

**Whose policy and why is it foreign?
Exploring the impact of civil society influence on SA foreign policy**

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The foreign policy adopted by a state is traditionally seen as falling exclusively within the domain of the state itself. However, civil society often finds itself at odds with a particular policy, with ideas of more effective policies, or with other interests of its own that require attempts to influence policy. This chapter forms part of an action-research and information dissemination project entitled 'Consensus-building Approaches and Policy Coordination Mechanisms: Responsive and Responsible Policy Formulation and Implementation in South Africa'. It was carried out with the financial support of the European Union and the National Treasury of South Africa through the Conflict and Governance Facility (CAGE).¹

The project was managed and implemented by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) and Action for Conflict Transformation (ACTION), an emerging global community-based network with its secretariat in Johannesburg, South Africa. It critically investigated some of South Africa's post-apartheid policy-making processes, in order to assess the extent to which ordinary citizens have been empowered to understand policies and articulate their opinions, needs and aspirations in relation to these policies (Tadesse et al. 2006).

The final report tried to amplify the voices of those who felt left out of policy-making processes. It combined an academic analysis of the concepts related to public participation and the virtues of a participatory democracy, with a record and description of real-life experiences of citizens trying to influence decision-makers. The project investigated two vastly different contexts in an attempt to gain insights into how policy is made and implemented. The first of these focused on the relationships between and amongst community members and the authorities responsible for implementing a housing project in Khayelitsha, in the Western Cape Province.

The focus of the contribution of the chapter in this volume is on the second case-study, arising out of a solidarity relationship ACTION and CSVR have with civil society organisations in Zimbabwe, and with South African partners involved in the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum.² It documents attempts by South African civil society to influence public awareness and government policy around Zimbabwe. The report gathered the comments and perceptions of those involved in these attempts. It also analysed the official and unofficial foreign policy making process and sought to identify opportunities for greater public participation in this process.

On a national foreign policy level, the perception of government as being distant and guided by unknown and misunderstood interests, creates divisions which undermine the potential for partnership and the development of complementary strategies towards a common goal. The lessons learned from the project will feed into wider advocacy

initiatives and assist in focusing and informing strategies aimed at increasing the impact organised and previously marginalised groups have on policies that affect them.

It is believed that context specific participatory governance systems and public participation mechanisms will facilitate better informed policy decisions; increase the responsiveness and accountability of government departments; improve public service delivery and human security; and reduce the need both for the public to resort to violence as a means of articulating their grievances and for the state to be violent in the implementation of its policies.

Background

The research study focused on the activities of the members of the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum (ZSF), a network of progressive South African civil society organisations, including youth, women, labour, faith-based, human rights and student formations that are engaged in the promotion of solidarity for sustainable peace, democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe.

The purposes of the forum are:

- To facilitate interaction and collaboration, and where possible promote joint action between South African and Zimbabwean civil Society organizations.
- To consolidate the efforts and to amplify the voices of South African civil society organizations in the promotion of peace, democracy and human rights for Zimbabweans.
- To create regular platforms whereby members of the Forum exchange and disseminate information on their individual activities relating to the core activities of the Forum.
- To engage principally in collective advocacy at national, regional and continental levels with the aim of influencing the policies and actions of the South African Government, SADC and AU with regard to Zimbabwe.
- To reduce the overlap of activities and maximize the utilization of resources through the exchange of information and coordination of activities relating to the core activities of the forum.
- To develop and carry out short-term and long-term solidarity initiatives towards Zimbabwe (ZSF 2005³)

The ZSF started to operate loosely in November 2004. Its steering committee consults frequently, the forum itself meets regularly in Gauteng Province and sporadically in other parts of the country. Throughout 2006, the ZSF grew in size and influence, and appears to have contributed to a greater understanding of the crisis and challenges in Zimbabwe both amongst its member organisations and more broadly in South Africa.

The Anglican Bishop of Natal, The Right Reverend Rubin Phillip, currently chairs the ZSF, and at the time of the study, CSVR was hosting the forum on behalf of member civil society organisations. This responsibility has since shifted to the ACTION Support Centre.⁴

Organising effectively

Broad-based forums made up of a wide range of bodies are never easy to organise because of the tensions that arise as a result of the differing strategies, values and ideological bases of their members. These tensions play themselves out within the ZSF, particularly with regards to its strategies in relation to government. The original study was undertaken in the period of Zimbabwe's history that followed Operation Murambatsvina,⁵ and the emergence of a harsher state strategy of violence and the abuse of human and people's rights. Opinions on foreign policy within the ZSF ranged from an extremely critical analysis of SA, and a push for total condemnation of government, to an appreciation of the complexity of the relationship between the South African and Zimbabwean governments, and support for strategic engagement with key government figures in an effort to influence policy within the constraints of this relationship. Meanwhile, another strand of thinking championed a complementary relationship between civil society and government that would enable a relatively unconstrained civil society to act more decisively than government, and in so doing create the space and the impetus for government to play a quieter diplomatic role, albeit towards a common goal.

The tension between these opinions illustrates how complex the role of civil society in relation to influencing foreign policy can become. The ZSF attempts to contain the tension and agree on common strategies in an effort to speak with a common voice. This need for civil society to organise itself and avoid contradicting its own various positions is the key to creating effective conditions for constructive participation in foreign policy processes. Without a common position, it is all too easy for government to dismiss civil society in its entirety and argue that the range of opinions expressed is confusing and incoherent, and thus unable to provide useful policy alternatives.

