

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Forestry – can it stop the mounting threats to the region’s forests?

L. Mubaiwa

Regional forestry cooperation among southern African countries, coordinated by SADC for two decades, will gain a policy framework when the Protocol on Forestry is ratified.

The Millennium Development Goals, adopted at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, emphasize the need to free all people from abject poverty (United Nations, 2000). Of the approximately 207 million people in the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), it is estimated that 70 percent live below the international poverty line of US\$2 per day (SADC, 2003). The situation is exacerbated by the high population growth rate, estimated at 2.4 percent per annum (SADC, 2004); the high HIV/AIDS infection rate, estimated at above 20 percent of the adult population (SADC, 2003); the low agricultural output; and the increasing frequency of climatic extremes. Poverty has forced most communities to resort to unsustainable utilization of forest resources, which many people consider freely available. In the process they destroy the environment on which their existence depends, hence the vicious cycle of poverty. For the past two decades SADC has recognized the role of forestry in poverty reduction, food security and environmental protection. The development of the SADC Protocol on Forestry is a milestone in realizing the region’s socio-economic development goals.

This article highlights the origin of cooperation and integration in the sub-region, threats to the region’s forests, the role of the SADC Protocol on Forestry and future challenges to fostering cooperation in the management of the region’s forest resources.

HISTORY OF COOPERATION IN SADC

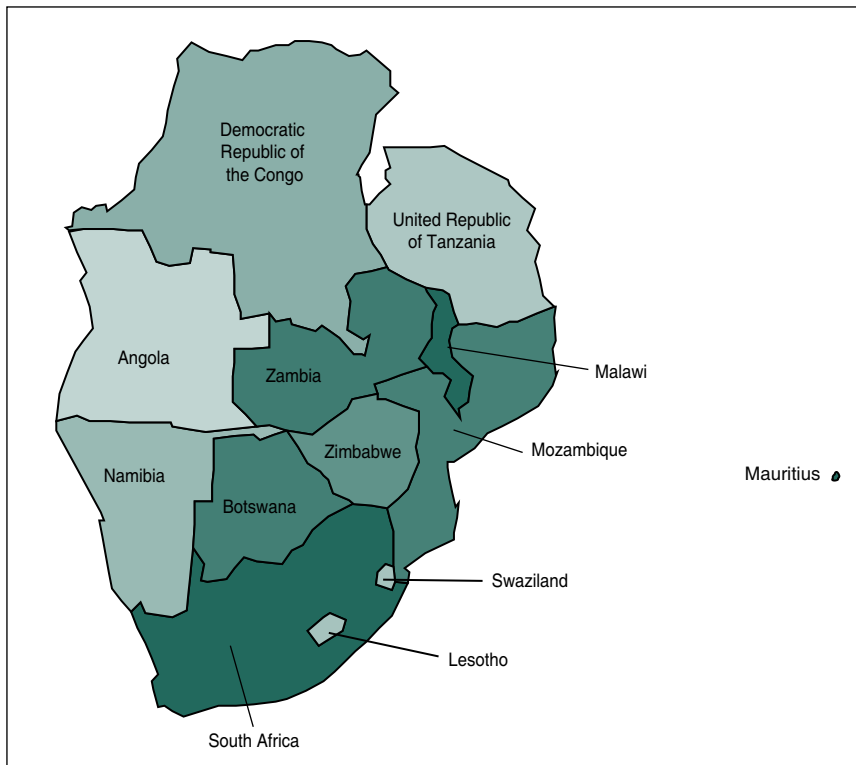
Cooperation in SADC had its origin in the socio-economic and political history of the subregion which created strong bonds among its member countries. In the late 1970s the five Frontline Independent States (Angola, Botswana, Mozambique,

the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia) initiated cooperation with the aim of helping minority-ruled States attain political liberation. The focus was later broadened to include economic liberation as signified by the theme of the Lusaka Summit in 1980, “Southern Africa: Towards Economic Liberation”. This summit saw the formation of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), which sought to strengthen regional cooperation. Namibia’s independence in 1990 ushered in a new dimension of reducing economic dependence on South Africa, then ruled under apartheid. In 1992 the Heads of State and Government signed a treaty to transform the Southern African Development Coordination Conference into the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to increase the depth of regional integration by creating a legally binding cooperation framework. SADC membership is currently 13 countries (see Figure).

