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POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS
IN INTER-STATE RELATIONS IN
SOUTHERN AFRICA

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It is intended in this paper to deal with some of the political factors which should be borne in mind when discussing the development of resources regionally and on an inter-state level in the sub-continent of Africa. While political factors may be particularly relevant in the discussion of human resources, they apply, of course, in all fields being considered at this Conference. It is thus hoped to provide a background or framework for the consideration of particular aspects dealt with in other papers, and to identify some of the opportunities and constraints in the regional context, which could affect the development of resources.

In the author's view, a regional approach to the development of resources is vitally important. In his introductory paper, Professor E. Pestel, from a global point of view, indicated the need to recognise regional diversity and also the greater effectiveness of measures taken by groups of countries with common interests - rather than on a national basis. This is, as it were, a half-way position between a "one-world" order - which is not a practical or even a desirable proposition - and, at the other extreme, an over-riding emphasis on national sovereignty - which is still applicable in most of the world, but which is being eroded by critical developments, including the growing threat to world resources, as indicated by Professor Pestel.

In terms of our own African situation there are clear advantages in a regional approach for dealing with problems, e.g. of rapid population growth, planning of population control, training, the provision of job opportunities, social services, etc. The advantages are apparent, too, when one considers other resources, as well as the related environmental questions which cannot

in any case be restricted by national borders.

However, in spite of these obvious advantages of a regional approach - both from a global and a more local point of view - the effective development of meaningful regional co-operation is a difficult and even perilous task, as illustrated by the efforts in other parts of the world, e.g. Europe, even where there is much greater equality between the parts than in the case of Southern Africa.

There is thus perhaps a tendency to talk rather loosely of Southern Africa as an identifiable and meaningful region, with common interests and developing links, i.e. to use the term "region" in more than simply a geographical sense. While there are certainly many links between the countries of the sub-continent, which tend to pull them together, i.e. the centripetal forces, it must always be borne in mind that there are important centrifugal forces which have weakened existing links or which threaten to prevent the development of new links - in spite of what might appear, in South Africa at least, to be the rational advantage of such links. The fact that these centrifugal forces can be described in a general sense as political, or even as based on narrow national interests, to the detriment of international co-operation and rational planning, does not change the situation. Such forces, however irrational they may appear to be from one point of view or another, must be taken into account. Simply to argue that developments should take place in a certain direction, because that is the rational direction in which resources could be used to the best advantage of all concerned, is to be divorced from reality.

It is a truism to say that politics is the art of the possible, and to determine what is possible within a given set of real circumstances, it is necessary to look at more than simply the opportunities and to examine also the constraints. The policy-makers cannot avoid these in reaching their decisions, and it would be pointless to engage in an "ivory-tower" exercise without relevance to the hard facts of life, on which policy decisions must be based.

Given both the centripetal and centrifugal forces at work in Southern Africa, the question of whether this is, or can be, a meaningful region, in much more than the geographical sense, will remain a debatable one for the time being - in spite of the obvious advantages of co-operation between the various

States, which will no doubt be frequently alluded to, and quite rightly so, during this Conference.

However, there are more grounds now, than there were a few years ago, for being hopeful that the centripetal forces are growing stronger - for two general reasons at least. Firstly, the withdrawal of Portugal from Africa means that there is now, or soon will be, no outside power with a direct involvement in our region. The regional problems and opportunities can therefore be dealt with between Africans. This can become a truly African region - without the distraction of having to take into account interests not fully identified with and committed to the development of Africa. Secondly, there is the determined development over the past year of the South African détente policy, together with the expressed willingness of Zambia, supported by other important States of the region, to try and settle differences through communication and negotiation, rather than through conflict.

