A Socio-Historical Approach to Regional Organizational Relations? NGOs in Gender Security in the SADC Region

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Abstract

The extant academic literature in the field of regional International Relations has paid little attention to non-state actors' organizational relations in building region-ness. Yet, the region offers sets of organizational relations outside, alongside, and as part of the formal regional state structures to do with gender, which offer insights into non-state regional relations and thus help to fill the lacunae in the field and facilitate understanding of the regional dynamic of international relations. This article examines how organizational relations of non-state actors in gender security play out in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. It highlights the shortcomings of the inter-governmental approach to international relations pursued by various scholars. Drawing on interviews with representatives of NGOs, governments, the SADC, and annual reports, as well as the academic literature, it argues for a socio-historical approach to understanding regional organization and transnationalism, which considers African agency in building region-ness.

Introduction

This article adopts a socio-historical approach to describe and contextualize non-state regional organizational relations in building gender security and to illustrate their importance in creating a region-ness in the Southern African Development Community (SADC).[1] The concept of organizational relations is used here as a broad framing tool to analyze the relational modes of coordination, alliance-building, networking, and advocacy underpinning regional security governance involving state and/or non-state actors (Nedziwe 2017). The terminology is purposeful to move beyond singular state-centric descriptions of regional organizational relations in the field of International Relations (IR). The article

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[1] SADC here is defined as a socially constructed region of the 16 countries constituted by both state and non-state actors from Angola, Botswana, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe (https://www.sadc.int/member-states). I argue here that it is the organizations relations that define and redefine the region through processes and interactions.

focuses on the organizational relations of non-state actors in gender security, which takes into account their agency in building region-ness outside, alongside, or as part of the confines of regional structures. Region-ness here refers to a sense of belonging or being part of building the region, that is regional cohesion and regional consciousness to contribute to shared development and security. Employing this approach to explain the region's social fabric is an exercise in understanding regional transnational behavior in a more nuanced way. Furthermore, by focusing on non-state organizational relations, this work departs from mainstream views in the scholarship on regional international relations along physical territorial logics that depict regional organizations as intergovernmental, overlooking sets of relations, particularly those of non-state actors that equally constitute the make-up of regions. Equally, while mainstream gender studies have premised analyses on universal, rigid binaries and body logic, gender has not been the starting point for non-state organizational relations in SADC[2]. Non-state organizational relations, instead, have emerged outside formal intergovernmental spaces as a way of addressing common regional insecurities (SADC 2008; SADC 2014; SADC 2022). The mainstream logic contrasts with the organizational logic that has emerged in SADC, which reveals African agency as a multidimensional, dynamic phenomenon that can be traced from the socio-history of transformation from political to multi-layered forms of regional organizational relations. The article does not seek to essentialize non-state organizational relations in regional IR thinking but, drawing on Paul-Henri Bischoff, Kwesi Aning, and Amitav Acharya (2016), Siphokazi Magadla (2013)and Heidi Hudson (2016)'s works, engages with mainstream assumptions to shed light on their limitations by uncovering African non-state agency outside, alongside and within state intergovernmental regional spaces in the SADC.

Women-based NGOs in the SADC region choose their identity as regional organizations and their norms according to the gender insecurities that they seek to address, and this strategy reaffirms African agency. These NGOs seek to address multiple gender insecurities through initiating, selecting, and developing norms and policies on gender-based violence, gender and the media, women, law and development, gender and climate change, gender and healthcare, gender and HIV and AIDS, sexual reproductive health rights, women and economic justice, women and human rights and LGBTQ+ issues (Morna, Makamure,

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[2] Several significant works in African women's scholarship challenge binary and body logics, such as Oyèwùmí (1997), Nzegwu (1998), and Magadla, Magoqwana, and Motsemme (2021). Magadla (2013) contends that the discourse of International Relations (IR) should prioritise the voices of African women, communities, and indigenous societal actors. Similarly, Hudson (2016) underscores the active agency of women in Africa's international politics, a dimension frequently overlooked.

and Dube 2017, 12, 35)[3]. These multiple gendered issues have found expression in policy documents, with women-led NGOs playing a leading role in their framing, pushing for buy-in and diffusion in global, regional, and national policies[4]. The agency of these non-state actors and their organization within regional international relations is necessitated by the growing gendered insecurities that have impacted women the most. It is from sets of non-state organizational relations that regional gender policies first emerged and expanded, from SADC's first declaration on gender and development in 1997 and its addendum in 1998 to its first legally binding protocol on gender and development in 2008 and the revised version in 2015 (SADC 2008; Gender Links Report 2015).

Research Design

Mixed methods were employed to gather primary and secondary data in 2016 to map African non-state agency in gender security in the SADC region. The analysis draws on five of 24 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2016 in Botswana, Madagascar, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Informants included NGO representatives in both junior and senior positions, as well as officials in the Ministries of Women and Gender, SADC, and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). The article also draws on annual reports of NGOs, policy briefs, and databases, as well as inter-governmental gender instruments. Secondary data was drawn from the relevant literature on regional international relations and newspaper articles. This data is used to illustrate the relevance of region-ness that draws on non-state organizational relations to address gender insecurities in the SADC region.

