

## **Post Apartheid South Africa: A Thorn to Regional Integration Efforts?**

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The emergence of a peaceful post apartheid South Africa on the regional landscape as a member of SADC ushered in a new component to regional integration efforts in the Southern African region. The 'African renaissance', as championed by the South African president Thabo Mbeki, now seemed a reality. However nine years down the line South Africa's full cooperation with her fellow SADC members is not yet a reality.

South Africa has and continues to generally pursue a path of self-interest in policy formulation and Pretoria's assertions that the South African markets will open faster than those of the other SADC members are certainly open to debate. The mismatch between South Africa's rhetoric and action continues to grow with time. For example Pretoria continues to pursue an independent trade and foreign policy, which promotes a fierce regional export and investment drive whilst simultaneously protecting its own market. Consequently it has benefited from changes in trade policy that fellow SADC states are adopting under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at the expense of the countries adopting the changes. Compounding this state of affairs is the fact that the re-emergence of South Africa on both the regional and global market, given South Africa's relative political stability and other advantages, has threatened to divert aid and investment flows from other SADC countries to South Africa.

South Africa's economic (political) advantages and current policies threaten to turn Southern Africa into a South Africa controlled economic regional hegemon. This path seems more assured as South Africa's commitment to it's fellow SADC member states dwindles into rhetoric, reducing other SADC states to dependent economic clients.

This paper therefore examines the alternative possibilities that South Africa will either answer to it's calling as the 'regional benign hegemon', pursuing it's ambitions for leadership based on the principle of equality with it's fellow SADC states or follow the path of a self-centered regional economic power, effectively nullifying prospects of regional integration in Southern Africa.