That conflict still exists in the region, including even some violent conflict in the case of two disputes (Rhodesia and South West Africa), is a fact, and the possibility of the escalation of this conflict cannot be excluded. But a significant change of direction has taken place, a change which in general can be said to be gathering strength. Whereas in the years immediately preceding 1974 the growing tendency among African States, particularly those in Central and East Africa, was to emphasize the need for armed struggle to solve the Southern African "problems" (and here one can refer to the Mogadishu Declaration of 1971 and many subsequent U.N. and O.A.U. resolutions), the emphasis now, among all the States directly concerned with these problems, is on the need to find peaceful means for solving differences, through negotiation. Various reasons could probably be identified for this positive

change of direction, including the economic facts of life in Africa, but there is no doubt that the traumatic event which led directly to a re-assessment of policies by many of the Governments of this region, was the Army coup in Lisbon in April, 1974, and in particular its immediate effects on Mozambique and Angola.

Paradoxically, this event which appeared to many to herald an increased level of confrontation with the White-ruled States of South Africa and Rhodesia, if the trends of the past few years were to be followed, gave rise very quickly to a period of negotiation and the moves for détente in the region. It is perhaps not surprising now that the political leaders concerned quickly realized that escalating confrontation would not be in the interests of anyone, Black or White, and, as Mr. Vorster phrased it, the consequences would be "too ghastly to contemplate". The States of the region, therefore, and in particular South Africa and Zambia, found a certain identity of interests in avoiding such confrontation, if at all possible. This newly-found identity of interests was much stronger and more effective than any other common interests or links which these countries had or could potentially develop, because it was based on vital, political, strategic and economic considerations which were, and are, over-riding for the policy-makers. But, while this is a good basis on which further co-operative links could be built, there are, of course, still many problems to be overcome - problems stemming from the hard political facts of the situation, from different perspectives and perceptions, and so on.

It is not intended here to give simply a recital of the differences between countries of Southern Africa, or of the new possibilities arising out of the current détente process. The situation is very fluid and full of uncertainties, and there is no need to stress the point that serious questionmarks still hang over various issues, such as those of Rhodesia, Mozambique, South West Africa, Angola and relations between people within South Africa. It is intended rather to consider a few general questions which should be taken into account in our thinking and acting on the inter-state relations of the region. Hopefully, a consideration of these questions will provide some guidelines, and perhaps inject a note of caution, when matters affecting the sub-continent are discussed, including the development of its human resources.

There is, firstly, the need to emphasize the over-riding nature of the political dimension in international relations (as in other fields, too). Secondly, it is necessary to look at the concepts of interdependence and dependence. Thirdly, there is the interaction of domestic and international affairs

and, fourthly, the related question of differing social systems and ideologies.

1) The Political Dimension

There is a tendency to deal with international relations in compartments - a not uncommon tendency in other fields, too - and, in fact, it is generally a difficult task to do otherwise and to think in a more integrated way on these matters. Thus, it is common for political and economic aspects each to be dealt with separately, and this separation is extended to other more restricted areas, such as finance, labour, and so on. This tendency is aggravated by the functional separation of Government Departments, by the separation of academic disciplines (with insufficient attention to the need for a more integrated multi-disciplinary approach), and so on. There are constructive changes taking place in this regard, and there is a growing recognition of the inter-connection of the various aspects of international relations. The importance of science and technology in this field is now also receiving growing recognition by policy-makers (although many scientists would perhaps prefer not to be concerned with the hard processes of political decision-making).

In the real circumstances of inter-state relations it is not possible to deal with political constraints and opportunities as a separate area from others, or vice versa. In fact, it is even misleading to talk of a "political" dimension which is inter-related with other dimensions. The word "political" should not be understood in a narrow sense, such as "party political"; what we are really concerned with here is the area of government decisions on policy, the process of policy-making at the top level. Many factors are involved in this process - economic, social, party political, ideological, etc.

Therefore, it is necessary to avoid the tendency of looking at these factors in isolation. For instance, mention is often made of the economic advantages of relations between certain countries, if only political considerations did not interfere. Presumably what is meant here is "party political" considerations or perhaps ideological ones. But, of course, the economic aspects are not somehow "untainted" by party politics or ideology. They are bound up with other factors in the process of political decision-making.