The vastly different structures and approaches of civil society formations are partly responsible for these differing approaches. Within the ZSF, several participating organisations are membership-based, including the affiliates of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the Young Communists League (YCL) and the South Africa Students Congress (SASCO). These all have national organisational structures and are accountable to their card-carrying members. Internal structures and established decision-making processes ensure an internal accountability between the organisations and their members. SANGOCO, the national coordinating body of NGOs, also works within the confines of the broad mandate it receives from its members.

Other forum members, such as NGOs participating in their own right, are less constrained by the need to obtain a mandate before adopting a position, but are then also open to accusations of representing only their own narrow interests, and often cannot easily demonstrate that they have public support for their positions. At the same time, it is often

these NGOs that have the infrastructure and resources to enable them to speak out on foreign policy in a high profile way. But a critical position is easily dismissed as not being representative of any demonstrable support base.

One of the key purposes of the forum is to combine the strengths of these different forms of organising and carry out a programme on Zimbabwe that is supported by sufficient resources and infrastructure, that is vocal, high profile and influential, but that is also representative of sufficient public opinion to allow it to assert positions legitimately. Part of this legitimacy comes also from the contact and partnership with Zimbabwean organisations active within Zimbabwe. This allows the forum to be guided by the voices and direction coming from Zimbabwean civil society itself.

Opportunities for influence

Public participation in foreign policy processes is thus necessarily a more complex issue than involvement in domestic policy processes. Civil society faces a number of challenges that entail a depth of self-organisation before it can hope to influence government in a way that makes its intentions clear and that offers government a credible partner with whom to engage. But even where this self-organisation has occurred, and the intentions of civil society are clear, what mechanisms are in place to enable public participation in this sphere of government policy making and to what extent has it been able to influence policy?

The principles that guide South African foreign policy evolved from the long history of the ANC and the anti-apartheid liberation movement. The ANC Freedom Charter states that ‘South Africa shall strive to maintain world peace and the settlement of all international disputes by negotiation – not war’ (ANC 1955). This ideal, according to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), finds its expression in a foreign policy that ‘promotes multilateralism in order to secure a rule-based international system’ (DFA 2005), including the government’s commitment to strengthening the function of multilateral regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Within the AU, many African leaders have been criticised for evading the Zimbabwe issue. The actions of several governments have been likened to the repressive nature of the ruling party in Zimbabwe and this, combined with a long tradition of respecting the sovereignty of the internal affairs of another country, is often assumed to have informed a reluctance to take a decisive stand on Zimbabwe. The delicacies of the politics within the AU and its subsequent failure to speak out critically against Mugabe have been interpreted by some as complicity.

The African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) and the Pan African Parliament (PAP) have spoken out more critically on the abuses of power taking place in Zimbabwe and this has both challenged this interpretation and created the space for member states of the AU to also act more decisively (Tibajuka 2005). The recent clear communiqué from the April 2007 SADC heads of state summit, officially appointing the South African Government as mediators in the Zimbabwe crisis, also heralds a significant

development (SADC 2007), but the full impact and outcome of the intervention have yet to unfold.

South Africa is often referred to as a middle-power, a status shared with countries such as Canada and Sweden in the North, and Brazil and India in the South. Its foreign policy can be understood through this perspective. Usually, multilateralism and networking constitute the fundamental strategies of middle-power countries that are used in order to promote common foreign policy issues, which they believe they can not advance on their own (Cilliers 1999). Seen from this perspective, South Africa is attempting to move from a past that was defined by hard power, to a future that embraces soft power, where it helps to build common norms and values in Africa (and the world at large). It does not want to be seen as a giant imposing itself, but rather aims to encourage collective leadership and action.⁶

South Africa's commitment to an 'African Renaissance' is another important aspect of its foreign policy. This entails a set of ideals that aim to create a peaceful, economically strong and politically free continent by harnessing the positive influence of African cultures and traditions. It also seeks to illuminate the impact that years of oppression have had on the psyche of Africans and emphasises the need for Africans to take the lead in solving their own problems. This helps to explain the leading role that South Africa has taken in developing both the AU and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Broad ideals and principles such as these provide guidance for foreign policy formulation. The dynamic and politically sensitive nature of foreign policy in most cases does not allow for the development of country-specific policies through a once-off, written document. It is rather the cumulative result of discussions amongst key government officials, often impelled by the views of strong personalities. The role of internal ANC policy formulation processes, including input from Alliance partners COSATU and the South African Communist Party (SACP) are also crucial in giving direction to Government foreign policy. The results of these discussions and stances taken in the process are usually made known to the public through a 'series of indicative official statements given from time to time'⁷ and reflect the foreign policy of the state on a particular issue.

The consequence of this is that foreign policy is not definitively created as such, but is fashioned through an evolutionary process. The influence of civil society on policy choices depends on the extent to which it manages to get its voices and concerns heard and taken into consideration within this process.

In procedural terms, the source of foreign policy in South Africa is the constitution itself, which makes the President the head of all ministries, including the DFA, and gives the President the power to appoint foreign dignitaries.⁸ In theory, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Foreign Affairs should play a general oversight role over foreign policy. However the committee has not been active in the role and foreign policy formulation is almost exclusively located within the Office of the State President (the Presidency).⁹ This

fact links to a general trend in South Africa over the last years that has seen the expansion and strengthening of the Presidency. Hughes (2004: 47) notes on the Presidency that the number of staff has increased from 27 in 1994 to 337 today, and the budget that has increased by 21.6 percent since 1999..