The article discusses the non-state norm selection process in gender security, followed by the actual norms in gender security and non-state agency in building region-ness. The discussion then turns to NGOs in gender security, their organizational relations, and the obstacles and ends with a conclusion. This study adopts an interpretive, multi-layered approach to regional organization, which is more suitable than mainstream approaches because it acknowledges the importance of non-state relations and agency in building a sense of regional identity and cohesion[5]. By emphasizing organizational relations and agency, we can develop a more thorough understanding of a region, gain better insights into the factors

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[3] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06.09.2016.
[4] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06.09.2016.
[5] The definition of agency here draws on that proposed by scholars in IR and foreign policy as "directed, meaningful, intentional and self-reflective social action" or the faculty or state of acting or exerting power (Chabal 2009, 7; Buzan, Jones and Little 1993, 103, cited in Bischoff 2020, 1).

that drive regionalizing behavior, and engage with the concept of inclusive security in Southern Africa more effectively.

Norm Selection in Gender Security

The initial organizational relations to select norms in gender security have largely occurred outside inter-governmental forms of regional organization where non-state actors have mobilized in networks of NGOs. In turn, these NGOs work alongside and within inter-governmental spaces to further develop and refine the selected norms. For example, the initial non-state relations that developed SADC's first legally binding gender protocol involved the organization of women-led NGOs around cluster of themes based on their expertise and the gender insecurities that they sought to address on the policy level (Made and Morna 2009).[6] Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA), a regional non-state transnational community, led the cluster that drafted the provision on constitutional and legal rights in the 2008 protocol, while the Southern African AIDS Information and Dissemination Services (SAfAIDS), also a regional non-state transnational community, led a cluster that put together the provisions on HIV/AIDS (Made and Morna 2009, 27).[7] The initial draft of the regional gender protocol was developed through the collaborative efforts of organizations within the clusters. This demonstrates the significant role of non-state actors, operating independently from state frameworks, in addressing regional gender-based insecurities.

Furthermore, it is important to note that while women-led NGOs have initiated organization around the selection and development of policies on gender and women issues, they also acknowledged the importance of forming social relations with state actors within the intergovernmental space:

> Most of the time, civil society actors initiate regional policy issues on gender. We go to SADC with like-minded organizations to say how we can change this policy. We bring our evidence from our primary actors or community-based organizations and take these issues to SADC and say: Can you please change this policy or protocol on gender?! We go to SADC because it is a political kind of structure that brings all the government ministries and heads of states together. We work with SADC because we want to influence policy around gender. SADC is critical if you want to influence policy. We want to work with SADC because that is where the decision-making process is. We work with SADC because we believe it is the best approach to work as a regional organization. The benefits of working on the regional project are to

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[6] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06 September 2016.
[7] In addition, the Gender Advocacy Programme based in Cape Town led the governance cluster, the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre Network in Harare led the economic justice cluster, and the media, information and communication cluster was led by Gender and Media Southern Africa (Made and Morna 2009, 27).

solve problems collectively to address problems like migration, HIV/AIDS, culture, and patriarchy.[8]

The non-state organization, in this case, have been based on not only forming social relations amongst non-state actors but equally with state actors to address gender insecurities. These sets of non-state approaches have involved establishing close relations with various actors operating within the SADC regional policy-making structures. For example, Made and Morna (2009, 34-35) note that the "relationship between civil society organizations and the SADC Gender Unit began in 2005 when hands were joined in a collaborative effort to put gender equality in the spotlight in the run-up to, and during, the SADC Heads of State Summit in Botswana that year." Regional organization to select norms in gender security has involved complex, dynamic organizational relations in clusters outside, alongside, and within SADC inter-governmental spaces as a way to develop regional policies that address gendered insecurities. This mode of organizational relations involving non-state-state actors contrasts with mainstream intergovernmental perspective on regional international relations, according to which SADC is "an implementation body" that enables the heads of states and governments to "call the proverbial shots in the region" (Landsberg 2012, 75). In practice, since the 1990s, both state and non-state actors have participated in selecting and developing norms related to gender security within the intergovernmental policy framework of SADC, revealing a more complex reality than mainstream approaches suggest.

Norms in Gender Security Governance

Traditionally, norms are seen as being developed at the global level and then spread to regional and local contexts (Finnermore and Sikkink 1998). However, recent research has shown that the norm cycle is more intricate, involving a bidirectional process. Norms can emerge from the bottom-up, originating at the local or regional level and then spreading to the global level, or they can follow a top-down approach, starting at the global level and then being adapted and implemented at regional and local levels (Acharya 2013; Nedziwe and Tella 2023). In the case of the SADC region, norms related to gender security have followed a complex path. They have originated from local and regional organizations, then spread to global platforms, and subsequently been incorporated back into regional and local policies. (Morna, Makamure, and Dube 2017; Nedziwe and Tella 2023). Evidence suggests that norms and issues within the African context are not merely adopted from the global level but are often generated locally, highlighting the agency and autonomy of African actors in norm

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[8] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06 September 2016.

development. Furthermore, the important role of non-state regional organizational relations is revealed through how NGOs come together to form coalitions that center around the selection, development, and diffusion of norms related to gender security. NGOs have been at the forefront of developing regional frameworks that have subsequently been incorporated into global gender security norms and development. This highlights the dynamic agency of African actors in international relations, which extends beyond a purely intergovernmental approach.