As an example, the closing of the Rhodesian Border with Zambia in 1973, the subsequent re-opening of the border from the Rhodesian side and then the refusal of the Zambian Government to return to the previous situation, were all policy decisions, i.e. political decisions, but decisions in which economic factors were basic, even though in Zambia's case the decision was not dictated by economic advantage. The decision of the Zambian Government, which still applies, not to make use of transport routes through Rhodesia, until there is an acceptable settlement in Rhodesia, has no doubt had a detrimental effect on Zambia's economy. It was a policy decision in which other factors at the time were considered to be over-riding from a Zambian point of view. Judgements on whether the policy was and is the right one, or not, will vary, depending on the point of view. But it is important to remember that it was not an isolated decision; it was bound up in the complexities of the Southern African situation. For instance, Zambia had already had problems with the import of maize through Beira, because of Portuguese retaliation for certain Zambian actions, and Mr. Smith's closing of the border was seen then as a final indication that Zambia could not rely on those routes to the sea. It required the change in political control in Mozambique in 1974 for a reassessment to begin in Zambia, but the political dispute in Rhodesia continues to prevent Zambia from making use of those routes to the sea, which would be economically most advantageous. This situation also has detrimental economic effects on Rhodesia and Mozambique, but that fact alone is not sufficient to bring about a change.

The policy of the Mozambique Government regarding its border with Rhodesia and the use of its ports by Rhodesian traffic is no doubt heavily influenced by economic considerations. But it would be foolish to assume that these considerations will indefinitely be paramount. The longer a settlement is delayed or prevented in Rhodesia, the stronger will other factors become, such as ideology and external pressures, which may well outweigh the purely economic factors in the Government's political decisions.

Even Malawi's access to the sea through Mozambique is not unthreatened, because of strong political differences between the two Governments, and this threat may well influence Malawi to adapt its policies towards other countries, in order to improve its relations with Mozambique.

Similarly, the future of labour arrangements between Mozambique and South Africa will be determined by various factors influencing policy decisions by both countries. Obvious economic factors are of crucial importance, but again they

are not the only ones. Apart from the fact that Mozambique's international alignment is with countries strongly opposed to South Africa, there is the fact of radically different social systems. Hopefully, these will be able to coexist peacefully in Southern Africa, but in any case there are likely to be differing conclusions as to how human resources should best be employed and developed.

These few examples from the current situation in Southern Africa have been given to illustrate the over-riding importance and also the complexity of the political decision-making processes. It is with this basic general point in mind that one can now look at three other more specific questions affecting the relations between countries of this region, which in turn affect efforts to develop our human and other resources.

2) The Question of Interdependence and Dependence

There is often some confusion about the term "interdependence". The facts certainly show that there are numerous links between the States and territories of the region - trade, labour agreements, migration, investment, transport, power, tourism, military or paramilitary arrangements, etc. None of these links is in a one-way direction only; there are advantages and opportunities in varying degrees for all the parties concerned. Therefore, there is a large measure of interdependence between the countries of the region.

However, the facts also show that in varying degrees there is a strong measure of dependence on South Africa for these countries, i.e. dependence of the periphery on the strong centre. This factor of dependence is politically crucial because, while there may be economic advantages for the dependent countries, it has a noticeably negative effect on policy-making in regard to relations with South Africa. So it is vitally necessary to bear in mind always, when considering the degree of inter-dependence, the accompanying factor of dependence and its negative political effects.

These "political" effects include policy decisions on economic relations. For example, Botswana has tried, in reaction to its dependence on South Africa, to assert its independence, not only ideologically in statements and voting at the UN, OAU, etc., but primarily in the areas of investment, trade, monetary relations, development assistance, etc. The President of Botswana, Sir Seretse Khama, has said, for instance, (March, 1970): "We do not intend to seek aid

from South African official sources. It would not be in the interests of either country to increase Botswana's dependence on South Africa." In Botswana's National Development Plan, 1970 - 75, as published in September, 1970, it was acknowledged, with reference to the Customs Union and joint monetary system, that the economic dependence on South Africa was great. It was then stated: "It is considered to be in the interest of both countries to transform this dependence into a relationship of interdependence."