According to Hughes, the most important branch of the Presidency for policy formulation (including foreign policy) is the Policy Coordination and Advisory Service which researches and prepares briefs for the President. While the Presidency plays a dominant role in foreign policy formulation, the DFA is a key implementer of foreign policy and makes input into policy formulation and provides issue-specific expertise and knowledge whenever it is required (Hughes 2004: 17). The increasing role of the Presidency in foreign policy formulation appears to have a major impact on the DFA. The ANC, in its capacity as the ruling party, also plays a key role in policy formulation, particularly through the National Executive Council's sub-committee on International Relations. The sub-committee coordinates the ANC's foreign policy interests and has representation from the Presidency, the DFA, Parliament, the tripartite alliance and other stakeholders (Hughes 2004: 29).

The foreign policy choices of South Africa in relation to Zimbabwe factor in a range of issues that involve past and current historical, political, economic, regional and international dynamics. Over the course of their engagement for decades, the relationships between the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the ANC were never smooth. In the days of the anti-apartheid and anti-colonial struggles, the ANC had closer ties with the Zimbabwe African People's Unity (ZAPU) than it did with President Mugabe's ZANU, which was closer to the Pan Africanist Congress.¹⁰ According to Gumede (2005: 182), in the post-apartheid period, the South African government was publicly critical of Zimbabwe's intervention in the war in the Congo, and the two countries went into a fierce, backdoor diplomatic battle over Zimbabwe's control of the SADC security organ.

The South African government, however, has also come to Zimbabwe's aid on several occasions. Lodge (2005) notes that in February 2000, South Africa approved an R800 million loan to Zimbabwe to purchase petrol and electricity, and later approved a 25 percent reduction in electricity tariffs, despite huge debts owed by the Zimbabwe Electricity Authority to the South African electricity parastatal Eskom. On issues related to the Zimbabwe land reform, the Mbeki administration has been active in trying to get western governments to financially back land re-distribution in Zimbabwe. During the farm takeovers of 2000 and 2001, SADC leaders, including Mbeki, while expressing reservations about the treatment of white farmers, stopped short of an unambiguous condemnation of the Zimbabwean government.

The South African government's calculated approach to Zimbabwe has been highly criticised in the media. It has been accused of adopting a pro-ZANU-PF attitude, a position then seemingly vindicated by government publicly arguing that President Mugabe should not be isolated. Lodge notes that during the March 2002 Zimbabwean presidential election, a fifty-member South African government delegation of election

monitors endorsed the election, with official missions from Nigeria and the AU in agreement. However, the Commonwealth team, led by former Nigerian head of state, General Abdulsalami Abubaker, recorded high levels of politically-motivated violence. Although some members of the South African monitoring team expressed alarm over attacks they had witnessed on the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the South African government dismissed these, noting that many people died in the run-up to the first South African democratic elections but that these had been internationally accepted.

This does not mean that South Africa has been completely uncritical of President Mugabe. In March 2001, the MDC met with President Mbeki and members of his staff told journalists that the 'softly, softly' approach was under review. Lodge (2005) refers to an interview in June of that year where Mbeki complained to Tim Sebastian on BBC's Hard Talk that Mugabe 'didn't listen to me'. However, these events have still been generally interpreted as indicating a sympathetic and accommodating policy towards the Zimbabwean government. The South African media has labelled this policy 'quiet diplomacy', those less sympathetic using Reagan's phrase in relation to South Africa of 'constructive engagement'.

Nonetheless, there have been apparent shifts in South African foreign policy towards Zimbabwe, subtle initially, but more rapidly over the past few months. In April 2002, talks between the MDC and ZANU-PF broke down, and in the run-up to the March 2005 elections President Mbeki seemed to focus on encouraging them to begin negotiations again, meeting with leaders from both parties. In June of 2004, President Mbeki met an MDC delegation led by the party's Vice-President, Gibson Sibanda. In September 2004, he met President Mugabe in New York and in October met an MDC delegation led by Morgan Tsvangirai, the President of the MDC (DFA 2006).

After the March 2005 elections, several events occurred which re-focused attention on Zimbabwe and sparked a renewed involvement from civil society. On 18 May 2005, the Zimbabwean government launched 'Operation Murambatsvina'. With no prior warning, a huge number of homes were destroyed by the government. The United Nations issued a scathing report and concluded that some 700,000 people in cities across the country lost their homes or sources of livelihood, or both (ICG 2005).

Soon after this event, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) threatened to expel Zimbabwe if it did not pay off a US\$300 million loan. President Mugabe initially approached the South African government for help. There was a massive outcry from civil society and the media, responding to both the humanitarian cost of Operation Murambatsvina and to the prospect that South Africa might unconditionally loan money to Zimbabwe. Although most of the discussion around the loan request was held behind closed doors, the government apparently refused to cover the loan unless the Zimbabwean government undertook some political reform. The subsequent refusal of Zimbabwe to accept the loan, because of the political conditions attached, is said to have created an enormous rift between the two countries. Nevertheless South Africa has

accepted the mandate from SADC to lead a mediation process and will try again to use dialogue as a way of finding solutions.