Non-state actors have exercised their agency at the global level in two ways: either by working independently, parallel to state actors, or by collaborating with them within intergovernmental policymaking spaces. For example, the report on the 1999 Cancun ministerial meeting highlights the participation of a diverse group of representatives of NGOs that worked both independently and in collaboration with state actors during the event. These included "feminist economists, gender and trade analysts, and women's advocates [who] analyzed World Trade Organization (WTO) policies from a gender and human rights perspective and drew attention to the situation of women in the context of existing and emerging WTO agreements in the areas of agriculture, intellectual property rights, service, and investment" (Equation 2003, 67). A mix of local, regional, and international NGOs, such as the International Gender and Trade Network, Women Environment Development Organization, and Women Edge Coalition, also participated in the Cancun meeting. The participation of these non-state actors demonstrates their agency in establishing social relations and working together with governments from the Global South to resist the WTO Ministerial draft policy on trade. Moreover, they actively sought to raise awareness about the gender-specific consequences of the ministerial draft policy on women and children (Equation 2003).

Building Region-ness: A History of Non-State-State Relations

In the 1990s, SADC became more open to non-state-state relations. This expansion of the intergovernmental space was a means of acknowledging the importance of social relations between non-state actors and state actors in constructing a sense of regional identity and building a regional community that would be validated by its citizens (Mbuende 2012). The 1992 Windhoek Treaty, which established the SADC, recognizes that the organization:

> shall seek to involve fully, the peoples of the region and Non-Governmental Organisations in the process of regional integration […] shall cooperate with and support the initiatives of the peoples of the region, and Non-Governmental Organizations, contributing to the

objectives of this Treaty in the areas of cooperation in order to foster closer relations among communities, associations and the peoples of the region (SADC Treaty 1992, 19).

The 1992 Windhoek Treaty suggested a move towards greater inclusivity, forging stronger ties with states that were facing increasing demands for democracy and accountability. As the concept of security evolved, non-state actors became more involved in the regional dynamics, at least in terms of policy and practice, by the mid-1990s. Kaire Mbuende (2012, 56) emphasizes that:

> The involvement of non-state actors relates not only to their input into the SADC Programme of Action but also to knowledge of their own operations. […] NGOs can contribute to regional integration by working with their counterparts in other member states on a number of issues.

Consequently, SADC's policy documents and scholars recognize non-state relations in addressing several regional issues, as well as non-state actors' need to be active agents (Söderbaum 2007; Godsäter 2015; Mbuende 2012; Nedziwe 2020). The recognition of the need to form closer relations with non-state actors and the peoples of the region in the 1992 SADC Treaty and non-state contributions to regional integration (Mbuende 2012) stands in contrast to the environment of the immediate post-independence era of the 1980s. During that time, the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), SADC's predecessor, adopted policies that excluded non-state actor participation. This discriminatory approach was manifested in the masculine biases present within the SADCC. For instance, despite women advocating for the establishment of a gender desk within this state-led body, their requests went unheard (Lyons, 1999; Geisler 2004).[9] The democratization and nonlinearization of the 1990s opened spaces for the women's movement to engage in the development of norms within SADC's inter-governmental policymaking structures (SADC Treaty, 1992). In 1998, a SADC Council of NGOs was formed. Through this network, NGOs are expected to interact with SADC institutions to contribute to their context, form, and direction. The growing non-state relations occurring alongside and within SADC point to how organizational approaches transcend an inter-governmental approach that limits analyses to those of state actors.

In this context, SADC played a crucial role in facilitating the development and expansion of NGOs within the region. It acted as a catalyst for the growth of NGOs, empowering them to exercise their agency and generate ideas to tackle a broad spectrum of

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[9] While women participated in Zimbabwe's liberation struggles and fighting in the battle front alongside with men, they were left out in the immediate independent governance structures. The marginalization of women is characteristic of post-independent governance structures in other Southern African countries such as Zambia (Nedziwe 2020).

insecurities that have evolved and increased over time (Nedziwe 2020). The combined efforts of regionally-based organizations and NGOs with international affiliations have led to the development of ideas within SADC to address a range of social insecurities in the region. These efforts include advocacy and activism on human rights and democracy issues, led by organizations such as the Inter-African Network for Human Rights and Development and Democracy (AFRONET), Southern African Human Rights NGO Network (SAHRINGON), and the Human Rights Research and Documentation Trust of Southern Africa. Additionally, advocacy and policy research initiatives encompass peacebuilding and conflict resolution, with NGOs like the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) and the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) taking the lead. Organizational relations of these actors within the SADC point to the interconnectedness between non-state identities and insecurities (Adler and Barnett 1998, 9-28).

NGOs promoting advocacy around economic justice, development, and trade include the Southern African Network on Debt and Development (SANDD) and Jubilee 2000 Southern Africa.[10] The issues that non-state actors address have also expanded with the scope of norms and funding around emerging and evolving problems. For example, advocacy and activism on environmental issues have involved NGOs such as the Environmental Justice Networking Forum (EJNF), ZERO, Empowerment for African Sustainable Development (EASD), and the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA). Those addressing the nexus between HIV/AIDS and gender and power include the Southern African Network of AIDS Service Organizations (SANASO), AIDS Rights Alliance of Southern Africa (ARASA), Gender Links (GL), and WLSA and Women and Resources Eastern and Southern Africa (WARESA). Issues concerning workers and students have also gained importance and have been incorporated into regional norms, policies, and organizations through advocacy efforts of such NGOs as the Southern African Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUCC) and the Southern African Students' Union (SASU). Several organizations focus on advocating for business interests in the region, including the African Business Forum, the Southern African Association of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (SAACCI), the Federation of Clearing and Forwarding Associations

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[10] The other organisations include the African Forum on Debt and Development (AFRODAD); Economic Justice Network (EJN); Ecumenical Service for Socio-economic Transformation (ESSET); Southern Africa's Peoples Solidarity Network (SAPSN); Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC); Southern and Eastern African Trade Information Negotiations Institute (SEATINI); Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN) and Swaziland Solidarity Network.

of Southern Africa (FCFASA), and the Small Enterprises Promotion Advisory Council (SEPAC). Churches in the region have also formed social relationships by organizing themselves to engage in advocacy and activism. These faith-based organizations have focused on various issues, including liberation, African spirituality, charity, and other broader social concerns (Nedziwe 2020). Such organizational relations have included but not been limited to the Southern African Council of Churches (SACC) and the Southern African Catholic Development Association (SACDA).