SADC envisions a “regional community that will ensure economic well-being, improvement of the standards of living and quality of life for the people of southern Africa” (SADC, 2003). To transform the political commitments into action, a decentralized integration model was developed in which each member country was given the responsibility to coordinate the development of a specific economic sector. From 1984 on, Malawi coordinated the forest sector, providing leadership in regional forestry programming, networking and resource mobilization. The Technical Committee of Directors of Forestry was established in 1985 to harmonize approaches to the region’s forests. The Protocol on Forestry was initiated in 1998 to provide a policy framework for cooperation in this respect.

The decentralized system of sectoral coordination was encumbered by fis-

Lloyd Mubaiwa is Senior Forestry Expert, SADC Secretariat, Gaborone, Botswana.



SADC member countries

cal and personnel problems, however. Personnel were seconded to the SADC Forestry Sector Technical Coordination Unit from the Malawi Forestry Department, and staff turnover was high. Malawi was responsible for providing the unit's operating finances, which were often inadequate. The consequent reliance on donor funding, which depended to a certain extent on government relations, affected the continuity of some projects.

In 2001, Heads of State and Government approved the restructuring of SADC institutions and programmes to increase operational efficiency. The 21 sectors originally coordinated by member countries have been clustered into four directorates, managed centrally at the SADC Secretariat in Gaborone, Botswana: Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources (FANR); Trade,

Industry, Finance and Investment (TIFI); Infrastructure and Services (IS); and Social, Human Development and Special Programmes (SHDSP). The FANR Directorate comprises seven technical areas of cooperation, namely food security, agricultural and natural resources research and training, crop development, livestock production and animal disease control, fisheries, wildlife, and forestry. The directorate's priority objectives are poverty eradication, food security, sustainable utilization of natural resources and effective protection of the environment.

A Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan was developed in 2003 to provide strategic direction for regional policies and programmes for the next 15 years. Priority intervention areas include cross-cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender, environment and

sustainable development, private-sector development, statistics, information and communication technology and science and technology.

SADC FOREST RESOURCES

SADC forests are among the richest and most diverse in the world, covering an estimated 357 million hectares or 55 percent of Africa's forest cover (FAO, 2001). They range from the tropical moist forests of Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the scrubland and desert ecosystems of the Kalahari and Namib deserts in western Botswana and southern Namibia. Natural forests comprise the following six main vegetation types.

- **Miombo woodlands.** These are the largest dry deciduous forests in the world, extending north of the Limpopo River and covering about 270 million hectares in eastern, central and southern Africa. These woodlands form the most extensive forest vegetation type in SADC. They comprise predominantly *Brachystegia* spp. in association with *Julbernardia* spp. and *Isoberlinia* spp.
- **Zambezi teak forests.** These forests are found in the Kalahari sands of western Zimbabwe, northern Botswana, northeastern Namibia, eastern Angola and Zambia and cover an area of approximately 19 million hectares. They are dominated by Rhodesian teak (*Baikiaea plurijuga*) in association with mukwa (*Pterocarpus angolensis*) and false mopane (*Guibourtia coleosperma*), which are important commercial timber species.
- **Mopane woodlands.** These woodlands cover about 30 million hectares and are found in drier lower areas with sodic soils where mopane (*Colophospermum mopane*) is the predominant species.
- **Acacia woodlands.** These woodlands

cover most of the arid and semi-arid areas. The predominant genera are *Acacia*, *Combretum* and *Terminalia*.

- **Montane and tropical moist forests.**

Montane forests are found in pockets in high-altitude, high-rainfall areas of Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe, while the tropical moist forests are mostly found in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The common species, most of which are commercially exploited, include African mahogany (*Chlorophora excelsa*), red mahogany (*Khaya nyasica*) and soccer ball fruit tree (*Tabernaemontana angolensis*).

- **Mangrove forests.** These forests cover about 164 200 ha along the coastline of Angola, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa and United Republic of Tanzania. The common species include white mangroves (*Avicennia marina*) and species in the genera *Hyphaena*, *Xylocarpus*, *Sonneratia*, *Rhizophora* and *Nypa*.

Plantations account for about 2.5 million hectares or approximately 1 percent of forest cover in the region (FAO, 2001). Over 75 percent of the plantations are commercially managed. These are mainly located in the high-elevation and high-rainfall areas in South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Most of them are privately owned. The main species planted are eucalypts and pines (*Eucalyptus grandis*, *E. cloeziana*, *E. camaldulensis*, *Pinus patula*, *P. taeda*, *P. elliottii* and *P. kesiya*). Further expansion of industrial plantations in SADC countries is limited by unavailability of suitable land. Community outgrower schemes, which have been introduced in South Africa and Zimbabwe, have the potential to make significant contributions and thus transform rural livelihoods.