It is evident that the South African government places a premium on engagement with regard to Zimbabwe. As Thami Ngwenya, from the Centre for Public Participation, puts it, '[South African policy] has been to not isolate Zimbabwe, to not take the Commonwealth or the US line, but rather a stance that says let us engage with Zimbabwe.'¹¹

In its 2005-2008 Strategic Plan, the DFA regarding Zimbabwe writes, 'It is important to promote the national reconciliation process and to encourage continuous dialogue between political parties and other role-players in that county, not only through the SADC and AU, but also bilaterally' (DFA 2005). This makes sense in the context of South Africa's overall focus on multilateralism and negotiation, and explains the current emphasis on encouraging dialogue between the MDC and ZANU-PF.

The analysis and perspectives of powerful individuals within the government is another key factor that guides South Africa's policy. Given the central role that he plays in policy formulation, it is instructive to look at the following passage written by President Mbeki in the online newsletter, *ANC Today*.

The current Zimbabwe crisis started in 1965, when the then British Labour Government refused to suppress the rebellion against the British Crown led by Ian Smith...(and when) the large sums of money promised by both the British and US governments (during the Lancaster House talks) to enable the new government to buy land for African settlement never materialized.¹²

In 1998 we intervened to help mediate the growing tension between Zimbabwe and the UK on the land question (which led to an international conference). At that conference, the international community, including the UK, the UN, the EU and others agreed to help finance the programme of land redistribution that had been an essential part of the negotiated settlement of 1979...nothing came of these commitments...With everything having failed to restore the land to its original owners in a peaceful manner, a forcible process of land redistribution perhaps became inevitable (Mbeki 2003)

These statements indicate the essential linkage South Africa perceives between the current situation in Zimbabwe, its colonial legacy and the responsibilities of the international community to respond to this legacy.

The policy towards Zimbabwe can thus be seen through a range of factors, aptly summed up by Mills (2005) as reflecting 'a combination of its own political traditions and stress on compromise and negotiation, the history of race and colonialism in the region and the resonance of these factors including around land distribution domestically, and a belief

that alternatives including criticism of Mugabe will only marginalize the role to be played by external powers.’

The impact of civil society action on Zimbabwe

South African civil society, including the ZSF, has carried out a range of activities aimed at raising awareness within South Africa about the situation in Zimbabwe, expressing solidarity with Zimbabweans, and attempting to influence South African policy. This section provides an overview of some of those activities, focusing on those carried out in 2005. The activities include awareness raising meetings and press conferences, where specific positions have been agreed upon and made public; direct interactions with government officials; and support to solidarity actions undertaken by its member organisations.

Masiko notes that the ZSF conducted a series of meetings to discuss the role of South African civil society organisations in the March 2005 Zimbabwe Parliamentary elections. At its January 2005 meeting, the ZSF resolved to support a fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe through a delegation led by the churches in accordance with the SADC principles and guidelines on elections (ZSF 2005a). The Third Zimbabwe Solidarity Conference followed this meeting from 24 to 25 February 2005.

The conference explored the possibilities and strategies of election observation and reached consensus, at least among civil society, on what constitutes a legitimate election and the minimum criteria that should be adopted by South African observers. Speakers at the conference included Morgan Tsvangirai, President of the MDC, and Zwelinzima Vavi, the Secretary General of COSATU. Among other things, the delegates resolved that ordinary South Africans should be mobilized around the Zimbabwe cause, and that there should be grassroots solidarity with Zimbabwe. It was also agreed that the ZSF would coordinate the production of a newsletter in the period running up to the election¹³ (ZSF 2005b).

A press conference of the ZSF on 22 March 2005 highlighted the extent to which violence sponsored by the Zimbabwean government had led to an increase in the number of political victims that fled Zimbabwe for South Africa. The press conference was broadcast on the evening news of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), was aired on numerous radio stations, and was followed by another press conference on 7 April 2005, whereby the ZSF communicated its position and analysis with regard to the March 2005 elections in Zimbabwe. Representatives from the ZSF told journalists that they believed that elections in Zimbabwe were not free and fair, and that the environment was not conducive for free elections (Masiko 2005).

The conclusion of the March 2005 Zimbabwe election and the subsequent unrolling of Operation Murambatsvina necessitated a revision of focus and strategy on the part of the ZSF. On 10 June 2005, at the ZSF regular meeting, Ms. Thoko Matshe, a Zimbabwean activist, gave a presentation together with Bishop Rubin Phillip, on the effects of Operation Murambatsvina. This led to a press conference on 20 June 2005. The MDC spokesperson, Paul Themba Nyathi, and Isabella Matambanadzo, a Zimbabwean activist

from the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), recounted to forum members and journalists the impact of Operation Murambatsvina on the poor people of Zimbabwe. They pleaded with the forum to step up its solidarity efforts as Zimbabweans needed to hear voices from the outside. The event was captured by two of the major newspapers in Gauteng and aired on SABC radio stations (Masiko 2005).