Non-state regional organizations and transnational networks have increasingly focused on conducting research to support and inform their advocacy efforts. NGOs conducting research with a regional dimension include the Economic Research Consortium (AERC) and the African Energy Policy Research Network (AFREPREN)[11]. Advocacy and policy research on press and media freedom have also been a focus of organization in the region. The Southern African Research and Documentation Information Centre (SARDC), Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), and Africa Information Afrique (AIA) are among NGOs addressing these issues. Additionally, larger networks such as the Southern African Non-Governmental Organization Network (SANGONET), SADC Council of NGOs (SADC-CNGO), and Reflection and Development Centre for Eastern and Southern Africa (MWENGO) reflect the non-state relations and collaboration around common regional insecurities and challenges. NGOs addressing gender security form part of broader regional networks such as the SADC Council of NGOs. Mbuende (2012, 56) notes that "NGOs have formed a regional organization—the SADC Council of NGOs, established in 1998—through which they can interact with the SADC institutions and contribute to regional integration in their own right." This non-state organizational approach, which aims to engage with SADC institutions to confront shared regional insecurities, reflects African agency in fostering region-ness beyond an inter-governmental dominant narrative.

NGOs in Gender Security in SADC

The engagement of non-state regional actors in gender security with the SADC institutions to support and influence normative change has grown since the 1990s. This process involved developing norms outside the state and then pushing for political buy-in from the SADC governments to adopt policies on gender security.[12] These NGOs include

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[11] The other organizations include the Southern African Political Series (SAPES), Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA), Marine Science Cooperation Programme (MARINE), and the Regional Research Collaboration in Reproductive Health in Africa (REPH).

[12] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06.09.2016.

those working on gender and media-related issues in Southern Africa, such as GL, Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU), Western Cape Network on Violence Against Women, Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA), and the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (Made and Morna 2009; Nedziwe and Tella 2023). WLSA and Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) have organized around issues of women, law, and development. Regional organizations on gender and healthcare, sexual reproductive health rights, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS have been spearheaded by SAfAIDS and the Voluntary Services Overseas-Regional HIV and AIDS Initiative of Southern Africa (VSO-RHAISA). Gender and education have been prioritized by NGOs such as Education of Girls and Women in Africa (EGWA) and the Southern African Network of Higher Educational Institutions, Challenging Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence (Made and Morna 2009; Morna, Makamure and Dube 2017). The issues that these NGOs address have not been static but have changed and expanded over time. The organization of non-state actors at the regional level in Southern Africa demonstrates the agency of African stakeholders in addressing gender-related insecurities within the SADC region. This agency extends beyond the traditional inter-governmental state perspective, highlighting the crucial role of non-state actors in shaping regional policies and initiatives.

The evolving context of global insecurities and their repercussions for local communities has been characterized by changing norms and policy directions (SADC 2016; Morna, Makamure, and Dube 2017). This has resulted in a growing number of women-led NGOs who exercise agency around climate change and agriculture within a regional context. Non-state regional organizations and transnational initiatives aiming to mitigate the impact of climate change on women and promote their role in the agricultural sector include WARESA, Southern Africa Women for Environment (SAWE), and Gender, Urbanisation, and Environment (GUE). Non-state actors have also organized themselves to address issues related to women's economic justice and human rights. This is evident through the work of NGOs such as the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN), South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID), and the DITSWANELO Botswana Centre for Human Rights.

Global norms, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their underlying principle of "Leave No One Behind," have influenced regional organizations to expand their focus and include issues related to men's experiences and challenges. These organizational relations have involved NGOs such as MenEngage Africa, which is affiliated with the global MenEngage Alliance and consists of "over 350 non-governmental

organizations at grass-root, national, and regional levels" (MenEngage Africa 2023). It addresses gendered insecurities that range from gender-based violence to HIV prevention, children's rights, positive parenting, and promoting gender, human, and social justice. Non-state actors also address issues that affect LGBTQ+ groups, such as the South African-based Gender Links. Despite the progress made by non-state regional organizations in addressing gender-related issues within the SADC region, there have been challenges in reaching a shared understanding of gender and common regional gender insecurities. This is due to the prevalence of homophobic attitudes in countries such as Malawi, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Zimbabwe (Nedziwe 2017). In addition to the challenges posed by divergent attitudes towards gender and sexuality, there is an increasing trend of non-state regional actors engaging in relational modes of coordination, alliance-building, networking, and advocacy to address gender security governance. These organizational relationships appear to be intentionally designed to transcend traditional state-centric approaches.