The region's forests provide a wide

range of products and services that are important to the socio-economic well-being of the region's communities. Apart from maintaining ecological balance and biological diversity, they are important as a source of food, energy, shelter, medicine, income and spiritual well-being. Forests protect several large river basins shared by a number of countries. Forest mismanagement in one country is therefore bound to have cross-border effects – hence the need for a regional approach.

THREATS TO SADC FORESTS

SADC has one of the fastest growing populations in the world. The challenge of increasing food requirements has inevitably presented the region with additional challenges of uncontrolled deforestation and cultivation of fragile ecosystems, resulting in soil erosion, desertification, biodiversity loss, decline in agricultural productivity and ensuing socio-economic upheavals (CTA, 2004). For example, in the mid-1990s, annual soil loss was estimated at 50 000 tonnes in Swaziland, 3 million tonnes in Zambia, 96 million tonnes in Zimbabwe's Save Catchment Area and 300 to 400 million tonnes in South Africa (UNEP, 1994). Swaziland is the only country in the region that has witnessed a positive net gain in forest cover, of 1.2 percent

per annum (FAO, 2001). Deforestation in the region is estimated at 2.25 million hectares annually, mainly owing to woodfuel demand and agricultural expansion. Woodfuel is generally collected for domestic use, tobacco curing and brick kilning.

FAO (2003) estimated fuelwood consumption in the region at nearly 90 million cubic metres annually. More than half of Zambia's fuelwood is converted to charcoal, yielding about 100 000 tonnes annually (UNEP, 2002). Nearly 47 percent of deforestation in Malawi is attributed to woodfuel harvesting, and tobacco and tea estates account for 21 percent of national woodfuel consumption. In Zimbabwe, wood used for brick kilning in rural areas is said to equal that used for cooking (Zimbabwe Forestry Commission, 2003). Uncontrolled wildfires and illegal selective commercial harvesting also deplete the region's forest resources, resulting in significant changes in forest structure and composition and in some cases rendering the forest more vulnerable to opportunistic invasive alien species. Geist and Lambin (2002) concluded that economic factors account for 81 percent of the deforestation in the SADC region.

Forest cover loss is exacerbated by inadequate institutional support and shortage of trained personnel, which

Charcoal production from mopane (*Colophospermum mopane*); in the SADC region, the demand for woodfuel, including charcoal, is one of the main causes of deforestation



result in ineffective approaches particularly to the management of natural forests. The adoption of technologies emerging from national and international forestry research institutions such as the Center for International Forest Research (CIFOR) and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) is limited, primarily because of inadequate extension support. The need for effective policies, legislation and institutional structures that recognize forests and wildlife as viable land-use options and that allow community-based management of forest resources has been recognized at the regional level and included in the SADC Protocol on Forestry.

THE SADC PROTOCOL ON FORESTRY

The SADC Protocol on Forestry is a regional policy framework to foster cooperation in forestry and provide a common vision and approach to the management of the region's forest resources. The then SADC Forestry Sector Technical Coordination Unit began work on the protocol in 1998 in collaboration with the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The Heads of State and Government of all but three SADC countries (Botswana, Mozambique and Namibia) signed the Protocol in October 2002. Ratification is yet to be completed.

Objectives

The SADC Protocol on Forestry is aimed at promoting sustainable forest management and trade in forest products, consistent with the Forest Principles adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and the Proposals for Action of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF)/Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF)/United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) process. For easy alignment with national policies and legisla-

tion, the protocol was designed to be compatible with international initiatives such as the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to which all SADC member countries are signatories.

The protocol advocates the active participation of all stakeholders and places responsibilities for its implementation at both the national and regional levels. Particular attention is given to the adoption of policies and strategies that enable active participation of local communities and women in forest management "including affirmative steps to seek and encourage such participation" (SADC, 2002). The protocol recognizes intellectual property rights and aims to ensure equitable benefits from indigenous knowledge systems. Member countries are expected to cooperate in good faith. It enshrines basic principles of sovereign rights over national forests, intergenerational equity, maintenance of ecological functions and minimizing undue negative environmental impacts.

The protocol is legally binding in that a signatory State could be taken to a court of law and compensation could be sought for failure to comply. However, respect for political sovereignty seems to predominate and cooperation in good faith generally prevails.

Ratification process

The SADC Protocol on Forestry has been ratified by four of the current 13 member countries (Lesotho, Mauritius, South Africa and United Republic of Tanzania). At least five more countries must ratify it to obtain the minimum two-thirds majority required for it to enter into force.