Another press conference in June released video footage from Zimbabwe taken by the Solidarity Peace Trust and was planned to coincide with similar events organised by Amnesty International in Namibia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Senegal and New York. This press conference also publicly criticised the lack of coverage given to the Zimbabwean issue by the SABC and was at least in part responsible for the subsequent response. The video footage released was the first of Operation Murambatsvina to appear on national television in South Africa and was given extensive media coverage. Full-page newspaper adverts supported by more than 200 organisations were also put in national weekly and daily newspapers. Following the fallout from Operation Murambatsvina, the ZSF coordinated the South African involvement and joined over 200 human rights and civil organisations to release an international joint appeal in June 2005 to the UN and the AU to help the people of Zimbabwe (AI, COHRE and ZLHR, 2005).

On 29 August 2005, in its parliamentary submission to the Home Affairs Portfolio Committee, the ZSF welcomed the announcement from the Home Affairs Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula that she had ordered an independent probe into the deaths of two Zimbabweans at the Lindela refugee holding facility in Gauteng and also provided suggestions on how the situation at Lindela could best be handled in the future (ZSF 2005d).

A subsequent ZSF Public Meeting on 30 September 2005, held at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, discussed two important issues related to Zimbabwe. The first focused on the political and economic effects of a collapsed Zimbabwe on South Africa, and the second explored the policy of the South African government in relation to Zimbabwe over the last five years. A major success of the meeting was the announcement by a representative from the Department of Home Affairs that Minister Mapisa-Nqakula wished to see the ZSF assist in organising a meeting between refugees and refugee organisations in South Africa and her department (ZSF 2005e).

In response to the Minister's request to meet with Zimbabwean refugees and refugee organizations, the ZSF first arranged a preparatory meeting at the CSVR office with the wider Zimbabwean community and representatives of refugee organisations. During the subsequent meeting with the Minister, she expressed her appreciation of the ZSF, agreeing with the need for a group of South Africans to organise themselves and express solidarity with Zimbabweans. She committed herself to addressing some of the problems experienced by refugees and agreed to hold regular meetings of this nature.¹⁴ (Masiko 2005).

Members of the ZSF also attended different political congresses and conferences in 2005, including the ANC National General Council held in Tshwane (Pretoria) from 30 June to

3 July 2005 and the SACP Special Congress held in Ethekewini (Durban) from 8 to 10 April. These provided an opportunity to raise awareness on events in Zimbabwe and ensure that the situation was discussed in depth by key political structures. These also provided platforms to distribute videos and DVD materials produced by the Solidarity Peace Trust¹⁵ in an attempt to give a visual understanding of the crisis in Zimbabwe to South Africans.

The ZSF helped to organise funding for the Young Communist League's demonstration at the Zimbabwe and Swaziland Embassies on 31 March 2005, protesting human rights violations in both countries. On behalf of the ZSF, the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition funded a demonstration by the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) on the 25th Anniversary of Zimbabwean independence on 18 April 2005. COSAS managed to bring more than 500 learners to the march through the streets of Johannesburg to Khotso House and delivered a memorandum of support to the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CRISIS) office (ZSF 2005 e?).

COSATU has conducted some of the most visible actions in response to Zimbabwe's struggles. With close ties to the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), COSATU has protested the treatment of workers and the poor under the current government. Some of the most publicised activities came in the run-up to the March 2005 parliamentary elections. In October 2004, and again in February 2005, delegations of COSATU officials who went to Zimbabwe with the intention to monitor the state of the country ahead of the elections were expelled from the country. These events were covered by both regional and international media, and were interpreted as a direct challenge to the ANC and to the government's position on Zimbabwe (Masiko 2005).

The ZSF released a press statement on 2 February 2005 condemning the expulsion of COSATU's delegation from Zimbabwe, contending that 'COSATU's integrity is beyond question in terms of its intentions, and that attempts to label the organisation's intentions as nefarious, are improper, fundamentally inaccurate and malicious' (ZSF 2005f). On the eve of the elections, COSATU also planned to blockade the Beit Bridge border in a call for democratic reforms in Zimbabwe, but were prevented from doing so by the police, ending up picketing 200 metres from the post.

Following COSATU's aborted visit to Zimbabwe, the ANC was embarrassed by the treatment a member of the tripartite alliance had received. Consequently they were compelled to engage COSATU on the Zimbabwe issue. To an extent, these organisations influenced the government's reaction to unfolding political events in Zimbabwe.

The South African Council of Churches is another civil society grouping that has carried out a series of high-profile activities aimed at influencing South African policy on Zimbabwe. As with COSATU, the SACC has strong, historical links with its counterpart in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches. Among the best publicised of its activities was a letter sent to President Mbeki in February 2004 urging him to put pressure on the MDC and ZANU-PF to renew negotiations, an action that followed a year of efforts by the churches (IRIN 2004).

The SACC was to have led a group of six South African civil society organisations, including the Catholic Bishops Conference, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and the Centre for Policy Studies, on an observer mission to Zimbabwe. They were, however, all denied observer status by the Mugabe regime. In a statement issued on March 9, urging churches to mobilize public opinion against human rights abuses and repression in Zimbabwe, the SACC stated: 'The deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe is not likely to be resolved by the March 31 election, regardless of the outcome' (SACC 2005).

On March 28, Molefe Tsele, the general secretary of the SACC, was refused permission to enter Zimbabwe at the Beit Bridge border post. Tsele was traveling to Zimbabwe at the invitation of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches to take part in an ecumenical delegation to observe the March 31 election. Tsele was accompanied by Abie Dithlake, general secretary of the SADC NGO Council, who was also turned away by immigration officials because their names did not appear on the government's list of accredited election observers.