Lesotho's attempts to balance its heavy economic dependence on South Africa by aggressively asserting its independence through highly critical statements and through votes at international meetings has been very apparent in the past few years. Recently, the Lesotho Government has in the O.A.U. gone to the length of opposing the moves of other Black States of the region to find peaceful means of resolving differences. Swaziland has traditionally maintained a lower profile on these matters, but it, too, has sought to diversify its external economic relations, so as to reduce the degree of economic dependence on South Africa. Mozambique's independence is very recent, but it can be expected to follow the same line, and an eventual Black Government in Rhodesia will no doubt also attempt to prove its independence and to reduce the degree of dependence.

In about a year's time a new independent State will join the ranks of Black-ruled countries of the region, namely the Transkei. How will it react in order to prove to the rest of Africa and the world that it is really independent - in spite of its economic dependence on South Africa?

In determining their policies, each of these States acts in what it considers to be its own interests, and a prime interest for them at this stage of their development is naturally the assertion and maintenance of their independence. One can clearly see running through all the policy decisions of governments in this region (and elsewhere in Africa) the strong nationalist urge to consolidate the formal independence gained by their countries, to achieve equality with other states and to determine more effectively their own destiny.

In an article written in 1960 Rupert Emerson commented :

"The prime rival to nationalism as a driving force is presumed to be the desire for an improved standard of living. From time to time, it is asserted that the ordinary poverty-stricken Asian and African is really interested only in seeing an end put to his poverty. This is a highly

dubious proposition. The evidence indicates that he regards at least temporary economic privation as an appropriate price to pay for national salvation. It has also been contended that his real demand is for a transition to modernity, as manifested in economic and social development. In some part the pressure for economic development derives from the same root as the desire for an improved standard of living. However, it also has nationalist implications in its drive for equality." +

The Malawi Government's decision to halt the flow of labour to South African mines should be seen against this background. This was a difficult decision to understand on economic grounds only, especially as it had generally been considered in South Africa that Malawi's friendly posture was largely due to the great economic advantage it gained from the export of labour. But it seems that the Malawi Government decided that the national interest required a drastic reduction in this dependence, and that its human resources would be better exploited in the development of Malawi itself.

This natural tendency among the weaker countries of the region to develop their independence vis-a-vis South Africa and to strive for a greater measure of equality is not necessarily detrimental to the development of the region as a whole. In fact, the greater the measure of equality, the healthier will be the relationship of interdependence. But here a heavy responsibility rests on South Africans. Given the Republic's overwhelming economic strength in relation to the other states, it is unavoidable that a considerable degree of dependence in fact will continue. Therefore, if genuine interdependence is to grow at the same time, every effort must be made in South Africa to treat the other states as political equals at all times. (It has been on this basis that the South African Government has achieved notable progress in negotiations with other governments during the past year.)

Unfortunately, the negative effects of dependence are aggravated by the fact of opposition to South Africa's domestic policies on the part of neighbouring Black states. For instance, Sir Seretse Khama has commented (September, 1971) that in skills, knowledge of African conditions, etc., South Africa has much to offer. But Botswana was morally and politically unable, he said, to accept official South African aid. There is no need to stress this obvious factor in our relationships with Black states for many years, but it can at least now be said that there are signs that a reassessment is taking place in some of these states, which may bear fruit, if the current negotiations over differences in the region continue constructively.

+ Rupert Emerson, Nationalism and Political Development, reprinted in Development: For what?, ed. John H. Hallowell, 1964, Duke University Press, p.4

This latter aspect leads directly to the next general question, which can be discussed fairly briefly.

