Southern African Development Community (SADC):
The Struggle of Informal Cross Border Traders in Regional Common Markets

Nsongo Jonas Mijere
University of Transkei
South Africa

The independence of Ghana became the rallying symbol for political liberation and majority rule, or democracy on the African Continent. It signaled a need for regionalism and Pan Africanism. The peoples of Central, Eastern, Southern Africa regions took up the challenge to liberate themselves from yoke of various types of colonial domination.

The people of the Southern African region embraced the challenge of political and economic liberation and Pan Africanism. Unlike the other parts of Africa, the people of Southern Africa experienced a unique colonial domination and political liberation struggles: They experienced internal and external colonial, racial and economic domination, and forced migration systems. To achieve political independence, they jointly waged prolonged wars to rid the region of colonialism. In the four decades of cooperative liberation struggles, the Southern African region achieved partial political national liberation and democracy. As a consequence of liberation struggle, the national political leaders established SADC to spearhead regional economic integration. But with political independence, the national state has become a new dominant force in Southern Africa.

This paper discusses firstly the problem faced by informal cross border traders in creating common markets in the SADC region. It will examine based on a pilot study the attitudes of ICBTs on their plight cross border business trade. The dominant national state regime maintains border posts to control the movements of people and goods. Secondly, the SADC member states impose customs duties to protect and promote national economies. SADC does not have policies to promote the spontaneous economic development. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, I shall argue that SADC has placed less emphasis on spontaneous economic integration. The constraints imposed on informal cross border traders or small business cross border traders by national customs and immigration policies contradict reason d’être of SADC and pan African vision.

Ironically, national states accepted the IMF sponsored economic structural adjustment programs. In implementing the economic adjustment program a large number of the productive labour force has been thrown on the streets. But the national regimes have not embraced the IMF program at regional level. SADC does not have a vision to cultivate entrepreneurship among the productive labour force. The paper will grapple with the question whose interests does SADC serve?