In July 2005, a delegation from the SACC visited Zimbabwe to assess the impact of Operation Murambatsvina and was harshly critical of the Zimbabwean government. Following this trip, the SACC met with President Mbeki to express its concern over the operation. At this meeting, Mbeki expressed support for a humanitarian relief campaign which the SACC subsequently launched (and which was held-up by the Zimbabwean authorities)(*Mail&Guardian*, 15.07.05).

Following a second trip to Zimbabwe, the SACC met again with Mbeki and other high-ranking members of the South African government, during which time they reportedly expressed concern over the proposal to help Zimbabwe pay off its loan from the IMF. They reported that President Mbeki was trying his best to resolve the situation in Zimbabwe and that 'there was a lot going on that people did not know about, given the nature of diplomacy' (*Mail & Guardian* 10.08.05).

The positions taken by South African social movements towards Zimbabwe are complicated. Initially, organisations such as the Landless People's Movement (LPM) came out in support of the Zimbabwean government's land redistribution programme. Patrick Bond, from the University of KwaZulu-Natal has stated that 'the tragedy is that civil society has not more readily identified with the oppression of the working class in Zimbabwe, especially the progressive/social movements (which have the capacity to mobilise large numbers)'.¹⁶ However, a delegation of social movement activists was sent to observe the March 2005 elections, including members of the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), the LPM and Jubilee South Africa. Their report was harshly critical of the Zimbabwean government, highlighting draconian media and assembly laws and the failure of the land reform programme (Indymedia 2005).

Political parties and international civil society organisations have also attempted to apply pressure on the government. The Independent Democrats wrote a letter of invitation to

the President and the Deputy President, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka to discuss Zimbabwe, to which the pair replied stating that they would be happy to engage.¹⁷ The Democratic Alliance has also been outspoken on its opposition to government policy. Amnesty International, South Africa, together with CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation and the South African Non-Governmental Organisations Coalition (SANGOCO) organised a solidarity rally in the border town of Musina on the eve of the March 2005 elections to protest against violations of human rights in Zimbabwe.

It is difficult to argue a direct causal relationship between the activities of the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum, and other civil society actors, and any subsequent shifts in government policy. This is partly because of the complexity of the policy-making process, but also because of the absence of any official points of engagement from which any changes can be observed. Some would argue that the efforts of civil society make very little difference at all to what emerges as policy, while others cite evidence of shifts that may not have occurred in the absence of outspoken criticism and policy alternatives. The following section will explore this relationship of cause and effect in more depth and draw some conclusions that could inform a more effective way forward.

Roles and challenges of civil society in foreign policy choices

As was established earlier, foreign policy evolves organically and is influenced by ideas, changing circumstances and personalities. A wide range of factors that influence foreign policy choices make it virtually impossible to draw a direct causal link between civil society actions and policy changes.¹⁸ Most of the people interviewed for this case study did not believe that South African civil society has had a significant impact on policy decisions, which is accurate in so far as the general position of the South African government, that is, to favour engagement over isolation has not changed.

If examined closely, however, the reality is slightly more nuanced. There is a correlation between several key activities of civil society and policy changes, making it reasonable to assume that civil society organisations contributed, at least in part, to these shifts. For example, the pressure the SACC applied on the South African government to induce the MDC and ZANU-PF back to the negotiation table is widely viewed as having influenced their decision to do so. Another recent shift is apparent in the loan conditions that the South African government allegedly demanded when President Mugabe asked for South Africa's help to pay off the IMF debt. The meeting that the SACC held with President Mbeki seems to have been an important factor in convincing the government to hold back on granting the loan.¹⁹ The government was also under intense public pressure, as both civil society and the media came out loudly against Zimbabwe's loan request, disturbed by the graphic images of Operation Murambatsvina splashed across their television screens. The footage of this destruction was first picked up by the media at the 22 June 2005 press conference organised by the ZSF.

However even the successful interventions of those civil society actors that are close to government cannot be a substitute for transparent mechanisms for public participation in policy-making. It can be argued that the SACC has actually become too close to

government²⁰ and that the meetings they have had were not transparent enough to constitute meaningful civil society consultation.²¹

Some members of the forum believe that, although government has not been willing to officially engage with the ZSF, there is a greater willingness to talk privately, behind closed doors. These ‘behind closed doors’ discussions are strengthened by the existence of organisations such as the ZSF. ‘Just by coming together and being a forum they are making a contribution because when we go to speak to individuals within government, and say we are speaking on behalf of x, y and z, we have legitimacy in their eyes.’²²

Regardless of the real impact of civil society efforts to influence foreign policy, the absence of formal processes for public participation creates the perception that government is largely unwilling to engage or be influenced by civil society positions. In practice, civil society’s contribution to foreign policy tends to be marginal, specifically when it comes to peace and security issues. As Steven Friedman puts it, ‘Democracy assumes that citizens have a stake in the policy which is made in their name, why does this principle cease to hold if that policy is made in relation to external factors?’²³

The government appears to be reluctant to engage civil society on foreign policy because it considers these issues to be technical, diplomatically complicated and sensitive to national security. Contributions that are valued come almost exclusively from large research NGOs like the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) or the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), which offer technical skills, such as research, that the government can take advantage of on an ad-hoc basis. Government is also far more likely to engage with organisations like these because they are safe and do not ‘rock the boat’.²⁴