There has been a notable increase in non-state organizational relations, particularly in the form of larger networks, aimed at influencing gender security in the SADC region. Some of these networks include the Botswana Council of NGOs (BOCONGO), the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance Network (The Alliance), and the AIDS and Rights Alliance for Network of AIDS Service Organisations (ARASA).[13] The NGO regional networks have adopted a collaborative approach to tackle the complex and interconnected gender insecurities prevalent in the region. Their agency is evident in the way they structure their organizational relations, which operate independently from, in parallel with, and in cooperation with inter-governmental regional organizations. Through these diverse modes of engagement, the NGO networks aim to shape policies and practices related to gender security.

In sum, non-state organizational relations in gender security in the SADC region can be categorized into two main types (SADC 2016; Morna, Makamure, and Dube 2017):

(1) Relations outside formal state frameworks, involving the formation of non-state relations around regional insecurities, initiating and developing norms to

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[13] The other organisations include Platforma da Mulheres Accao (PMA) in Angola, Union Congolaise des Femmes des Media (UCOFEM) in the DRC, Fédération Pour la Promotion Féminine at Enfantine (FFPE) in Madagascar, the NGO Gender Coordination Network in Malawi, the Forum Mulher in Mozambique, the Namibian Non-Governmental Organizations Forum (NANGOF), the Southern African Network of AIDS Service Organizations (SANASO), Coordinating Assembly of NGOs in Swaziland, Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), Women's Coalition in Zimbabwe, and the Non-Governmental Organization Coordination Council (NGOCC) in Zambia.

influence inter-governmental policymaking, increasing norms to address social issues, growing non-state region-ness, and norm changes.

(2) Relations alongside or within formal intergovernmental structures, involving growing state-non-state relations to address regional insecurities, a norm cycle of initiation, development, adaptation and diffusion, the development of a gender norm cycle, and potential norm changes, social changes, development and greater gender security in the region.

The two main types of non-state organizational relations in gender security in the SADC region, those outside formal state frameworks and those alongside or within formal intergovernmental structures, demonstrate the significant role and agency of non-state actors in shaping norms, policies, and practices related to gender security, as well as their potential to contribute to social change, development, and greater gender security in the region.

Analyzing Regional Organizational Relations in Gender Security

Links Between the Global, Regional, and Local Levels

Non-state organizational relations in gender security in the SADC region have manifested in various ways, such as elevating local norms to the global level, reintroducing them to the region, and promoting their integration into regional and national policies. Non-state actors' engagement at the global level has been perceived as an important strategy to advocate for local and regional issues to be adopted in global policy. This tendency reveals the agency of non-state actors in linking norms between the global, regional, and local levels. The organizational approaches of women-led NGOs from Southern Africa that have culminated in SADC's key gender policies, as well as their roles in global policymaking, challenge mainstream assumptions that neglect the role non-state actors in regional international relations. For example, the Southern Africa Gender Alliance has played a visible role in forming organizational relations and the development of gender policies at the UN level. Emerging in 2003 as a regional coalition of gender and women's NGOs, the Alliance aimed to promote gender security in the SADC region. In 2014 and 2015, it actively participated alongside other non-state and state actors in the development of UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by 2030 (SADC 2016; Morna, Makamure, and Dube 2017; SADC 2022). Bhekinkosi Moyo, the executive director of the Southern African Trust (SAT), emphasized that the

creation of the SADC Gender Protocol allowed regional NGOs to play a role in shaping the UN's process of formulating SDG 5:

> The Protocol is an example of a one-stop-shop for global, continental, and regional development instruments. It is also an example of an iterative process from regional to global…This network of regional networks is now using the SDGs to lobby for the update and upgrade of the Protocol in line with the SDGs. (Gender Links, 2015, 1)

The participation of Southern African NGOs in shaping SDG 5, followed by their efforts to promote its integration into regional and local norms and their collaboration with governments, demonstrates the agency of non-state actors at multiple levels of governance (Morna, Makamure, and Dube 2017, 12, 35).

The development and revision of the 2008 SADC Gender Protocol involving the Alliance organizing outside, alongside, and within SADC's inter-governmental spaces reveal the close ties of non-state-state relations in addressing gendered insecurities in Southern Africa. As such, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development represents

> an example of a sub-regional instrument developed through lobbying and technical expertise from civil society, political buy-in from governments, monitoring of implementation by both civil society and the SADC Secretariat, and resourcing of implementation by funding partners (Gender Links 2015, 1).

Non-state sets of regional organizational relations have included NGOs, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, professional associations, social movements, trade unions, business associations, advocacy and lobby groups, women's organizations, interest groups, and self-help groups. However, many of these entities are not adequately represented in mainstream discourse and thinking. These organizational relations center around coming together to develop norms, while working with states to suggest policy shifts or proposals of new norms. The relations between non-state and state actors to develop norms in the SADC context point to a multifaceted African agency in building region-ness to address social insecurities, including those relating to gender.

The gender policies that have emerged from the late 1990s to date have involved wide participation initiated by non-state actors who then lobbied for their adoption and diffusion in SADC's regional policies. Processes initiated outside the state have been important to non-state actors' organizational strategies, as well as in helping them to obtain the results they seek in developing gender norms and their diffusion. Pat Made and Collen Lowe Morna (2009, 37) highlight the complex nature of engaging SADC officials, emphasizing the importance of understanding their processes and timelines to effectively influence outcomes. They point out that "NGOs often arrive at inter-governmental summits expecting to influence outcomes without realizing that the leg work takes place much earlier." Furthermore, Made and Morna stress that "those with the real power are the senior officials,"

suggesting that NGOs need to engage with these key decision-makers well in advance of the summits to have a meaningful impact on the outcomes. Non-state organizational approaches have further revealed their agency and ideas through lobbying for the integration of regional norms into global norms (SADC 2016; Morna, Makamure and Dube 2017). Non-state regional organizing in the SADC region has also involved the sharing of expertise and resources to identify, develop, and advocate for policies that address a wide range of issues, with the aim of effecting change in the region.