3) Interaction of Domestic and International Affairs

It is a truism that foreign policy can nowhere be divorced from domestic policies. This is especially evident, of course, in Southern Africa at present. There is the obvious fact that South Africa's internal racial policies are the main factor in our external relations. But internal factors in all other countries of the region are now directly related to and influencing their external relations : The question of a settlement within Rhodesia is currently the crucial issue affecting relations between various countries, notably Zambia and South Africa; similarly, the internal disputes within South West Africa are of international concern; Angola's internal conflict not only prevents that country from playing its potential role in the Sub-Continent, but directly affects the attitudes of Whites in other countries regarding the possibilities of compromise with Black Nationalist movements; the internal development of Mozambique will determine its relations with its neighbours; and so on.

We cannot, therefore, look at the possibilities of developing human resources through co-operation between States without taking into account the internal social and economic factors in each of the States concerned. This creates serious problems because (a) there is a high degree of fluidity and uncertainty at present in most of the States, and (b) the differences in internal systems appear to be becoming more pronounced.

4) Different Social Systems and Ideologies

Brief separate reference to this question is necessary, because it has been highlighted by the radical change in Mozambique.

The ideological approach of Frelimo will constitute a crucial factor in future relations with Mozambique, as it increasingly affects economic and social aspects of policy in that country. While the Frelimo Government may be fairly pragmatic in recognising the realities and the advantages of their links with South Africa, and while we can discount some of the rhetoric in their public statements, there is no doubt that the Frelimo leadership is serious about the intention to establish a type of socialist system in Mozambique. This is bound to make relations with South Africa delicate on various levels (and mention has already been made above of labour arrangements); it will also

mean that the Frelimo leadership will naturally associate more freely with other countries in Africa and the rest of the World, which have similar socialist systems. Moreover, the influence which the Frelimo ideology will have on other countries in the region will have to be watched. There are already indications of a shift in Zambia and of a strong ideological bond between Frelimo and the ZANU faction in Rhodesia, SWAPO in South West Africa, the MPLA in Angola, and the South African ANC. (The struggle for influence over these various movements and others between the Soviet Union and China complicates the relationships further.)

That South African Government agencies, such as the Railways, have so far been able, under these difficult circumstances, to co-operate effectively on a functional level with Mozambique, is to the credit of both Governments, and one can hope at least that the need for this type of co-operation, if confrontation is to be avoided, will continue to be recognised. In fact, co-operation at this level could even be strengthened, if there is the need and will for it on both sides, in spite of differences at other levels, such as the ideological. Inter-state relations do not necessarily operate along a continuum, with confrontation at one end and full co-operation at the other. In the modern world there are so many diverse facets of the relations between states, that it is often possible for normal co-operation to take place in some areas, while there are strong differences in others - provided that a particular difference does not become overriding.

Apart from the specific question of the influence of socialism, of whatever variety, there is the general, long-standing question of the African environment in which South Africa's relationships with its neighbours must take place. In the era of anti-colonialism these relationships have been complicated by the fact that White South Africa has not easily been able to identify with the aspirations of Black Africa. This division between the so-called White South and the rest of Africa has been further aggravated by outside interference and pressures. But it can be said now that attitudes are changing on both sides of the divide. There is greater appreciation in White South Africa of the facts of our place in Africa and of the need for a greater commitment to Africa. In response, there is now a greater willingness in Black Africa to accept Whites as fully African, and to acknowledge South Africa's role in the continent as an independent African State.

Concluding Comments

The sub-continent of Africa is at present in a period of dynamic change. The outcome cannot be predicted, but the choice between co-operation and confrontation is clear. Political leaders have to make the choice and then have to find the means of giving effect to it, taking into account all the constraints on them. The consequences of confrontation for all peoples of the region have been recognised by many; hence the current efforts to avoid that course. What is needed at the same time is more emphasis on the positive consequences of co-operation - particularly in developing in a rational way our human and other resources. There must be a more effective input of this positive approach into the policy-making process, and here scientists and engineers have a considerable contribution to make - not simply by identifying problems and opportunities, but by being involved wherever possible in the policy planning and decisions. This requires a receptiveness on the part of politicians, but also an awareness on the part of scientists of the political constraints which have to be dealt with realistically.