

2. The Trust's strategy



The Southern Africa Trust was established to strengthen the voice of poor people in the development of public policies at a regional level that target the reduction of poverty and inequality in southern Africa. It does this by building more informed, credible, and capable regional linkages within and amongst different sectors in the region, promoting a shared regional agenda for poverty reduction, and better opportunities for engagement within and between the different sector role players in policy development. Given the magnitude and ambition of the programme, the team needed to identify key drivers of change and opportunities for meaningful participation and engagement.

The team agreed that one marker of success would be the development of a southern African regional poverty reduction strategy by the governments of the region along with an implementation programme that are both informed by civil society organizations (CSOs). In addition, that a second marker of success would be the establishment of standing regional and national platforms for stakeholder participation in policy development and implementation, especially those representing voices of poor people.

The Trust decided that a third marker of success would be that such standing platforms would address the regional dimensions of poverty as evidenced at a national level and the integration of national experiences of poverty related challenges and poverty reduction strategies in the regional integration agenda, in each of the main social and economic thematic areas of the regional integration agenda.

To achieve this, the Trust reviewed the various existing forums for regional policy making, and reflected on which of these was best placed to champion the regional poverty reduction strategy and programme. Three significant regional forums were identified. The first was the Southern African Development Community (SADC). SADC was initially set up in 1980 to reduce economic dependence on the then apartheid South Africa. It was reconstituted in 1992 with the following regional objectives, to: ensure economic well-being, improve the standards of living and quality of life of the people of southern Africa; promote freedom and social justice; and, ensure peace and security. The second platform identified was the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). COMESA is a preferential trading area with nineteen member states stretching from Libya to Zimbabwe. The third platform identified was the Southern African Customs Union (SACU). SACU is the oldest customs union in the world and today consists of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland. Its aim is to maintain the free interchange of goods between member countries.

In addition, a range of Pan African institutions were identified in southern Africa as existing regional policy-making platforms. One is the Pan African Parliament (PAP), established in March 2004. It is one of nine organs provided for in the treaty establishing the African Economic Community and consists of 53 African Union states. PAP's vision is to provide a common platform for African peoples and their grassroots organizations to be more involved in the challenges that face the continent. It is supported by the Bureau for the Pan African Parliament based in Midrand, South Africa. A second African platform identified was Nepad, the New Partnership for Africa's Development. It is a vision and strategic framework for Africa's renewal. NEPAD is designed to address the current challenges facing the African continent. Issues such as the escalating poverty levels, underdevelopment and the continued marginalisation of Africa needed a new radical intervention, spearheaded by African leaders, to develop a new vision that would guarantee Africa's renewal.



This mandate was given to five initiating Heads of State (Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa) by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 2001. The secretariat is based in Midrand South Africa. A third mechanism identified is the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). It is a self monitoring instrument voluntarily acceded to by member states of the African Union.

The Trust made a number of critical decisions regarding its approach to fulfilling its mandate. While recognising the need to work with all these policy-making institutions, the Trust identified SADC as the most relevant and immediate regional platform in terms of its mandate and geographical reach and decided to target the bulk of its efforts on the SADC region and institutional mechanisms.