The organizational approaches employed by NGOs in the SADC region offer alternative pathways for regional processes that go beyond the traditional inter-governmental narrative. These NGOs provide valuable insights into how the evolution of organizational relations has contributed to the building of a more cohesive region. The involvement of NGOs in the development of SADC protocols and their efforts to lobby member states have resulted in political support from governments. Made and Morna (2009, 37) highlight the importance of strategic lobbying, stating that "successful lobbying on any issue depends on knowing who, what, when, where, and how." They also argue that "through its engagement with the SADC Gender Unit and SADC-PF, the [Southern Africa Gender Protocol] Alliance was able to understand and navigate the process of getting a Protocol before the Heads of States to sign".

In sum, NGOs' active organization in norm development and diffusion in regional and local policies points to the agency in ways that help to shed light on social approaches to address gendered insecurities in Southern Africa. The issues that NGOs have championed point to the agency of non-state actors that moves beyond an inter-governmental lens to explore the dynamic nature of regional international relations that have involved intertwined social relations that include both states and non-state actors. The diverse nature of NGOs in gender security and their organizational relations in complex networks to develop and push for adopting norms that seek to address social insecurities at a localized level suggests the need to move beyond common state-centered assumptions. This non-state agency is visible in the formation of organizational relations and development of norms, as well as their diffusion in global, regional, and local policy.

Non-state actor organizational relations outside inter-governmental spaces have faced challenges, with NGO representatives sometimes disagreeing on the development of gender policies and questioning the necessity of a SADC gender policy given existing protocols at the African Union (AU) and UN levels. For instance, Matrine Buuku Chuulu from WLSA Zambia reflects on the differences that emerged during the development of

SADC's first Protocol on Gender and Development of 2008: "From the outset, the process of coming up with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development was a negotiated one between different stakeholders and groups" (as cited in Made and Morna 2009, 29). Chuulu notes that during the 2005 SADC Summit, the newly formed SADC Protocol Alliance pledged to broaden ownership and support for elevating the 1997 Declaration to a protocol through consultations at the national level. However, the Alliance encountered divergent views among civil society organizations:

> Those who participated in the 2005 meetings strongly supported the elevation of the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender to a protocol, while other gender equality and women's rights organizations in the region believed there was no need for a SADC [Gender] Protocol after the African Union (AU) had adopted the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. (As cited in Made and Morna 2009, 29)

Some organizations felt that pressure for the SADC Protocol had started without adequate consultation or inclusion. As Chuulu explains, to ease this tension, the Alliance sought to incorporate language from the AU Protocol into earlier drafts of the SADC Protocol:

> We believed that since the SADC Heads of State had already adopted and started to ratify the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the proposed SADC Protocol should not have weaker language. This would compromise the gains achieved in the AU Protocol and other international instruments like CEDAW. (As cited in Made and Morna 2009, 29).

This example shows that despite differences regarding the necessity of a SADC gender policy, its content, and the language used, women in the region acknowledge the need for compromises to maintain closer relations among themselves and nurture relations with the state to achieve their gender security agenda. This has led to various strategies to manage differences and develop policies aligned with continental and global gender norms: "The art of harmonious negotiation with others was one of the first lessons that members of the SADC Gender Protocol Alliance had to learn in getting the SADC Gender Protocol off the ground" (Made and Morna 2009, 29). In sum, although policies addressing gender insecurities have emerged from non-state-state relations, these processes have not been without challenges.

Obstacles to Regional Organisational Relations in Gender Security

Kaire Mbuende (2012, 56) notes that while the Windhoek Treaty of 1992 provides for non-state actors' participation in SADC's inter-governmental processes, this commitment has not always translated into action. NGOs have faced real obstacles that include states questioning their legitimacy, as they are donor-funded. Similar issues were

raised by the informants who noted government sensitivities when working with NGOs, as well as a lack of clear modalities for non-state participation in SADC's intergovernmental framework[14].

NGOs as Illegitimate?

Friction often arises when government leaders or heads of state question the legitimacy of NGOs, as they are frequently dependent on donors and driven by external agendas. In this regards, Mbuende (2012, 56) points out that

> There has been apprehension among SADC governments about foreign-funded NGOs in a number of countries. NGOs are seen either as pursuing a foreign agenda or as opposition parties in disguise. One of the liveliest debates that I witnessed at SADC summits was when the Secretariat tabled a report on SADC cooperation with NGOs. Most of the heads of state who participated at the meeting expressed apprehension about the role of NGOs.

Some SADC heads of state have argued that these NGOs pursue foreign agendas dictated to them by their funders[15]. The irony of this argument is that since the 1980s, when its predecessor, SADCC, was formed, SADC has adopted a neo-liberal framework for its regional integration largely funded by foreign donors for its regional activities (Nedziwe 2020). This reliance on foreign funding for both state and non-state actors in the region raises questions about the autonomy and authenticity of these organizational relations as genuinely home-grown initiatives. Nonetheless, the agency demonstrated by women NGOs in their historical and ongoing organization is embedded in a mix of local, regional, and global influences, which suggests that their agendas and priorities are not solely determined by external factors.