Personal relationships are also a key avenue for engagement with the government. There is a conviction that the government listens less to civil society than to individuals with whom they share personal relationships. In particular those with whom relationships were forged during the liberation struggle.²⁵ Despite its monolithic appearance, government is made up of individuals who can play an important internal role in affecting policy outcomes. However, this key avenue for influence can in no way replace the need for more official government and civil society engagement. There is currently little transparency or communication with the public over foreign policy decisions. Inevitably, the public only gets to know of any policy developments once they are brought into the public domain.²⁶

More transparency from government about how decisions are made would build more confidence around foreign policy. The lack of clear mechanisms for participation not only reduces confidence, but also takes away the potential for building cooperative partnerships that could be mutually beneficial. In Burundi, for example, the South African government and civil society have largely been working separately, despite both working towards shared peace- and security-related goals. However, this apparent opportunity does not appear to provide sufficient incentive for closer cooperation that is not co-optive in nature. The legitimacy and popularity of the current government is not

likely be threatened, especially by a foreign policy issue.²⁷ Excluding civil society is thus not seen as a major source of concern.

This trend was noted by Bishop Rubin Phillip in his reference to comments by President Thabo Mbeki about NGOs pushing the agenda of their western donors by criticising the government. Phillips noted further that these comments had been perceived as threatening towards outspoken civil society actors, and that there was a concern that those who do criticise might be seen as traitors if they disagreed with government.²⁸

The nature of civil society in South Africa itself also limits its impact on foreign policy issues. Understandably, there is ‘an assumption (among South African civil society) that what is foreign is foreign, and what is domestic is critical’.²⁹ People for good reasons tend to be far more concerned with local issues than they are about the situation in Zimbabwe. For instance, COSATU’s priorities will always primarily lie with the national concerns that immediately affect its constituents, such as HIV/AIDS or the country’s labour laws. Where there is an interest in what is happening outside of South Africa, it tends to be issue-specific and related to the concerns of the groups involved. For example, both Jewish and Muslim communities have mobilised at various times to respond to South Africa’s policy towards the Middle East (Hughes 2004: [page???](#)).

A related concern is the limited capacity of civil society organisations to speak with a coherent voice that articulates shared concrete concerns and suggestions. It is difficult to expect government to engage effectively with civil society unless it can organise and use its collective power. This makes platforms such as the ZSF vital as avenues where civil society can discuss issues and come to common positions that can be presented to the government.

Institutional changes could be made to increase the opportunities for civil society to impact on foreign policy and for government to take advantage of the grassroots views and contributions civil society has to make. For example, the role of the Presidency in policy review could be strengthened in collaboration with civil society organisations. It could hold open analysis and discussion forums, and invite input from a broad range of civil society organisations. It could engage civil society and deepen an understanding of the thinking behind particular policies.

Kwezi Mngqibisa, from ACCORD, contends that ‘as civil society we do not need an institutionalized linkage to foreign policy-making, that is exactly why we are who we are, we are not an extension of the policy unit of the DFA.’³⁰ Nevertheless the prospect of meaningful engagement would provide a rich incentive for civil society actors to find ways of working together and to focus on contributing to a foreign policy that was understood, supported and consistent with the values and principles of our own democracy.

Revising and enhancing the role of civil society in foreign policymaking

The case study on Zimbabwe demonstrates the complexity of foreign policy processes. If civil society wants to assert its interests and influence this policy domain, they must

accept responsibility for making their own voices heard. It has been difficult to establish whether South African civil society has the necessary expertise, skills, collective voice and the time to question, critique and provide alternatives to the foreign policy choices the government makes.

Civil society organisations are more likely to be powerful and vocal if they speak with a united voice on issues. It does not help if different strands of civil society are calling for different strategies and solutions, for example, on the crisis in Zimbabwe. This brings opportunities for government to pick and chose who they want to engage with behind closed doors. Furthermore, it is often divisive and separates the organisations and people who could be working together more effectively.

Where there is a group of people, disagreements and tensions are bound to arise as people usually have different interests and preferences on any issue. There is nothing wrong with people disagreeing with one another, yet it is essential that those who share some common agendas agree at least on their guiding principles and the main goal. Different strategies can be used to reach their main goal, but these should be informed by agreed and accepted principles. Agreeing a common agenda and a common set of principles would enhance opportunities for effective policy engagement

However, effective foreign policy engagement is not solely dependent on civil society organisations themselves. The Portfolio Committee on Foreign Affairs could also be strengthened and made more effective. This structure could become an important avenue for the public to engage and make submissions on foreign policy-related issues. Civil society organisations do not only have to deal with government and parliament at a foreign policy level, but also have the power to engage in all forms of activities that can tap into the power of cross border networks and sector-to-sector linkages. If South African civil society were to engage itself more with their Zimbabwean counterparts, it would enable them to speak with more authority, and with more useful insight, on Zimbabwean issues.

The government is also missing out on an important opportunity to tap into the resources and expertise of a civil society which could complement a common human security agenda driven by government. In the case of Zimbabwe, the South African government has, on the whole, chosen to speak only to party political players, that is, ZANU-PF and the MDC, and has largely ignored ordinary Zimbabwean citizens and the civil society formations into which they have organised themselves. Another approach could have opened up opportunities that have been lacking at the formal political level.