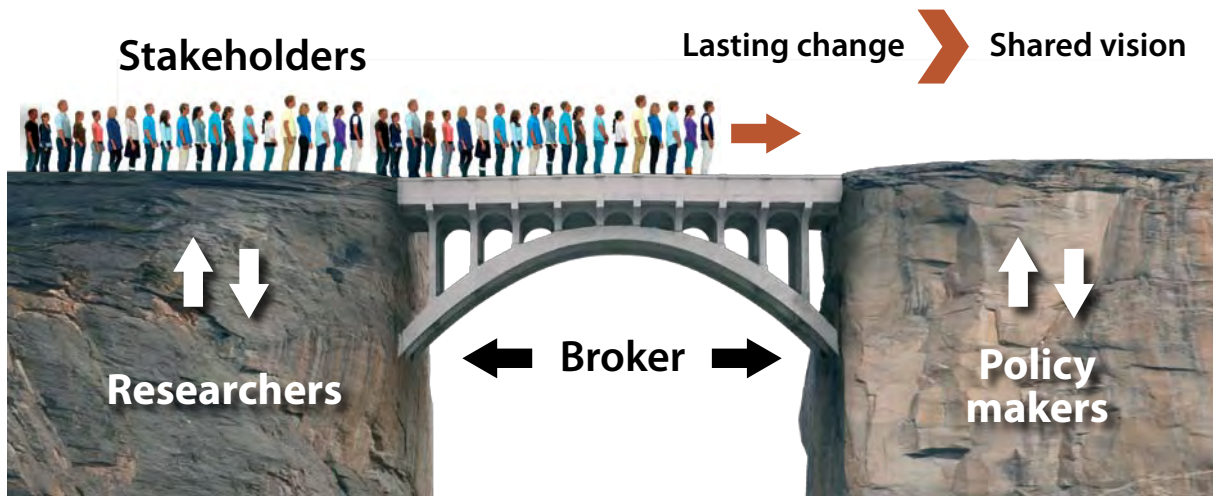
Secondly, the Trust identified a range of entry points for engaging with SADC structures and within the SADC region. The most obvious entry point was to work directly with existing regional organizations. A further entry point was to work at a country level and develop the regional dimensions of the various national agendas. A third channel identified was to work with civil society organizations in different sectors and strengthen their understanding of, and ability to engage in, regional policy dialogue at both the national and regional levels. The Trust decided to adopt a multi-entry point strategy and work at all levels, as represented by the mapping of the civil society terrain in SADC in appendix 1. It represents the Trust's scope of work in supporting wider, or more inclusive, regional engagement.

In the main the Trust's approach is to work with, and strengthen the existing capacity in the region rather than creating new entities. This was decided despite (and, in many ways, because of) the weakness of many of the regional formations, national structures and civil society organizations. In this way the Trust undertook not to set itself up as threat or a competitor to the existing regional players but to support their development for sustainable and effective influence. However, where gaps exist, the Trust decided that it would support the creation of new entities if they can be sustained beyond the Trust's support.

The Trust defines civil society broadly. It includes non-government organizations, faith based organizations, community organizations, research institutes and business. This is because the Trust believes each of these organizations has a role to play if we are to create a society without poverty. For example business has access to resources, which is used and channelled appropriately can have a significant impact on poverty.

The Southern Africa Trust has positioned itself as a catalyst, an intermediary, and a broker for systemic change in regional poverty reduction policy development through its programmes and strategies. It unlocks the required change through building capacity and strengthening existing organizations, facilitating the creation of new opportunities, networking stakeholders and actors, and when necessary, catalysing the emergence of new agencies and platforms that represent voices of the poor. The diagram below provides an overview of the Trust approach to carrying out its work to promote successful policy making that is informed by evidence from the experience of people living in poverty. It represents the Trust's scope of work in supporting deeper, or more informed and sustained engagement for policy change.

Figure 1: How the Trust supports deeper engagement for policy change



Lasting change and a pro-poor policy environment in the region are achieved through five strategies. The first strategy focuses on improving the capability of partner organizations to do policy work through new knowledge, increased engagement in regional policy development, evidenced based research, building networks and alliances, and improving the health of the regional civil society apex organizations that bring together and represent the different civil society sectors throughout the countries of the region.

The second strategy focuses on improving dialogue between civil society organizations, the state and the private sector for better policies by creating new opportunities for civil society participation in policy processes, strengthening the engagement of business in regional poverty-focused policy processes, and increasing the number of civil society partners participating in regional policy processes.

The third strategy aims to ensure the regional policy agenda will reflect policy objectives identified by poor and marginalised constituencies. This is achieved by increasing the formal inclusion of civil society voices in policy processes, advocating for regional policy statements to address issues inserted by civil society organizations, and creating an inclusive regional civil society platform to undertake joint poverty-focused policy initiatives.