Power Relations, Sovereignty, and the Lack of Clear Modalities for Non-State Participation

There are notable tensions in non-state-governmental regional relations. Chuulu, a representative of WLSA, notes that "[t]his friction is rooted in the power relations endemic to civil society-government relations" and "political participation had to be forced out of the power holders" with the help of the 2008 SADC Gender Protocol (as cited in Made and Morna 2009, 30). Furthermore, the SADC governments have raised the question of sovereignty in cases where they have felt uncomfortable with the issues that NGOs have brought to the fore.[16] There is, however, a sense among NGOs that the sovereignty card is

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[14] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06.09.2016.
[15] Personal communication with the representative of the SADC Gender Unit in Botswana, 16.09.2016.
[16] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06 September 2016.

played in an attempt to reinforce the dominance of some governments whenever they feel that their power is being threatened or questioned.[17] These sensitivities were noted in countries such as South Africa, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Zimbabwe, where political elites believe that working with NGOs amounts to co-governing with them (Nedziwe 2017).

The way governments have related to NGOs has its history in traditional patriarchy that prioritized men's participation in national and regional governance structures to the exclusion of women. The essentialization of the state as the key driver of formal regional organizations draws on mainstream thinking about regional international relations as an inter-governmental or state-centered affair (Blauuw 2016). However, such mainstream approaches present challenges in the case where the agency of region-ness has involved both state and/or non-state organizational relations to address regional insecurities. Non-state actors have shared in the agency to contribute to SADC's Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan to address the social (gendered) insecurities that confront the region (SADC-RISDP 2020). Non-state and state actors have played different but important roles in building region-ness, with the former's efforts remaining unrecognized in much of mainstream thinking. Furthermore, non-state actors have not enjoyed uninterrupted participation in and access to SADC's policymaking structures; in some instances, NGOs have had to tread carefully in their dealings with regional governments. Representatives of NGOs note that "civil society actors always try to be politically savvy to avoid overriding the government because governments do not like it when their job is being done by civil society."[18] Similarly, Mbuende (2012, 57) emphasizes "the differentiated roles of NGOs and governments," meaning that "NGOs cannot be substitutes for governments even in areas where government institutions are weak." While non-state organizational relations are visible in the context of the SADC region, the state remains a central player that holds much power in regional international relations in Southern Africa. This power is visible in the interactions between NGOs and governments, with the former careful not to cross the line or interfere with the latter's job.

Power dynamics in SADC's formal governance structures have hindered civil society engagement in the development of regional policies, such as the 2008 SADC Gender Protocol on Gender and Development. SADC governments have, at times, prevented civil society participation "in a bid to flex their power" (Made and Morna 2009, 30). Even

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[17] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06 September 2016.
[18] Personal communication with a Senior Programme Officer at Gender Links on 06 September 2016.

influential NGOs, referred to as "big boys" by SADC officials, have been excluded from crucial SADC meetings.[19] These NGOs are seen as both enablers in driving the regional gender security agenda and as a threat when lobbying for an agenda that states consider their responsibility.

The term "big boys" is used to categorize women-led organizations based on masculine and feminine binaries, serving as a tool to divide and exclude them from contributing to processes they aim to influence in order to address regional insecurities. The women and gender NGOs who have been excluded from these processes have played key roles in the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance. For example, Gender Links (GL) was excluded from participating in the final SADC Summit that adopted the revised 2015 Protocol on Gender and Development.[20] This exclusion occurred even though GL led the Alliance team in the initial drafting, consultation, and selection of issues that constitute the revised 2015 protocol that is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. At the same time, some Alliance members, such as SAfAIDS, as well as UN agencies, were included in the SADC meeting that adopted the revised 2015 SADC Gender Protocol. SAfAIDS is considered a preferred NGO by SADC due to the issues it addresses.[21]

Moreover, NGOs that focus on issues considered "hard," such as human rights, constitutionalism, democracy, and good governance, have not always been welcome to participate in SADC's inter-governmental policy-making forums.[22] These NGOs are sometimes perceived as advancing donor-driven agendas, while at other times, they are seen as pursuing issues that border on the sovereignty of SADC countries.[23] In sum, NGOs in gender security have not always received the same treatment from SADC governments, resulting in their exclusion from participating in vital inter-governmental regional summits.

The power dynamics described above highlight the complexities of government-non-state relations, where non-state actors have felt undermined by governments in their level of participation in the SADC agenda. Moreover, although women NGOs reached a consensus on aligning the language used in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the

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[19] Personal communication with the Regional Programme Officer at Voluntary Services Overseas, Rhaisa on 07 September 2016.

[20] Personal communication with the Regional Programme Officer at Voluntary Services Overseas, Rhaisa on 07 September 2016.

[21] Personal communication with the Regional Programme Officer at Voluntary Services Overseas, Rhaisa on 07 September 2016.

[22] Personal communication with a senior representative of the SADC Gender Unit in Gaborone, Botswana on 16 September 2016.

[23] Personal communication with the Senior Director of DITSHWANELO Botswana Centre for Human Rights in Gaborone, Botswana on 16 September 2016.

