution mechanisms and operational capabilities for peacekeeping operations. Furthermore, investing in conflict prevention mechanisms and advocating for early diplomatic interventions are essential strategies to tackle the root causes of conflicts and minimize the necessity for large-scale peacekeeping interventions.

By drawing from past experiences and embracing proactive approaches, SADC can maintain its pivotal role in fostering peace, security, and development across Southern Africa. Building on past successes and addressing current challenges is paramount to achieving the organization's vision of a stable and prosperous region, where peace and security form the bedrock for sustainable development and shared prosperity among member states.

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHORS / ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ОБ АВТОРАХ

Singuwa Chimuka (Zambia), PhD (History), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, RUDN University, Moscow, Russia.

Сингува Чимука (Замбия), кандидат исторических наук, факультет гуманитарных и социальных наук, РУДН, Москва, Россия.

Svetlana A. Bokeriya (Russia), PhD (Law), Associate Professor, Department of Theory and History of International Relations, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, RUDN University, Moscow, Russia.

Светлана Александровна Бокерия (Россия), кандидат юридических наук, доцент, кафедра теории и истории международных отношений, Факультет гуманитарных и социальных наук, РУДН, Москва, Россия.

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