The current mediation process is an excellent case in point. The agonizing process of trying to find solutions, while levels of repression and violence from the ruling party continue unabated, and in an historical context that is littered with examples of betrayal and deception, could gain fresh energy from the inclusion of a wide range of civil society actors. The narrow focus of the mediation process on a free and fair election does not take into account the aspirations of most civil society actors. The opportunity to use the

mediation as a springboard for deeper transformational processes is largely lost due to the exclusion of so many potential actors.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that a more open approach to foreign policy formulation would create the conditions through which a more coordinated set of strategies could be developed that would have greater impact and be more likely to achieve intended impacts. In order for this more open approach to work in practice, civil society will need to rise to the challenge of better organising itself and of generating and sharing better information. Government will also need to actively research what civil society initiatives exist and create genuine opportunities for developing cooperative partnerships. These partnerships may take all of us closer to meeting the human security needs of not only South Africa but the continent as well.

Through the recommendations contained in this chapter we hope to contribute to improving existing mechanisms for public participation by non-state actors and those affected by government's policy decisions. We hope that applying them will improve people-centred, demand-driven policy-making.

The basis of our own democracy has been formulated with the involvement of civil society groupings from across the world. The ideals of the Freedom Charter, for which so many ordinary members of society fought so bravely, and its essential clause, the people shall govern, are not ideals of South Africa alone. They remain the vision for which people continue to struggle, through their engagement here at home, and through their contribution to a foreign policy that enshrines and champions them. A strong and vibrant people's democracy will need to embrace this contribution.

Notes

¹ CAGE is a grant maker implemented as a project of National Treasury and funded by the European Union Programme for Reconstruction and Development since 2003. The Facility funds, in the main, research organisations to undertake research that inform South Africa's policy within the arena of conflict and governance. The Facility also facilitates collaboration and capacity building in the arena.

² Pamela Masiko, a researcher at CSVr, and Colin Christensen, of the ACTION Support Centre, did much of the background research and writing that formed the basis of this chapter. Masiko served as coordinator of the ZSF during the period about which this report was compiled. Both her and Christensen's contribution to this project have been invaluable.

³ A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by a range of organisations that included trade union, student, youth, NGO and political organisations.

⁴ This shift involved a complicated series of discussions between the secretariat and steering committee of the ZSF, CSVr and ACTION. In order to include each parties needs and interests the shift in secretariat function included co-opting a CSVr staff member onto the steering committee.

⁵ Murambatsvina translates roughly as ‘Clear out Rubbish’. Operation Murambatsvina was a government strategy used in Zimbabwe, from May 2005, by July of the same year it was estimated by UN Habitat to have forcibly removed and displaced an estimated seven hundred thousand people by destroying their homes and declaring petty trading illegal.

⁶ Interview, David Monyae, Department of International Relations, University of the Witwatersrand, 06.10.05.

⁷ Interview, Steven Friedman (position?), 28.09.05.

⁸ Interview, David Monyae, 06.10.05.

⁹ Interview, Kwezi Mngqibisa (position?), 21.10.05.

¹⁰ Interview, Kwezi Mngqibisa, 21.10.05.

¹¹ Interview, Thami Ngwenya (position?), 19.10.05.

¹² This reference to the Lancaster House agreement is an important one (although the agreement does not contain any binding statement of support, UK and US assurances during the negotiations were essential in helping secure agreement). For the purposes of this case study, it underlines the historical sense of betrayal that may be felt by people and goes some way to explain the sympathy many people feel towards President Mugabe.

¹³ The Zimbabwe Solidarity Newsletter produced eight issues over a three month period. It focused on election related political, economic and social analysis and was designed so that it could easily be printed out and distributed. It was also translated into Shona and Ndebele.

¹⁴ At the meeting for the first time a senior government official, the Minister herself, publicly acknowledged that there was indeed a ‘crisis of enormous proportions’ in Zimbabwe. Although it promised to lead to further meetings that would draw in member of other ministries concerned with policing issues, social welfare and even trade and industry up until June of 2007 only one follow-up had taken place and this without the attendance of other ministries and departments.

¹⁵ The Solidarity Peace Trust regularly produces DVDs and written reports that are based on in-depth studies of Zimbabwe. They focus on the impact government policies have on the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans. <http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org>

¹⁶ Interview, Patrick Bond, Centre for Civil Society, University of Kwazulu-Natal, 28.09.05.

¹⁷ Interview, Lance Greyling, (position?) 27.09.05.

¹⁸ Interview, Steven Friedman, 28.09.05.

¹⁹ Interview, Thami Ngwenya, 19.10.05.

²⁰ Interview, Right Reverend Rubin Phillip, 20.10.05.

²¹ Interview, Lance Greyling, 27.09.05.

²² Interview, Anonymous, Zimbabwe Liaison Office, 07.12.05.

²³ Interview, Steven Friedman, 28.09.05.

²⁴ Interview, Kwezi Mngqibisa (position?), 21.10.05.

²⁵ Interview, Anonymous, Zimbabwe Liaison Office, 07.12.05.

²⁶ Interview, Thami Ngwenya, 19.10.05.

²⁷ Interview, David Moore, (School of Development Studies, University of Kwazulu-Natal), 21.10.05.

²⁸ Interview, Right Reverend Rubin Phillip, 20.10.05

²⁹ Interview, Thami Ngwenya, 19.10.05

³⁰ Interview, Kwezi Mngqibisa, 21.10.05

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