Rights of Women in Africa with the SADC Gender Protocol of 2008, heads of state and government ministers resisted this proposal. Made and Morna (2009, 30) note that "any attempts to retain some of the language and rights issues in the AU Protocol were resisted by government stakeholders," especially concerning matters such as marital rape and women's surname choices after marriage. Made and Morna further contend that accepting weaker language was a necessary compromise to ensure the Protocol's adoption, even though governments had already committed to the language and issues when signing the AU Protocol. The demand to remove these issues and alter the language was perceived as an act of sabotage against the process. In this context, the process of policy development by non-state actors has involved negotiated compromises not only among the non-state actors themselves but also with state actors, although the extent of these compromises may vary. To foster genuinely participatory relations, there is a need for improved interactions and cooperation between non-state and state actors.

The 1992 Windhoek Treaty declares that SADC will develop "appropriate mechanisms and an institution framework" to facilitate the involvement of "the people of the region in the process of regional integration" (SADC Treaty 1992, 8). However, there is an absence of well-defined guidelines outlining the specific ways in which non-state actors can participate within the SADC policymaking framework. The authors of the 2023 Centre for Conflict Resolution's Policy Brief acknowledge that "SADC's policy instruments reflect an awareness of the key role that non-state actors can have in fostering genuinely participatory governance" (Adebajo et al 2013, 16), yet they further emphasize the lack of "clarity on the modalities for civil society participation in SADC activities." They further conclude that "NGOs have remained by and large uncertain about which SADC Secretariat directorate to engage, and often meet with resistance and political caution in their efforts to assist the Secretariat" (Adebajo et al. 2013, 16). Clear institutionalized modalities of engagement in SADC's activities could promote more effective non-state participation outside and alongside states to reduce regional insecurities. In these regards, Mbuende (2012, 57) points out that "a successful regional integration scheme must be rules-based, and the involvement of non-state actors cannot be an exception" and proposes creating an institution "through which NGOs systematically, and continuously, provide their input into regional integration efforts." Specifically, Mbuende (2012, 57) suggests:

> One possibility is to establish an SADC Economic and Social Council, which could meet twice a year. Such a council could be attended by representatives of governments, business organizations, labor, research institutions, and NGOs and could serve as a forum for the exchange of views among its various stakeholders." "One possibility is to establish an SADC Economic and Social Council, which could meet twice a year. Such a council could be

attended by representatives of governments, business organizations, labor, research institutions, and NGOs and could serve as a forum for the exchange of views among its various stakeholders.

In addition to rules-based interaction with states, a legal framework with clear guidelines could facilitate an environment in which non-state actors are guaranteed a sense of belonging to Southern Africa that, in turn, could contribute to a meaningful African agency in building region-ness. SADC's decision to approve the development of a mechanism for formal engagement with non-state actors, which was reached in September 2023, represents a positive step towards improving non-state-state relations (SARDC, 2023). Although the process of developing a legal framework has been lengthy, the ongoing dialogue between governments and non-state actors since 2016 indicates progress in the right direction. This dialogue aims to formulate clear guidelines for non-state participation, which will ultimately promote security and development in the region.

Conclusion

While the debates around regional international relations largely focus on intergovernmental approaches, the non-state organizational relations at the regional level deserve attention. The mainstream academic literature pays more attention to inter-governmental governance structures and their regional organizations, while non-state organizational relations and how they interact alongside and within intergovernmental spaces is often neglected. Non-state organizational relations have flourished in the SADC region since the 1990s, addressing various insecurities that extend beyond national borders. These developments have entailed NGOs organizing within complex networks to engage in the development of norms both outside of and alongside the intergovernmental policy framework. In this case, non-state forms of social relations that have emerged to address gender insecurities point to the fact that bodily logic or fixed gender binaries embedded in mainstream gender studies have not been the starting point for women's organization. This article showed that NGOs have embraced an organizational approach to address gender insecurities as part of broader regional insecurities, combining aspects of social mores, development, and practices. These gender insecurities are entrenched in a traditional patriarchal system and neo-liberal value systems characterized by persistent inequalities, discrimination, socio-economic marginalization, and domination, particularly of women in governance structures.

The article shows that non-state organizational relations in the SADC region have been wide-ranging, involving efforts that promote norm selection, development, and diffusion through working outside, along, and within intergovernmental policymaking spaces. It shows that organizational relations of non-state actors have centered around developing norms and lobbying for their adoption by SADC heads of state and Governments. While non-state organizational logics and the role they play within inter-governmental policy frameworks remain neglected in regional international relations analyses, a socio-historical approach to non-state organizational relations helps to shed light on forgotten but vital accounts of African agency in building region-ness. The different ways in which non-state organization plays out outside formal state regional frameworks have amounted to the selection and development of norms that seek to address gender security. Non-state strategies have involved organizing in NGO networks, as well as working alongside governments who have the "power" to counter gender insecurities within a common regional framework.

Furthermore, while mainstream approaches to international relations have largely presented accounts that center intergovernmental relations, this article points to the differentiated but important roles that governments and non-state actors occupy within Africa's international regional relations. Non-state actors have organized by way of promoting norm selection and development to contribute to norms, norm changes, or policy shifts on rights issues concerning gender, poverty, social difference, and deep inequalities. The way in which non-state organizational relations have played out in the SADC region points to African agency in regional international relations. Equally, while not devoid of obstacles and challenges, non-state organizational relations reveal agency to address Southern Africa's social insecurities. Future research could explore the increasing organizational relations by regional private businesses and their implications for Southern Africa's international relations and development.

Acknowledgments

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