Ratification has primarily been slow because:

- national forestry departments have

made an insufficient push because of poor understanding of the process and the absence of a clear account of the costs, benefits and risks associated with ratification – as was evident at a recent meeting of SADC Heads of Forestry when several relatively new directors asked for an explanation of the ratification process;

- member countries have lacked commitment to speed up the ratification process despite numerous reminders from the SADC Secretariat;
- constitutional procedures have led to delays at the country level.

Most ratifications of SADC policy instruments take place within the first year after signature, and then the drive for ratification generally wanes (Santana, 2004). The average time for ratification of SADC protocols is 2.5 years, so the Protocol on Forestry has not yet exceeded the average. The Protocols on Shared Watercourses and Tourism took an average of 4.2 years each. The Amended Protocol on Trade had the shortest average of 1.1 years.

Role of member countries in implementing the protocol

Commitment from both member countries and the region's Secretariat is critical to the success of the regional approach to forest management.

Most of the activities will be implemented at the national level. Member countries are expected to cooperate particularly on issues of common concern which include deforestation, forest fires, biodiversity conservation, invasive alien species, capacity building, promotion of trade and implementation of harmonized approaches, policies, legislation and issues of global concern. The following are a few examples of activities to be implemented by member countries:

- development of laws and agreements

that provide sufficient security of tenure to facilitate management of forests on a sustainable basis;

- development and publication of forest policies, programmes and plans that are consistent with SADC forest-related protocols, and regular review to ensure their effectiveness;
- performance of regular forest assessments to monitor forest cover and health, provision of socio-economic data and compilation of market information to facilitate trade;
- development of standards and guidelines for commercial forestry, timber harvesting and processing;
- forestry research, extension, education and training and facilitation of exchange of related information.

A range of global and regional tools and mechanisms can help countries in implementation of these activities, including regional criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, the National Forest Programme Facility and FAO assistance to national forest programmes and national forest resources assessment.

Role of the SADC Secretariat in implementing the protocol

The SADC Secretariat will have the role of facilitating, coordinating and harmonizing policies, strategies and programmes. The following are some of the activities expected to be undertaken at the regional level:

- coordination and mobilization of resources to facilitate implementation of the protocol;
- development and harmonization of national forest assessment methodology and guidelines and standards for sustainable forest management;
- development and maintenance of a regional database on status and trends in the region's forest resources;
- development of a forest products

information system to facilitate trade and industrial development;

- development of mechanisms to control illegal trade in forest products;
- facilitation of sharing of best practices in forestry;
- development of a regional programme for sustainable forest management, to include integrated management of transboundary forests, capacity building and promotion of research in forestry.

Collaboration with FAO and other United Nations agencies is imperative in approaching these demanding tasks. FAO has already helped develop methodologies for data and information collection from SADC member countries, for example. The Forestry Outlook Study for Africa subregional report for Southern Africa (FAO, 2003) identified some key issues which SADC needs to follow up with specific intervention programmes.

SADC FORESTRY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Forestry Development Programme under the FANR Directorate currently consists of three projects developed by the Forestry Sector Technical Coordination Unit, which were handed over to the SADC Secretariat upon centralization.

- "Management of Indigenous Forests" (1999–2002–2006) was established

on the premise that promotion of innovative forest resource utilization technologies that generate income for smallholder farmers can reduce forest destruction. Among the income-generation activities successfully adopted are fruit juice production from baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) and tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*), guinea fowl rearing, beekeeping and honey production, tree nurseries and harvesting and processing of forest products.

- "Strengthening of SADC Forestry Colleges" (1989–2001–2005) aims to strengthen technical forestry education and training as a way of fostering human resources development in the region. The project initially covered all forestry colleges before it was scaled down to focus on support to curriculum revision in Malawi, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia during its final two-year phasing-out period.
- "Environmental Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Biodiversity" (1998–2001) was aimed at sustainable utilization of plant resources and the conservation of endangered species in the region. A second phase has been proposed.

While these projects address some of the issues in the Protocol on Forestry, it is important that future projects be

*An ongoing SADC project promotes fruit juice production from baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) to generate income for smallholder farmers*



assessed for added value to regional integration as part of the prioritization process. A comprehensive forestry programme is being developed under the FANR Directorate and needs to reflect the new SADC priorities as outlined in the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan.

In addition, other forest-related projects are coordinated under other programmes as follows.