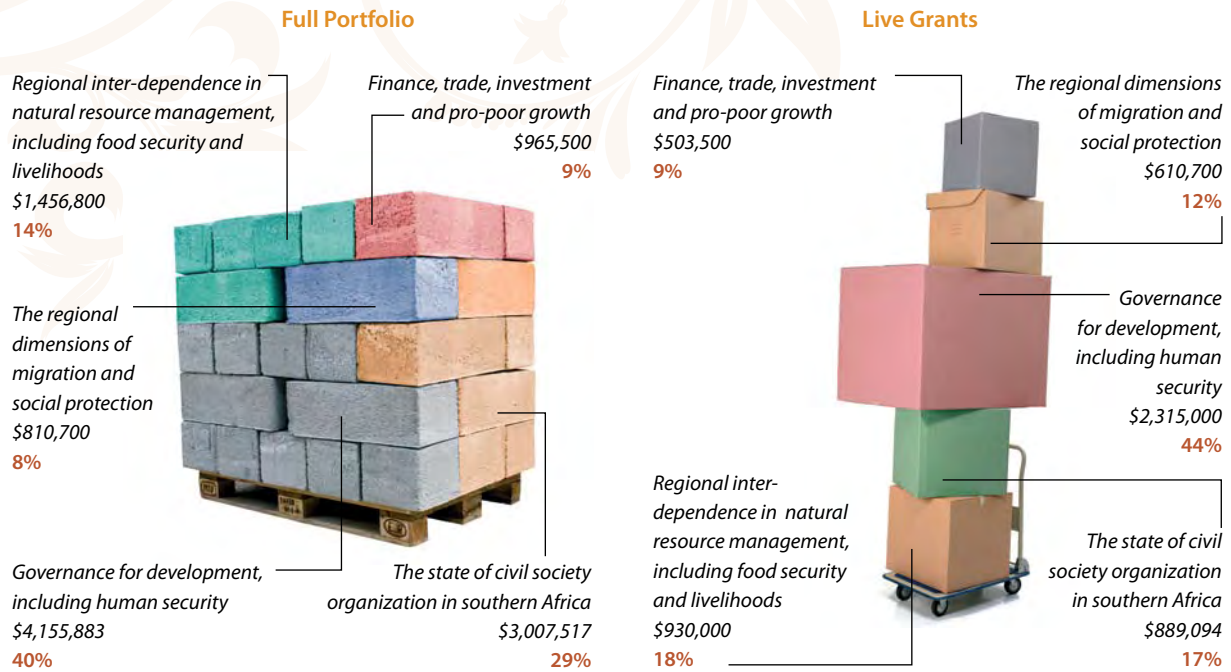
The fourth strategy focuses on creating an enabling environment for civil society organizations to play a more effective role in policy development. It includes the creation of regional and national mechanisms for policy dialogue that include the structured participation of civil society organizations, profiling innovative approaches to stakeholder engagement in policy development, facilitating multi-country comparative learning about the operating environment for non-state actors, and increased cross border mass media coverage of poverty related issues.

An integral part of the first four strategies, but also a strategy in its own right, the fifth strategy focuses on creating a grant-making mechanism for the region. This includes setting up the mechanism, sourcing funds, and appointing suitable trustees to oversee the organization.

Over time the grant making work of the Trust has become more targeted. Initially, the Trust, issued a very general open call for proposals for funding. It used this to identify the regional stakeholders and issues that they were working on. From the response received through this open call, sectors and themes were identified that were based on the real situation amongst civil society organizations in the region. Over time these have been narrowed down into five focus themes. These are the state of civil society (29% of the portfolio of funding), natural resource management (14%), migration and social protection (8%), governance and models of effective change (40%) and finally finance, trade and investment (9%), as the pie charts in figure 2 following depict.



Figure 2: Thematic spread of the Trust's grant making portfolio



Increasingly as the Trust identifies the most effective levers for change, it is focusing its efforts geographically and institutionally to ensure targeted impact that can be sustained. In the latest strategic steer five countries have been prioritised namely Zambia, Mauritius, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola and Mozambique – although not to the exclusion of other countries in the region. Along with this focus, more grants are being allocated through targeted closed calls. As at February 2009, 29% of the all grants issued were allocated through closed calls.

The Trust's five strategies and the inter-relationship between them are depicted below.

Figure 3: The Trust's five strategies and the inter-relationship between them