- **Environment and Development**
 - The Southern Africa Biodiversity Support Programme is aimed at building biodiversity management capacity in the region and integrating sustainable use into biodiversity conservation.
 - The Land Degradation and Desertification Programme is aimed at combating land degradation and desertification and mitigating the effects of drought. It supports member countries in the development and implementation of National Action Programmes.
- **Infrastructure and Services Directorate**
 - The Programme for Biomass Energy Conservation is aimed at development of alternative and more efficient energy technologies to ease fuelwood shortage in the region.
 - The Integrated Water Resources Management and Development Project focuses on developing a policy and strategy to guide the development of water resources in the region.
- **FANR Directorate Wildlife Programme**
 - The Wetlands Conservation Project focuses on wetlands governance, research and economic valuation.

Other projects that have been approved for implementation but for which funding has not yet been secured include:

- a project on domestication and com-

mercialization of indigenous fruit-trees in arid and semi-arid zones, intended to promote value addition to indigenous fruits while at the same time minimizing genetic erosion from wild collection through domestication;

- a regional forest resources inventory project to develop a regional forest cover map to monitor and identify high-risk areas for timely advice to policy- and decision-makers;
- a project for sustainable management of miombo woodlands, aimed at promoting innovative approaches.

These projects would need to be incorporated into the new regional Forestry Programme.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

The SADC Protocol on Forestry provides an excellent policy framework for deepening the regional integration in sustainable management of the region's forest resources. However, the following challenges need to be resolved in order for benefits to be realized from this initiative.

Ratification of the protocol

There is a need to speed up the ratification process to pave the way for the development of a strategy for effective implementation and monitoring.

Seeing the bigger picture

Unsustainable utilization of forest resources often results from poor understanding of the role of forests and their long-term impacts. It is all too easy to dismiss forestry as adding little value to regional integration. Since forests have ecological functions that go beyond national borders, the challenge is to encourage the SADC leadership to see the bigger picture and to recognize forestry as one of the priority intervention areas.

Development of synergies with other sectors

Most of the causal factors for forest loss in SADC arise from pressures outside the forest sector. It is therefore imperative to strengthen linkages and create synergies with other sectors. The new Forestry Programme should integrate forests with water resource management, agricultural productivity, wood energy provision, HIV/AIDS and poverty reduction, and should recognize forests as transboundary ecosystems that require an ecosystem approach to their management. This entails the development of policies and plans that recognize forestry as a viable land-use option.

Incentive-based forest management

The pilot project on community-based management of indigenous forest resources in SADC has demonstrated the influence of incentives on sustainable forest management. The Protocol on Forestry supports such initiatives. The challenge is for the region to catalogue and share innovative best practices in order to scale up their adoption.

CONCLUSION

As a policy framework, the SADC Protocol on Forestry is expected to provide an effective approach to the management of the region's forest resources and a powerful tool for mitigating forest threats – but this will depend on the effectiveness of its support and implementation. Of critical importance is that it should have effect at both the national and regional levels. This will only be possible if there is commitment for its implementation from all stakeholders. For its effectiveness, there is a need to balance sovereignty and good will in compliance with the provisions of the protocol, and a need to share best practices in the region. ♦



Bibliography

- CTA.** 2004. *Forest Management Bulletin*, Issue 19. Wageningen, the Netherlands, Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Co-operation (CTA).
- FAO.** 2001. *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2000 – main report*. FAO Forestry Paper No. 140. Rome.
- FAO.** 2003. *Forestry Outlook Study for Africa – subregional report for Southern Africa*. Rome.
- Geist, J.H. & Lambin, F.E.** 2002. Proximate causes and underlying driving forces of tropical deforestation. *Bioscience*, 52(2): 143–150.
- SADC.** 2002. *SADC Protocol on Forestry*. Gaborone, Botswana, Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat.
- SADC.** 2003. *Southern African Development Community: Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan*. Gaborone, Botswana, SADC Secretariat.
- SADC.** 2004. *Southern African Development Community: Annual Report 2002–2003*. Gaborone, Botswana, SADC Secretariat.
- Santana, F.A.** 2004. *Beyond signature and ratification: discussion paper on issues relating to protocol and policy implementation*. SADC/EC Regional Integration and Capacity Building Programme. Gaborone, Botswana, SADC Secretariat.
- United Nations.** 2000. *United Nations Millenium Declaration*. Millenium Summit of the United Nations, New York, USA, 6–8 September 2000.
- UNEP.** 1994. *State of the Environment – sub-regional report for Southern African Development Community*. Nairobi, Kenya, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
- UNEP.** 2002. *Africa environment outlook:*

past, present and future perspectives. Nairobi, Kenya, Earthprint Limited.

Zimbabwe Forestry Commission. 2003. *Minutes of the Working Group on Strategies to Combat Deforestation in Zimbabwe*. Harare, Zimbabwe. ♦